

Part One

## Developing a Theory of Empowerment

## Introduction

At the beginning of the discussion about developing a theory of empowerment, I want to pause a little over the special character of the study involved in the composition of this part of the book. In my search for thought about power I discovered that theories on this subject are discussed at least in psychology, sociology, philosophy and the political sciences, and in each of these disciplines the discussants almost totally ignore the other disciplines. Investigation of the concept of empowerment guided me to focus on the sphere in which the theories would clarify power relations and also serve as a basis for the creation of a theory of empowerment. In psychology I found new and interesting knowledge on the subject, but it lacked the methodical approach and the complexity required for a meta-theory (Griscom, 1992). Philosophy, as a source from which to create a theory of empowerment, was something I had to eschew because of my lack of methodical knowledge of this domain. Since the contribution of Michel Foucault seems to me to be very valuable and important, this caused me a certain discomfort. Sociology revealed itself as the most fertile source for my theoretical needs. I was especially pleased to find that the meta-sociologists – the creators of sociological knowledge – do not eschew Foucault, whom they place in a category of his own, *Post-Structuralism* (a term which he would almost certainly have rejected, but that is already a subject for a different book). Of the new theories of power I have chosen to deal at some length with five approaches, including that of Foucault, which have served me as sources for developing the theory and practice of empowerment.

The chapter on power is principally a discussion of the essence of power and of different approaches to understanding and defining it. The intention is to provide readers with a definition of power that can serve as a fertile basis for a discussion of empowerment. Hence the definition of power will appear only at the end of this chapter, the subtitle of which could have been *A Quest for the Meaning of Power*.

The collection of data about empowerment set me a different challenge. The literature dealing with the subject has only recently begun producing a systematic methodology of its own (Lee, 1994; Gutiérrez, Parsons & Cox, 1998). Hence, not a few writers about empowerment use the concept intuitively, at times even without defining it. In many cases, only an analysis of the text has made it possible to find in it a definition of empowerment and of the level of empowerment the writer refers to (Heskin, 1991). I also felt it my duty to include in the book a number of persons, like Paulo Freire (Freire, 1985) and Miles Horton (Horton, 1990), who do not directly refer to empowerment, but whose spirit infuses the concept, and who, in their practice and their approach, have been a source of inspiration to myself and to many others.

As I traced the concept of empowerment and the development of the use of the term, I saw how it is gathering popularity. In the sixties, I am told, the concept of empowerment was much in use by radical young people on American campuses who carried the message of the social revolution of those years. One can almost sense how the concept matures and changes its locus together with the members of that generation. In the eighties the term empowerment is used mainly by the populists of the new left in the USA (Boyte, 1984) and by several writers in social work and community psychology. In the nineties the term is expropriated from this distinctive slot. It appears in the newspapers and is uttered by politicians and professionals in the social sciences and the human services in the Western world. As this book is being written – the late nineties – the concept of empowerment is becoming established in the social-political-professional discourse all over the world.

The aim of this brief survey of the spread of the term has been to make perceptible the difficulties of sorting and classification of the different uses that have been made of it. A variety of adjectives have attached themselves to the term, such

as group empowerment, organizational empowerment, social empowerment. Most of the writers have not distinguished between empowerment as a process that occurs in people's lives and empowerment as professional intervention that encourages such a process. It has become clear that empowerment is a common term that refers to more than one kind of phenomenon, and that paths have to be paved within it to clarify its meaning. The development of the concept of empowerment during a period of several years from a remote non-concept (Russel-Erlich & Rivera, 1986) to a widespread and accepted concept has been dramatic. On the other hand, it is very possible that this has always been the way of new social concepts—from a marginal notion with a tentative character to one that is accepted, from marginality in the world of concepts to an enthusiastic centrality, innovation, and a multiplicity of uses. It is also possible that the sequel is predictable: a sinking into the routine of the cliché, an exposure of its limitations, a wearing-out and a making way for some other new thing. At this given moment of the development of social thought, empowerment integrates well into the discourse on contemporary social ideologies and values, contributes to this discourse, and provides it with an important moral criterion.

## Chapter 1 Theories of Power

### A Survey Towards the Development of a Theory of Power

Before beginning the discussion of empowerment and the development of a theory connected with it, I want to deal with a concept that is prior to empowerment—power. Power is a key concept for an understanding of processes of empowerment. The theory of empowerment that will be developed further on will draw its inspiration from an integration of two domains: from an understanding of theories of power and the use of insights drawn from these for the purposes of developing a theory of empowerment, and from an analysis of processes of empowerment. Hence, this deeper study of it will also make possible a better understanding of states of powerlessness, practices of disempowerment, and processes by which people and communities struggle for control over their lives and environments.

### A Brief History of Theories of Power

This chapter makes no pretension to survey all the existing literature in the field of the theories of power. It begins with a historical survey of thought about power in the social sciences, relating only to the most prominent theories. Further on, a number of theories that contain elements suitable to the development of a theory of empowerment are presented in more detail.

Modern thinking about power begins in the writings of Nicollò Machiavelli (*The Prince*, early 16th century) and Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan*, mid-17th century). Their books are considered classics of political writing, and the

contrast between them represents the two main routes along which thought about power has continued to this day (Clegg, 1989). Machiavelli represents the strategic and decentralized thinking about power and organization. He sees power as a means, not a resource, and seeks strategic advantages, such as military ones, between his prince and others. Hobbes represents the causal thinking about power as a hegemony. Power, in Hobbes, is centralized and focused on sovereignty.

According to Hobbes' basic premise, there exists a total political community, the embodiment of which is the state, or the community, or the society. This is a single unit, ordered according to a uniform principle, possessing a continuity of time and place, from which the power stems. According to Machiavelli, total power is a desirable final end, which is achieved only rarely.

In the mid-twentieth century it appeared that Hobbes' view was triumphant.<sup>1</sup> His language and his images, written more than a century after the publication of *The Prince*, were more appropriate to the modern scientific approach than Machiavelli's military images. The central tradition of research in the social sciences sought precision and logic (and is still seeking them today), and it asks how one can observe, measure, and quantify power. Power was presented as a *position* of will, as a supreme factor to which the wills of others are subject. In the seventies, Machiavelli's strategic and contingent approach attained to a renewed appreciation in France, with the crystallization of approaches that rediscovered

1 Interest in power exists in a variety of fields of thought: Karl Marx influenced the conceptualization of power in all the social sciences; Alfred Adler, following Marx, opened a discussion on power in psychology; Friedrich Nietzsche influenced thought about power in philosophy. The present chapter, however, focuses on contemporary theorists for whom power is the central concept in their thinking.

the unpredictable character of the power game, and its profound dependence on context (Clegg, 1989).<sup>2</sup>

After the Second World War, the social sciences began taking an understandable interest in power. At that time, the work of Max Weber (1947) served as a point of departure for thought about power because it continued the rational Hobbesian line and developed organizational thinking. Weber's approach to power connected with his interest in bureaucracy, and linked power with concepts of authority and rule. He defined power as the probability that an actor within a social relationship would be in a position to carry out his will despite resistance to it. The activation of power is dependent on a person's will, even in opposition to someone else's.

Weber was interested in power as a factor of domination, based on economic or authoritarian interests. He historically researched the sources of the formal authority that activates legitimate power, and identified three sources of legitimation, or accordance of social permission, for the activation of power: the charismatic, the traditional, and the rational-legal.

Theories of power after Weber developed in the direction of investigation of illegitimate power, as this grows within the formal and legitimate frameworks of hierarchic and bureaucratic power, and in the direction of the critique of Weber's bureaucratic model (Merton, 1957). The critique of Weber stemmed, unjustly, from an understanding of his theory as an idealization of the bureaucratic organization. The truth is that Weber saw the organizational power of the bureaucracy as the source of the mechanization and routinization of human life, and as a threat to the freedom of the human spirit. He also predicted that this organizational form, as a power instrument, would sabotage the appearance

2 Stuart Clegg's book *Frameworks of Power* (1989) has been of great assistance in helping me to understand the history of sociological writing about power, and he is one of the sources for my writing of the present chapter.

of more democratic forms of organization (Morgan, 1986, 1997).

Robert Dahl (1961) continues Weber's approach, both in the definition of power and in the attribution of it to a concrete human factor. Whereas Weber discussed power in the context of the organization and its structures, Dahl located the discussion of power within the boundaries of an actual community. However, the major importance of Dahl is in the development of the interest in understanding ruling élites, which came to the fore after the Second World War (Mills, 1956; Hunter, 1953). According to his *theory of community power*, power is exercised in a community by a particular concrete individual, while other individuals, also actual, are prevented from doing what they prefer to do. Power is exercised in order to cause those who are subject to it to follow the private preferences of those who possess the power. Power is the production of obedience to the preferences of others, including an expansion of the preferences of those subject to it so as to include those preferences. To this day, most writers dealing with organizational behavior make do with Dahl's definition of power—power as the ability to make somebody do something that otherwise he or she would not have done.

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz (1962) developed a model as a response to Dahl—*the two faces of power*. This model is also a critique of Dahl's basic premises. Dahl assumed a pluralistic society, in which all the community interests are represented by means of open processes. Bachrach and Baratz also have a doubt as to whether the decision-making process is really democratic and open as Dahl assumed. They dealt mainly with the connection between the overt face of power – the way decisions are made – and the other, covert face of power, which is the ability to prevent decision making. They pointed to the strategy of mobilizing bias to prevent discussion on certain issues and thus to determine what is *important* and *unimportant*. They referred to this organizing of what stays *in* and what is *out* as the *non-decision-making process* where

power conflicts do not rise above the public face of power which is confined to certain values, rituals or beliefs that tend to favor the vested interests of one (or more) group/s relative to others (Clegg, 1989).

In the seventies, Steven Lukes (1974) developed Bachrach and Baratz's approach further. It was he who shifted the discussion from *community power* to a focus on power as such, by introducing a three-dimensional model into the discussion of the subject. The third dimension that Lukes added to the discussion of power, which theoretically already recognized two dimensions – the overt and the covert dimensions – was the latent dimension of power. While the overt dimension of power deals with declared political preferences, as they reveal themselves in open political play, and the covert dimension deals with political preferences that reveal themselves through complaints about political non-issues, the third dimension deals with the relations between political preferences and *real interests*. Power, according to Lukes, is measured also by the ability to implant in people's minds interests that are contrary to their own good. The third, latent dimension is the hardest of all to identify, because it is hard for people who are themselves influenced by this dimension to discover its existence. The analysis of power, according to Lukes, must henceforth relate – in addition to the open decisions (of Dahl's overt face) and the non-decisions (of Bachrach and Baratz's covert face) – also to the entire political agenda, in order to examine its adequacy to the true interests of various groups. (A more detailed explanation of the three dimensions of power, and their development, appears in the section on Gaventa's theory of power.)

The writings of Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1996) extended the discussion of the concept of power from sociology to all the fields of the social sciences and the humanities. Through Foucault's influence, the empirical activity of identifying those who possess power and of locating power loses its importance. His approach systematically rejects the belief in the existence of an ordered and regulating

rational agency. In Foucault's world there is no source from which actions stem, only an infinite series of practices. Decentralization of the position of power is one of the great innovations of his thinking, which will be discussed more extensively further on.

Anthony Giddens (Giddens, 1982, 1984) developed his approach as a continuation – and also as a critique – of Foucault and his predecessors. He constructed an inclusive social theory which he called *structuration* or *duality of structure*. On his view, power is an important, if not exclusive, component of the social structure. Power is exercised by human agents and is also created by them, influences them, and limits them. In other words, power is not a quality or a resource of people, or a position in the social structure, but a social factor which influences both these components of human society and is also created by them – this is the duality that we will discuss once more when we turn our attention to Giddens.

This condensed survey describes in general lines how the discussion of power burst through the boundaries of organization and location and penetrated into all the domains of the social discourse. The roots of the concept are grounded in political theory and political philosophy. In the period after the Second World War, *power* was a central concept only in the political sciences. The work of Lukes and Giddens contributed to the establishing of the importance of the concept of power in the contemporary sociological discourse. Thanks to Foucault, the discussion of power became a widespread intellectual preoccupation. Foucault investigated the concept in new fields: medicine, psychiatry, penology, and human sexuality. Others continued his work in the criticism of literature, art and film, in semiotics, in feminist analysis, in social history, and in theories of planning.

We will go on in this chapter to discuss a selection of contemporary theories of power, and then to present the approach to power that will serve as a basis for this book.

Likewise, we will deal with several issues that are also relevant to the subject of empowerment, like, for example, the human and social damage involved in powerlessness (Gaventa, 1980); the organizational roots of powerlessness (Mann, 1986); the need for a combined approach to action and structure in the social domain (Giddens, 1984); and an understanding of power as concomitant to social relationships (Foucault, 1980).

### Gaventa's Theory of Power

John Gaventa (Gaventa, 1980) researched the phenomenon of quiescence – the silent agreement in conditions of *glaring inequality* (p. 3) – and tried to understand why, in difficult conditions of oppression and discrimination, no resistance arises against the rule of a social elite. He found that the social elite makes use of its power principally to prevent the rise of conflicts in its domain, and to attain social quiescence. In other words, a situation of apparent lack of conflicts is identified as both a sign and a consequence of deliberate use of power mechanisms.

The purpose of power is to prevent groups from participating in the decision-making processes and also to obtain the passive agreement of these groups to this situation. A silent agreement, then, is not an expression of a desire not to participate, but evidence of a mute compliance with the situation. Hence, a violation of this quiescence is a rebellion, whether it be an explicit demand to participate in decision-making, or a more minor response, such as non-acceptance. Gaventa bases his model for the understanding of quiescence and rebellion in conditions of glaring inequality on Lukes' three dimensions of power (Lukes, 1974) which were mentioned earlier in the chapter. This will be an opportunity to gain a deeper acquaintance of these dimensions, and to understand how each of them relates to power and to powerlessness.

### *1st. The One-Dimensional Approach to Power*

In the overt arena of power relations, A's power over B is manifested to the extent that A can make B do something which B would not have done had it not been for A. The overt dimension of power may be investigated by means of observation of behavior: who participates, who profits, who loses, and who expresses himself in the decision-making process.

The one-dimensional approach is based on assumptions that were sharply criticized by those who continued it. For example, that people always recognize grievances and act to right them; that participation in power relations occurs overtly in decision-making arenas; that these political arenas are open to any organized group; that the leaders are not an elite with interests of its own, but represent or speak for the entire public. All these assumptions lead to a conclusion which is characteristic of the one-dimensional approach: because people who have identified a problem act within an open system in order to solve it, and they do this by themselves or through their leaders, then non-participation, or inaction, is not a social problem, but a decision made by those who have decided not to participate.

On the basis of this conclusion, the one-dimensional approach provides explanations for the inactivity of deprived groups: indifference is a general quality of the human species, and people are divided into various kinds—the active political person, and the passive civic person. The constant connection between a low socio-economic status and minimal participation is explained as indifference, political incapacity, cynicism or alienation. At any rate, the causes of the non-participants' quiescence are sought in the circumstances of their life or in their culture, and not in the context of power relations. As a consequence of this approach of *blaming the victim* for his non-involvement, the recommendations too are generally for a change of the victim's non-participatory norms of

behavior—principally through education and social integration (Pateman 1970).

Even within its own basic premises, the one-dimensional approach will have difficulties explaining what there is in low income, low status, and low education, or in traditional or rural culture, that can explain people's quiescence. And how are we to understand vast differences between one place and another in the political behavior of people with these same characteristics?

### *2nd. The Two-Dimensional Approach to Power*

Power is activated on the second, covert dimension, not only in order to triumph over the other participants in the decision-making process, but also to prevent decision-making, to exclude certain subjects or participants from the process (Bachrach & Baratz 1962). A study of power in the covert dimension needs to observe who decides what, when and how, who remains outside, how this happens, and how these two processes interconnect. One of the important aspects of power, beside victory in a struggle, is to determine the agenda of the struggle in advance. That is, to determine whether certain questions will even be negotiated. The understanding of the second facet of power changed the explanation of the quiescence of deprived groups. From now on, non-participation in decision-making would be explained as a manifestation of fear and weakness, and not necessarily as a manifestation of indifference.

Since the two-dimensional approach, like the one-dimensional, assumed that the powerless are fully conscious of their condition, it cannot easily explain the whole diversity of means that power exercises in order to obtain advantages in the arena. For example, how is the raising of issues for discussion prevented? This approach also did not recognize the possibility that powerless people are likely to have a distorted consciousness that originates in the existing power relations, and thus live within a false and manipulated consensus that



they have internalized. The two-dimensional approach related to open conflicts and to the ability to maneuver their extent and their contents, while one of the most effective mechanisms of power is the ability to ensure quiescence in the decision-making arena—to prevent the outbreak of conflict.

### *3rd. The Three-dimensional Approach to Power*

The third, latent dimension, that of the *true interests* (Lukes 1974), explains that B does things that he would not have done had it not been for A because A influences, determines and shapes B's will. Yet another innovation in this dimension is that this phenomenon can occur without overt conflict. A conflict of interests between the activators of power and the true interests of those who are excluded from the arena creates a potential for conflict—a latent conflict.

An approach which assumes latent processes requires a special research methodology. It is no longer possible to make do with behavioral analysis and with observations of individuals as the only means of understanding power relations. Since systems prevent the appearance of claims and frustrate their transformation into political issues, what is required is a study of social and historical factors that will explain how human expectations are shaped and how people's consciousness of problems is formed.

### **Mechanisms of Power**

After defining the three relevant dimensions, it is important to identify various mechanisms by means of which power operates in each dimension in order to attain its goals.

#### *1st. Mechanisms of the First, Overt Dimension: Open Conflict in the Decision-Making Arena*

In the first dimension, relatively straightforward mechanisms are activated. The actors invest resources and talents in order

to obtain an advantage in bargaining on key issues. Resources may be votes in the ballot box, or influence that the actors can bring to the bargaining game. Possible talents are personal efficacy, political experience and organizational strength, which the participants use in order to win an advantage.

#### *2nd. Mechanisms of the Second, Covert Dimension: Mobilization of Bias; Non-Decision-Making*

In addition to the resources of the first dimension, the people with power mobilize game rules which work in their favor, at others' expense. Decision-making may be prevented by the exertion of force, the threat of sanctions, or the mobilization of bias which creates a negative approach to the subject. Mobilization of bias means the reinforcing and emphasizing of values, beliefs, ceremonies and institutional procedures which present a very particular and limited definition of problems. By mobilizing bias it is possible to establish new barriers and new symbols which are aimed to thwart efforts to widen the scope of conflict.

Several mechanisms of non-decision-making are harder to discover than others: like institutional inactivity resulting in *decisionless decisions*. The sum total of accumulating outcomes of a series of decisions or non-decisions, and non-events which, because they are such, cannot be observed and thus one may mistakenly think that they have not occurred.

#### *3rd. Mechanisms of the Third, Latent Dimension: Influence on Consciousness and Perception*

These mechanisms are less developed theoretically, so they are less clear. This dimension involves identification of the way in which meanings and patterns of action which cause B to believe and act in a way that is useful to A and harmful to himself are formed.

Since in situations of latent conflict it is especially difficult to learn how the perception of needs, expectations and strategies

is shaped, a number of domains must be investigated. For example, what use is made of social myths, language and symbols, in order to obtain an advantage in power relations. We need to investigate processes of communication and information transfer in order to understand what is communicated and what is not, and how this is done; how social legitimations develop around the dominant groups, and how they are imbued into people's consciousness in the form of beliefs or roles. The indirect mechanisms of this dimension, it would seem, have a significant influence on the shaping of people's political perceptions, especially of those belonging to powerless and highly dependent groups.

### A Model of Power and Powerlessness

Gaventa's model of power is an attempt to integrate the three dimensions of power in order to explain processes of power and powerlessness in situations of social equality. Gaventa examines the concentrated influence of mechanisms from the three dimensions on responses in such situations. He claims that a challenge, or a rebellion, can occur only if there is a shift in the power relations: a loss of power by A or a gain of power by B. Together with this, before an open conflict can take place, B has to take some steps in order to overcome his powerlessness. B has to overcome both the direct and the indirect effects of the third dimension: he has to go through a process of issue and action formulation, and he has to carry out the process of mobilizing action upon issues. By means of these processes B will develop his own resources – both real and symbolic – to engage in manifest conflict. In other words, B can actually participate in a conflict in the first, overt dimension, only after he has successfully overcome the obstacles of the second and third dimensions. Actual participation means the presentation of well-defined claims and grievances which are brought to discussion in the decision-making arena by B together with others who are in an identical situation.

A has a series of means with which to overcome the outcomes of the overt or covert conflict that B initiates: first of all, A can simply patronize B and remain aloof, thus preventing the very admission of the existence of the conflict. But A can also interfere with each one of B's steps: he can interfere with his obtaining of resources and his development of his own abilities; he can incite against the opening up of issues, and he can sabotage activities. It should be recalled that all the barriers to effective challenge that B has to face are options for the maintenance of the status quo that are available to A.

As the ability of powerless people (B) to act increases, the options of the activators of power (A) diminish; hence, too the process of A's becoming weaker. Each triumph reinforces itself and builds further consciousness and activity among the powerless, towards further change. The meaning of the process is social change—an emergence from quiescence to political participation and, as this happens, a strengthening of the weak. From the point of view of the powerful, expectations of such outcomes are a reason for adopting many means in order to preserve B's quiescence.

Gaventa's theory of power helps to expose the direct and indirect ways in which social powerlessness is created and maintained. It draws attention to the great influence of indirect mechanisms in the creation of powerlessness—a phenomenon which we will have more to say about. Gaventa's theory of power will serve, further on, as a basis for a discussion of powerlessness, not as a personal problem of the powerless, but as a social situation that has its roots in conditions of social inequality and in disempowering social solutions. The various mechanisms of the three dimensions of power will be used for developing strategies of empowering activity.

## Mann's Organizational Outflanking

Mann's concept of *organizational outflanking* (Mann 1986) makes clear the extent to which organizational resources and tools to activate these resources are necessary for efficient resistance against power. The advantage in power relations is on the side of those who possess an organizational advantage. Hence, those who possess the organizational advantage will always succeed in overcoming those who lack organizational resources, by means of a principal strategy which Mann calls organizational outflanking. Organizational outflanking finds expression in the ability to eliminate resistances with relative ease, to prevent them in advance by means of organizational priority, as well as to impose the order desirable to those doing the outflanking. All these goals can be achieved by those who possess the preferred organizational means. A historical social analysis proves that the advantage of the networks and alliances of power leans on the preferred organization that was available to them. The act of collective organization alone is inadequate to overcome an organization of power. In order to produce an effective resistance, people have to acquire the ability to activate a collective organization.

Organizational outflanking creates an advantage in the power relations for the outflankers as opposed to the outflanked. Powerlessness in a situation of organizational outflanking may be attributed to a lack of knowledge among the outflanked; however, there exist situations in which the knowledge exists and is available to the outflanked. In other words, not in every situation is knowledge useful to extricate oneself from a situation of organizational outflanking. It is important to understand that there are situations in which the outflanked know and are conscious of their situation, but nevertheless cannot, or are not ready to, extricate themselves from it.

*Surrendering to Organizational Outflanking as a Result of a Lack of Knowledge.* In situations where the surrender to organizational outflanking stems from a lack in knowledge resources, we must distinguish among various kinds of lack of knowledge:

**A. The most common explanation is ignorance.** There is ignorance which expresses itself in the fact that people do not know the rules of the game: they lack knowledge about developing a strategy and assessing the opponent's resources. They do not know the rules of behavior, the agenda, and the meaning of informal behavior. However, there can also be a more profound ignorance, when people do not identify the game itself. Especially extreme instances of the second kind occur when a group which possesses a great technological advantage encounters its absolute contrary (colonialism of the traditional kind, which obtained advantages of power by means of colored beads and mirrors; experts in community development and international merchants who exploit local poverty and innocence in order to amass profits in undeveloped countries).

**B. Isolation** is a more complex kind of lack of knowledge. It expresses itself in lack of information about others who share the same fate, with whom it is possible to create an alliance in order to resist power. Organizational outflanking succeeds because isolated resistance is an event which is easy to overcome. This is true even in cases where protest breaks out in different places at the same time, as long as the protesters themselves do not know about one another and do not form a coalition.

**C. Division.** Separation is an active step, a part of the strategy of organizational outflanking, and its goal is to create conditions of isolation even when people know about one another and could perhaps form an organized alliance. It is common for organizational outflanking to make use of time and space in order to divide groups from one another. An example of this is the division, on the face of it functional, carried out among workers in a single organization by means

of organizational culture, complex divisions of labor, and extreme competition (for example, in the name of maintaining secrecy, workers are prohibited from telling one another how much they earn; in the name of efficiency, workers are forbidden to organize and co-operate with one another).

**Surrendering to Organizational Outflanking, on the Basis of Knowledge.** It is less customary to think that a surrender to organizational outflanking can be based on the outflanked people's knowledge about their situation, but there are situations in which surrender to organizational outflanking is based on knowledge. In these cases the outflanked are conscious not only of their situation, but also of the price of resistance to the outflanking. Sometimes people estimate that the price they will have to pay for their resistance may be higher than their chance of obtaining a positive outcome, or than the benefit they may gain. When this is the evaluation of the situation, the knowledge ceases to have practical value in the existing conditions. Another kind of knowledge that is available to the outflanked is the knowledge about the oppression which the organizational outflanking creates in their lives, and about the fact that time that passes in the situation of organizational outflanking operates against them and strengthens the organizational ability of the outflankers, which continually becomes more sophisticated (Clegg 1989).

Organizational outflanking does not describe a particular tactic or mechanism of power, but is a given of the social situation. It makes clear that a lack in organizational resources characterizes everyone who is outside the networks and alliances of power; it makes clear why disempowerment is a common social phenomenon; it enriches the explanation of the quiescence of the powerless (Gaventa 1980); the culture of silence expresses a surrender of the organizationally outflanked, stemming from a knowledge that they are incapable of preventing the outflanking. As opposed to a tendency to explain powerlessness in a one-dimensional manner as people's lack of consciousness and knowledge

about their situation, organizational outflanking explains why knowledge by itself is not always enough to change the situation.

True, the theory of organizational outflanking is not an inclusive or a central theory of power and powerlessness, but it does emphasize important aspects which have accompanied the discussion of power all along the way. Organizational outflanking emphasizes the importance of efficient resistance to power—the price paid for the resistance is dear, and therefore it is necessary to obtain results, and in the most efficient way possible. Organizational outflanking makes clear the necessity of active organizational development in order to gain significant achievements while resisting power.

### Clegg's Circuits of Power

A tradition which began with Weber and continues to Foucault seeks to understand how social institutions create obedience. After the concepts of quiescence, rebellion (Gaventa, 1980) and organizational outflanking (Mann, 1986), we will discuss the meanings of obedience and resistance. Stewart Clegg (1989) sees power as a circular process that flows in three channels which he calls circuits of power. Each of these three circuits of power has a dynamic form of its own:

1. The overt circuit of power—this circuit may be observed concretely. For example, one may analyze what happens in the decision-making arena. This is a relatively simple circuit, in which a human agent exercises power according to the traditional explanation: A activates resources and means, and influences B in a way in which B would not have acted were it not for his relations with A.
2. The social circuit of power—this is an abstract circuit, which is called *the circuit of social integration*, in which the rules that order relations of meaning, membership and belonging are created.
3. The systemic-economic circuit of power—this too is an abstract circuit, in which both material and non-material

resources are created. It is called *the circuit of system integration*.<sup>3</sup>

The circuits of power illuminate the importance of context in the theory of power; real acts of power appear in the first, simple circuit. However, the description of the field of power, with all the advantages and limitations that it creates, appears in the second and third circuits, which are complex and contextual. In these circuits, power relations are conducted in complex and diverse ways. On the face of it, power which does not need to struggle against rules and does not require special resources for any goal whatsoever is the most efficient power. However, power relations are actually characterized by a complexity which undermines their effectiveness and thus makes them unpredictable. Hence, a one-dimensional, episodic perception of power relations can teach us something about the character of the relations between *A* and *B*, but teaches us nothing about the context, the field of relations in which *A* and *B* operate, and about how this field influences their access to resources of power and their ability to use these. This field of relations is described in the social and the systemic-economic circuits of power.

In the social circuit of power, the central rules of social life are created. The metaphor of a chess game can illustrate their importance: the overt power of the queen, which is greater than that of the knight, brings it about that the queen

3 Clegg (Clegg 1989, p. 236) makes use of the term *empowerment* to describe processes that occur in the economic circuit of power. However, although the idea that empowerment and disempowerment occur in the process of the dynamic production of power is correct, Clegg uses the concept of empowerment in the sense of creating or diminishing power. In my estimation, he found in the word *empowerment* a semantic solution for a description of a process in which a gain or loss of power occurs. The word is not used in this sense in the present book.

triumphs over the knight in the course of a certain event. This power is based on and stems from the rules of the game. It is social power that, by means of fixed laws, determines the ability of the queen and the knight to take the different steps they can take. However, dispositional power allows certain people not only a greater space of maneuvering for various moves, but also authority to reinterpret the meaning of the rules. Because of the power that the rules give them, they possess greater freedom to activate them according to their own interpretation than do those people who, like the queen and the knight, are permitted only a series of pre-defined moves. Implicit in this state of affairs are several possible strategies of resistance to power: for example, not to recognize the other's game rules; or to object to the meaning that the other attributes to them and to the steps that these entail.

The overt circuit of power is self-evident, but it is not independent, since it moves through the two circuits of power in which a social and systemic integration occurs. These determine rules and permit creation, and create the fields in which episodic power events take place. The *outcomes* of the resistance to power are not based on what happens in the overt circuit alone, but, among other things, on the creation of a "correct and logical *context*". What will be described as a "correct and logical *context*" is a good example of a norm that the social circuit of power supplies. Techniques of production are an example of power that is created in the systemic-economic circuit. They are enabling and innovative, and at the same time limiting and dominating. Hence domination is never fixed and eternal. It is subject to processes of creation and innovation which can weaken it to the same extent that they can strengthen it.

*Facilitative power* originates in the systemic-economic circuit, and it creates change and tension, making possible new organizational forms. In contrast, *dispositional power* originates in the social circuit, and supplies social integration and stability to the power relations. According to this explanation it is easier to change structures of domination because they

get built and they flow in a changing and dynamic circuit of systemic-economic power, and in principle they are more open to change and innovation than structures of social belonging and meaning, which get built in the social circuit of power.

It is important to remember that what happens in actuality is not dependent only on what happens in one of the circuits. The ability to exploit new opportunities that open up in the economic circuit to human agents who want to resist depends, among other things, on efficient organization on their part, which is made possible with resources from both the social and the economic circuits. We will recall that organizational outflanking (Mann, 1986) supplies a key to the question as to why people obey so frequently and agree to be subservient: because they are surrounded by organizations of power that are controlled by others. They are organizationally outflanked and lack a strategy of a collective organization.

Power and resistance are two separate, although interdependent, aspects of social life. The *circuits of power* model distinguishes between two main kinds of resistance:

1. **Effective Resistance.** This is organized resistance and is very rare: it becomes possible in conditions of victory over organizational outflanking. Such resistance becomes institutionalized as a new power and creates an entirely new field of relations. Michel Foucault argued that the events of May 1968 in France, in which students organized and demonstrated together against the regime, were an example of effective resistance of this kind.
2. **Episodic Resistance.** This is the most common form of resistance. It generally manifests itself only against the exercise of power: it is a resistance which operates in the overt circuit and is conscious only of this circuit of power. Episodic resistance itself actually strengthens the stability of power and confirms its representational character. This is resistance on a manifest level, which is based on obedience in the covert (social and economic)

circuits which determine the division of resources and the rules of power relations. A hunger strike by prisoners, or a demonstration by wives of policemen against deterioration in their husbands' conditions of service, are episodic resistances.

Clegg's circuits of power provide the theory of power with a strategic approach to power relations. The circuits describe a field in which all the possibilities are open, and none of the sides have the possibility of maintaining advantages or a fixed state over a period of time. Another important idea stems from the fact that a stormy and dynamic environment which requires complex resources creates a permanent opportunity for change and for the incorporation of new groups in the power relations.

The rarity of effective resistance is proof of the importance of organization when people are interested in resisting power successfully. (It also explains the success of military coups—these lean upon the military organization, more than on the military weapons, although efficient organization is generally also accompanied by efficient resources).

The three circuits of power also propose an interesting tool for evaluating the degree of power achieved in a process of resistance. The evaluation is divided into three groups of questions: questions about the outcome of the process—which are revealed in the overt circuit; questions about the inner ability created in the course of the process—which develops in the social circuit; and questions about the actual resources available to the process—which are made possible in the systemic-economic circuit.

### Michel Foucault on Power

It is almost impossible today to deal with the subject of power without relating to Michel Foucault. Thanks to him, thinking about power, which for many years was ponderous and predictable, has become fascinating and full of surprises.



Foucault does not present an ordered doctrine of power. He himself lives in peace with the contradictions and the dialectics that his approach creates; however, anyone who, like myself, is interested in applying his approach, runs into more than a few difficulties. The solution I have found is drawn from Foucault himself, who claimed that anyone who wants to make use of the knowledge may and should quote aggressively, and make use of what she requires without committing herself to the entire theory. In this spirit, I will make use only of the principal points of Foucault's thought on the subject of power and the research of power.

As already stated, Foucault's writing is full of contradictions. He does not have a sense of some profound and final truth. Instead of this, he finds layers that have to be peeled away. He is influenced by the phenomenological theory, but does not agree with its main idea that the center of meaning is an autonomous subject. His writing evinces a strong structural element, but he rejected the model that develops in his writings, and refused to create a uniform model with rules of its own. Foucault was influenced by Weber and Marx, but unlike them did not feel committed to a comprehensive analysis of organizations or of economic aspects: he chose each time to analyze a different social institution. Despite his claim that he prefers to focus on the micro-politics of power, his theory is suffused with structural macro principles (Walzer, 1986; Ritzer, 1988).<sup>4</sup>

Foucault, as noted, was influenced by structuralist ideas, but because he did not adhere to them and preferred a combination of personal and structural considerations within a single explanation, he is considered a post-structuralist, although there are some who dispute this (Walzer, 1986), himself included. Foucault is also considered a post-modernist. If modernity is connected with terms such as rationality, purpose, totality, synthesis and determinism, and post-modernism is an approach characterized by the opposed concepts—irrationality, play, deconstruction, antithesis and non-determinism, then Foucault is indeed a post-modernist.

**Power/Knowledge.** Foucault adopted Nietzsche's ideas about the connection between knowledge and power. He assumes a power/knowledge connection which cannot be separated, even semantically. A review of Foucault's writings, rather than a reading of a particular book or essay, reveals his theory of power, and especially the way the power/knowledge connection is created.

In his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) he discusses the period between 1757 and 1830, when the practice of torturing prisoners was replaced by close surveillance of them by means of the prison rules. Foucault interprets this change not as a humanizing of punishment, as is commonly thought, but as a more correct economy of power. The meaning of the change is the development and implementation of a new technology, which he named disciplinary power. The principal mechanisms that disciplinary power develops and by means of which it operates are:

1. The hierarchical observation. The ability of those in charge to observe their entire range of surveillance in a single gaze.
4. Apart from his own writings, two books are to a large extent authoritative sources on Foucault's approach to power, because they were edited during his lifetime and with his collaboration. These are: *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon (Gordon, 1980), which is a collection of Foucault's lectures and interviews on the subject; and the book by Dreyfus and Rabinow (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), which contains mainly their interpretation and concludes with two chapters written by Foucault. In addition to these two books, I have drawn upon the book by Gane (Gane, 1986), which is a collection of critical articles on Foucault; the critical article by Michael Walzer (Walzer, 1986); Giddens' chapters on Foucault (Giddens, 1982, 1984); Rojek's approach to Foucault's research methods (Rojek, 1986); Ritzer's chapter on Foucault's sociology (Ritzer, 1988), in a collection of essays edited by Gutting (Gutting, 1994); Eribon's biography (Eribon, 1991).

2. The judgment of normality. The ability to determine who is normal and who is not, and to punish those who violate the norms, in three dimensions: time—if one is late; activity—if one is not attentive; behavior—if one does not behave properly.
3. The examination. The examining observation of people and the judgment of them according to the norms. This mechanism makes scientific research possible. It makes use of the hierarchical observation and uses science to determine the standards of normality in all spheres of life.

By means of this mechanism the power/knowledge circle is completed; the knowledge that is derived by means of the scientific examination and judgment is fed back in order to impose standards of normality in all spheres of life, and grants the society (by means of its various institutions and its regime) the permission to legislate laws to reinforce the standards and to supervise all the citizens of the disciplinary society in order to prevent a deviation from these laws.

Disciplinary power is not only negative; proper functioning of the military or of industry, for example, is an expression of its positive outcomes. Nonetheless, Foucault is concerned about the expansion of discipline in the governing system and the police, bodies for which the entire society is a field of action and an object of disciplinary action. Although Foucault did not believe that disciplinary power spreads throughout society systematically, he estimated that most of the major social institutions are already infected by it, and hence the great similarity in the structure of prisons, factories, schools, detainment camps and hospitals. The transition from torture to rules, Foucault explains, is also a transition from physical punishment to psychic punishment of the soul and the will, and this is also the beginnings of the scientific discussion of normality and morality (Ritzer, 1988). The combination of power and knowledge with the rule of the state and its

supervision of normality has created something beyond a sophisticated technology; Foucault calls this combination, which is typical of contemporary Western society, *the disciplinary society*.

In *The History of Sexuality* (1980), Foucault describes sexuality in particular, and concern with the human body in general, as an especially dense transfer point for *relations of power* (Gordon, 1980). Medicine, in his view, deals more with the morality of sexuality than with the science of sexuality. Foucault sees medicine, together with psychology and psychiatry, as substitutes in scientific disguise for the religious confessional that preceded them. Medicine is a source of surveillance more than it is an instrument for researching the truth about sexuality. If before the 18th century the society sought ways to control death, since then it has been interested in controlling life, and especially sex. *Bio-power* took on two forms: 1. *Anatomo-politics*, which aims to discipline the human body (and its sexuality). 2. *Bio-politics*, which aims at controlling and regulating population growth, health, life expectancy and so on. In both cases sex was central, and society came to see life as a political object. Sex has become more important than the soul, and almost as important as life itself.

#### *Assumptions about Power*

Power relations are dependent on culture, place and time, and hence Foucault deals with power discourse in contemporary Western society only, which he characterizes as follows:

- A. Power is not a commodity, a position, a prize or a conspiracy. It is the activation of political technologies and is concomitant with the social body. Power not only operates in specific spheres of social life, but occurs in everyday life. Power occurs at sites of all kinds and sizes, including the most minute and most intimate, such as the human body.



- B. Power relations are mobile, non-egalitarian and asymmetrical. We must not expect to find a stable logic in power, or a possibility of balance in its domain.
- C. Since power is not a thing, is not control of a set of institutions, nor a concealed historical pattern, the aim of the researcher of power is to discover how it operates. To do this, one must isolate, identify and analyze the network of relations which creates political technologies. It is important to research the level of the micro-practices, from which one may learn how power operates in a social institution on the most routine everyday level.
- D. From all the previous assumptions it follows that power is not limited to political institutions as it has been commonly thought. Power has a direct and creative role in social life. It is multi-directional, and operates from the top down and from the bottom up. Although power is at its peak when it is situated inside specific institutions such as schools, prisons or hospitals, we should be wary about identifying technologies of power with particular institutions, because power is neither a superstructure nor a quality of an institution.
- E. When disciplinary technologies create a permanent connection with a particular institutional framework, they become productive. This is the positive aspect of power—productive power. This point emphasizes the advantages of efficient technologies of power in many productive domains—economic, industrial, and scientific.
- F. Power is a general matrix of power relations in a given society at a given time. No-one is outside this matrix, and no-one is above it. The prisoners and the jailers are subject to the same procedures of discipline and surveillance practiced in the prison, and act within the actual limitations of the prison architecture. Even though all are trapped in the grid of the power relations, there also exist rule and domination: the jailers nevertheless have certain advantages according to the prison rules,

as do those who are in charge of them and those who designed the prison.

- G. Domination, then, is not the essence of power. Domination does exist, but power is exercised upon the rulers too and not only upon the ruled. For the *bourgeoisie* in 19th-century France to turn into a class it had to activate technologies of power upon its members. Technologies of confession, as well as surveillance over life, sexuality, and health, were implemented first of all upon the bourgeoisie itself. Bio-power served as a central strategy in the bourgeoisie's self-creation. Only a century later would the same technologies be activated upon the French working class.
- H. In power relations there is intention, but there is no subject. Only on the micro level, the tactical level, does power have intentions. On the strategic level, which includes the complex of power relations, no subject exists. Hence we may not attribute the totality of what happens in the power field to any personal plan whatsoever (Walzer, 1986).

Nonetheless, power relations are suffused with calculations. On the local level we can generally discover a high level of decision-making, planning, manipulations, intrigues, and co-ordination of political activity. Foucault calls this the local cynicism of power, and does not attribute secret motivations to intentions and interests on the local level. Actors more or less know what they are doing when they do it, and express this clearly. This, however, does not imply that the broader consequences of local actions are coordinated, and that there exists someone (a subject) to whom the total meaning of this activity may be attributed. "People know what they do; they frequently also know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do *does*" (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1982, p. 187). In other words, people are not conscious of the by-products and the implications of their deeds.

*Resistance to Power*

In his writings and in the interviews he gave, Foucault related to resistance in different and contradictory ways. In his view, power exists only when it is exercised, and it does not depend on agreement or resistance. Power operates only upon free subjects, and hence it presupposes the concept of freedom. Freedom means the ability to choose from a range of possibilities, in different ways of behavior. The relations between power and the freedom of the person who refuses to surrender to it are part of a single whole picture, and are inseparable. Hence, slavery, for example, is not part of the power relations, but merely the exertion of coercion (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982).

Resistance to power is part of the power relations, and hence it is at the same time rich in chances and without a chance. On the one hand, any resistance to existing power relations confirms this power network, and reaffirms its boundaries. On the other hand, the very appearance of a new factor in the power relations – resistance – brings about a redefinition of and a change in the power relations (Wickham, 1986).

It is important to understand the somewhat cunning way in which power shapes the resistance itself. Power is the force that produces the resistance, determines its place, and administers it. In other words, resistance to power draws its means of struggle, and even its actual social position, from the existing form of power. It follows that a successful exercise of power means promotion of *certain* forms of resistance no less than effective mobilization of means against this resistance (Minson, 1986). This has another important meaning: those resistances and individual forms that are promoted by the existing power relations also create conditions for preventing the appearance of other maybe more dangerous and subversive forms of resistance. Hence, a local failure in the exercise of power cannot always be analyzed simplistically: a tactical

failure may be related to in more than one sense as a strategic victory.

*Research of Power*

Power/knowledge is the critical coupling that Foucault warns us about. The research of power is a scientific activity which has to avoid entrapment in the power relations in order to understand their meaning. Analytical interpretation is the only valid method of analyzing and understanding social phenomena, and it includes three inter-related steps:

1. The interpreter has to take a pragmatic stance of some kind, on the basis of some shared social feeling, about the direction in which things are transpiring. In other words, she cannot speak from an arbitrary personal sense of transcendence or distress.  
Of course, in any given society at any given time there will be various groups possessing different shared feelings about a given state of affairs. Even were a general consensus about the social situation to come about in a particular place at a particular time, it would only prove that a certain orthodoxy has taken over in this society, and not that the situation has arrived at a status of a single objective truth. Hence the interpreter never represents a pure truth or an inclusive social feeling, but only the view of a certain social group, and he has to be critical towards this relativity and also accept its limitations.
2. The interpreter has to supply a disciplined diagnosis of what has happened and what is happening in the social body that explains the shared feeling. At this stage, the work involves a gray and meticulous search in archives and laboratories in order to establish what has been said in the past and in the present by whom and to whom and with what results. In the framework of the diagnosis, the social critic has to investigate the context as an inseparable part of his field of research. This contextual research is different from the research that is common in the social

sciences, which behaves like an entity with internal rules of its own, ignoring the broader social context within which it functions, and relating to important variables as though they were self-evident.

3. To complete the task, the interpreter has to give the reader an explanation as to why the practices he has described create the common good or evil that was the reason for the interpretative research.

Although since 1968 Foucault's writing is suffused with the concept of power, he himself insisted that there is no need to develop a theory of power. He declared that he had not created a theory for fear that it might serve the existing power relations. Foucault claimed that there is no such thing as the objectivity of the scientist, and no validity in the privileged intellectual pose of standing outside the social order like a prophet or a sage (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). Since knowledge is one of the things that define power in the modern world, the researcher is not powerless and is not outside power, he is part of the power relations whether he wants to be or not.

The *Panopticon* created by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 is an illustration of the way Foucault researched and interpreted texts (Foucault, 1979; Ritzer, 1988). The Panopticon is an eight-sided building surrounded by a wall, with a tower at the center. The prisoners (or other occupants of the structure) sit in cells located on floors around the wall. The cells have two apertures – one for light, facing outwards through the wall, and one facing the inner courtyard and the tower. The cells are completely separated from one another by means of walls. Jailers (or overseers of another kind) sit in the tower and observe what happens in every cell. The prisoners are isolated from one another, and exposed to constant observation. Since they cannot know when they are being observed, they supervise their behavior themselves. Research of the Panopticon led to the following conclusions about power:

Power is exercised and not held. In other words, it is not at all important to measure power, or to attempt to locate it. The important question is how power acts and what it produces. Among other things, it produces obedience, discipline, systematic knowledge about the prisoners.

Power tends to be non-personal, diffuse, rational and anonymous, and at the same time all-inclusive—encompassing as many dimensions of social life as possible. The observations of the prisoners in the Panopticon may be exploited for the research and production of scientific knowledge in various disciplines. According to Foucault, the sciences of criminology, psychology and psychiatry developed simultaneously with the development of this technology of power/knowledge.

The most diabolical aspect of power is that it is not entrusted in the hands of someone so that he may exercise it upon others absolutely. It entraps everyone who comes close to it: those who exercise power as well as those who are subject to it. The jailers, like the prisoners, are in certain senses also entrapped in the prison.

#### *A Method of Researching Power*

The danger in researching power relations by focusing on institutions is that the researcher may adopt the point of view of the institution itself in the course of his research, and may not notice the technologies used by the institution. When the researcher analyzes power relations from the institutional point of view she puts herself in danger of seeking explanations and sources in the institution itself; i.e., of explaining power by means of power. Another problem in researching power, according to Foucault, is the necessity of researching relations which do not have a necessary particular form. Therefore the researcher has to provide himself with an analytical tool. Foucault proposes a grid that should be laid over the site being researched, with the aid of which it will be possible to analyze the relations in their specific local form. This grid has several dimensions:

### 1. *Differentiation*

In the particular institution that is being researched, one has to examine what distinctions are made between workers and clients, between healthy people and sick people, between rich and poor—and also what is included in this set of differentiating distinctions. For example—in the distinction between rich and poor, are further distinctions made beyond the quantity of money? Does the distinction between healthy and sick rely only on medical criteria, or also on social norms practiced in the institution?

### 2. *Objectives*

Power is always purposeful, so it is possible to examine its goals. What gains or advantages is the institution interested in achieving? What privileges? What functions does it fulfill?

### 3. *Realization*

What is the technology and what are the mechanisms by means of which authority is expressed and obedience achieved? What is threatened, and how? Are patients subjected to physical force, economic punishment, punishment of expulsion from the place? What kind of supervision and control is exercised, what methods of surveillance, and according to what laws or rules? Is the surveillance daily and intimate? Are the rules explicit and clear, or vague, hinted at, and variable?

### 4. *Degrees of Institutionalization*

It is worth investigating the influence of four processes of institutionalization (Rojek, 1986):

**A. Individuation of Private Space.** In almost all the institutions of the disciplinary society there is an increasing tendency to allot each individual a personal space of his own. The purpose of this practice is to enable efficient supervision

of the behavior of each individual, so as to evaluate it, judge it, and calculate its advantages and qualities. The interesting question in a process of institutionalization is how the allocation of a private space influence the life of the individual and the society. Foucault claims that it isolates more than it connects. If the institutionalization isolates, we have to ask what goals or purposes this isolation seeks to attain

**B. Coding of Activities.** Coding of activities is the prescription of social conduct which may be expressed in manners, movements, but also in tasks, and its aim is the regulation of the relations in certain situations. An activity may be permissible in certain contexts and forbidden in others. The researcher is interested in learning these codes, in order to understand what is permitted and what is prohibited, and especially what is considered *normal* in each context.

**C. Routinization of Activities.** Routinization is an institutionalizing process that serves the expansion of the power relations, because it makes certain acts *automatic*, and ensures the ease of supervision and surveillance over people, especially in schools and work-places.

**D. Synchronization of Activities.** In the institutionalization process, this means a rational division of labor. The person who operates as a part of a *social machine*, on the principle of *automatic obedience*, was the fulfillment of the dreams of social engineers at the beginnings of this century. When this process of institutionalization reaches its peak, there is no need to exercise influence and compulsion to make people act as they have been programmed to act. They are trained to fulfill functions in concert with others. This is the highest level of the institutionalization of power—the creation of an efficient mechanism in which individuals act predictably on the principle of automatic docility.

### 5. *Rationalization*

The exercise of power is a complex, changing, and organized activity. It annexes to itself processes that are more or less appropriate to the situation in which it operates. The search

for the rational asks: What is the effectiveness of the tools available to power? How advanced are they technologically? Do the mechanisms contribute to the achievement of the objectives of power? What is their benefit in relation to their cost? Cost, here, means not only economical cost, but also the cost that stems from resistance to power.

### *Foucault and the Development of a Theory of Power*

Although Foucault, as noted, asserts that he did not develop a theory of power, in fact, as we can see in the present chapter, he did actually develop such a theory (Walzer, 1986). Theoretical insights stemming from his theory will help me further on in the development of a theory of empowerment. For example, to what extent can a practitioner develop a sensitivity to her deeds in order not to mechanically serve systems of power that contradict her original intentions? How to make use of an interpretative analysis as a method for researching the by-products of professional practice? In my opinion, Foucault's method, like Gaventa's theory of power referred to above (1980), teaches a subversive reading of texts and procedures in order to discover the covert ways in which technologies of power create obedience and powerlessness.

This is also the place to explain why, despite its great relevance, I have not based a theory of empowerment on Foucault's approach. I have found that Foucault contributes more with his ideas and the spirit of what he says than with structure, which is so necessary for building a theory. Like existentialist writers before him (Camus, 1942; May, 1972), Foucault too sees powerlessness as structured into human existence. This understanding serves a theory of empowerment because it is based on a universal human insight about the damage caused by powerlessness. The difficulty is that Foucault does not believe in resistance, because he denies the centrality of an autonomous subject who has the ability to influence and change social relations. On his view, power, not human agency, is the central factor that motivates all

the other relations. He did not believe that there is a chance of bringing about social change through local efforts, and since the belief in the human ability to effect social change is a central belief of the theory of empowerment, there is no room at its core for the skeptical and pessimistic Foucault. For readers who may doubt the justification for presenting him here at all, I will note that a reading of Foucault's writings reveals contradictions in this sphere as well (Ingram, 1994). In contrast to his subject-less scientific method, his writing is suffused with emotion and humanity, and the topics he chose to deal with attest to a sincere concern for the fate of the subject in Western democratic society.

### Giddens on Power

Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1982, 1984) discusses power as part of a social theory that he developed, which he called *Structuration*. Giddens and Foucault are similar in that power is an essential component in their social thought, and is incorporated into their principal writings. However, they represent almost absolutely opposite approaches to the place of the individual in society. Giddens, too, allots power an important place in social life. He agrees that power does not have a locus, is not connected to norms and values, or to class interests. However, he objects to the representation of power as all-inclusive and as possessing awesome dimensions. Giddens is very much influenced by Foucault, but he sees every individual as possessing knowledge and even consciousness, and in this he is the most optimistic among the theorists of power.

Power is integrated within a complex social practice, in which human agency has structural qualities, and the social structure is part of the human activity that creates it and ensures its continuity. This *duality of structure* model sees the social structure and the human agency as two factors which build and activate the social relations, and power as a central and important component of both. The social structure makes

possible the human activity, and also limits it—by means of laws, rules and resources, and also by means of human practices that are part of it. It is human agency that creates the social structure—it establishes it, consolidates it, and also changes it while it acts. To the same extent, the social structure is a component of all activity. People speak a language that has a structure of rules and syntax, even if they don't know a thing about syntax and rules of grammar. While speaking, the speaker decides to speak differently, and then he activates two processes: he changes the language, and reaffirms and reconstructs the structure and rules of the language. In other words, human activity does not *just happen*—it is structured. People make use of what already exists in order to know what to say, what to do, and even how to begin acting in situations in their lives.

Duality of structure integrates two separate approaches: the idea of power as a voluntary human activity, and the idea that power is structural, and hence is more a quality of the society than of particular people (Hajer, 1989). Hence one can explain power simultaneously in terms of human action and in terms of structure: it is the ability of individuals to act in a directed and voluntary manner and to bring about change; it is also systems of domination and rule, and of the rules and resources connected with these. Power is indeed human activity: a person who exercises power could have behaved differently, and a person on whom power is exercised would have acted differently had it not been exercised. However, this occurrence cannot be fully understood without relating to the social structure in the context of which it occurs.

A number of principles derive from this:

- Power is a basic component of human agency. Absolute lack of power means ceasing to be a human agent. Power is the human ability to intervene in events and to make a difference.

- Power is an inseparable part of the social interaction. Power is an integral feature of social life. It is always part of the relations, and its signs may be discerned even at micro levels of interaction.
- An inequality exists in different people's ability and access to resources, which also creates an inequality among them in the sphere of power. Hence, the development of ability and access to resources are key concepts for an understanding of the power that people can exercise.
- Power can also be described on a continuum of autonomy and dependence. Unequal access to resources for realizing goals and unequal opportunities to influence the course of the interaction ensure mutual relations, because each side is to a certain extent dependent on the other, and also autonomous to a certain extent in its action. The investigation of power involves exposing this dialectics of dependence and autonomy in specific situations (Davis, 1988).
- Power is a process. Power is a factor that intervenes between human agency (in the form of every person's inherent ability to influence the world around him) and social structure (in the form of the structures of domination that determine the degree of a person's ability to influence the world). These relations, between human agency and social structure, are dynamic and processual.

The theory of structuration, or, by its other name, the theory of the duality of structure, will serve, from the next chapter on, as a meta-theory for the development of a theory of empowerment, and so we will go on discussing it. Giddens creates the basis for the discussion of empowerment a theoretical link that integrates micro and macro phenomena: of action by individuals and the change that this action can bring to the environment.



## Summary

We have seen how difficult it is to find an agreed definition of power. The discussion of the theory of empowerment will take place in the shadow of the claim that power as a concept is essentially contested. A précis of the views about the essence of power will illustrate this:

- Power has to be acquired. Power may only be exercised. Power is a matter of authority.
- Power belongs to an individual. Power belongs only to the collective. Power cannot be attributed to anyone, it is a quality of social systems.
- Power involves conflict. Power does not involve conflict in every case. Power generally involves conflict, but not necessarily.
- Power presupposes resistance. Power, first and foremost, has to do with obedience. Power is both resistance and obedience.
- Power is connected with oppression and rule. Power is productive and makes development possible. Power is an evil, a good, diabolical, and routine. (Lukes, in Clegg, 1989, p. 239).

This being so, good and contradictory reasons will always be found to prefer one approach over the others. I have chosen to discuss approaches which have a greater methodological value for the development of a theory of empowerment than others: they are conducive to the clarification of problems this book deals with, and they make it possible to deal more comprehensively and profoundly with the central topic—empowerment. Giddens' theory of structuration will be used to establish the general structure of the theory of

empowerment. It reinforces the rationale for an integration between the individual and the collective which it is important to develop. Foucault's influence finds expression especially in the conception of power as an inseparable component of social relations. Foucault and Giddens see the practitioner and the researcher as involved in the social situation in the most subjective way. These principles of the Foucaultian approach have been fully adopted in this book. The theories of Gaventa, Mann and Clegg will be used to illuminate specific spheres in the theory of empowerment: the issue of powerlessness; the importance of organization in community empowerment, and the advantages of the development of strategic resources.

## Chapter 2

### **Empowerment: Definitions and Meanings**

In this chapter we will define the concept of empowerment, indicate the meanings given to it in various contexts, and discuss each one of these meanings.

#### *Verbal Definition*

Empowerment is related to the word power. In English, the concept leans on its original meaning of investment with legal power—permission to act for some specific goal or purpose (Rappaport, 1987).

The new meaning of the concept includes mainly references to power that develops and is acquired. People are managing to gain more control over their lives, either by themselves or with the help of others. The form *to be empowered* relates to what is both a process and an outcome—to the effort to obtain a relative degree of ability to influence the world (Staples, 1990).

#### **Initial Meanings of Empowerment**

Three of the first writers to relate systematically to the concept have had a most fundamental influence on the development of its use. Barbara Solomon (1976, 1985) emphasized empowerment as a method of social work with oppressed Afro-Americans. Peter Berger and Richard Neuhaus (1977) proposed empowerment as a way of improving the welfare services by means of mediating social institutions. Julian Rappaport (1981) developed the concept theoretically and presented it as a world-view that includes a social policy and an approach to the solution of social problems stemming from powerlessness.

These writers emphasized the important connection between individuals and community, and encouraged a contextual-



ecological approach to the treatment of social situations. They discussed the failure of social programs to provide social solutions, and the destructive by-product of these programs—the creation of powerlessness among those in need of the programs. The root of the evil, they claimed, is that local knowledge and resources are ignored in the course of corrective intervention, and that the missing resources are provided insensitively, without consideration for what is already there.

Since the eighties, four ideological approaches have provided the framework of ideas for the discussion of empowerment. The first is an ethnocentric approach, which seeks a solution for difficult social problems of ethnic and other minorities (Solomon, 1976; Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991). The second is a conservative liberal approach that seeks to revive the community as a social unit which among other things has to care for its weak citizens as well (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977). The third is a socialist approach which demands of equity and social responsibility in the treatment of social problems (Boyte, 1984). The fourth approach wants to see empowerment as a profound and professional implementation of democracy—one that will contain every legitimate social ideological current in the democratic society. This is a progressive democratic world-view which resolves to live in harmony with the other approaches and attempts to create an integration of them. Its distinctive spokesman is Julian Rappaport (1981, 1985, 1987). The present book is a continuation of this approach. Where there is a multiplicity of shades it is not always easy to distinguish a new color, and not everyone who is interested in empowerment is interested in interpreting the ideologies behind it. Since empowerment is declaredly also a world-view, it is worth acknowledging that different and even contradictory value-systems have participated in its creation.

In order to develop empowerment into a theory I first had to sort the accepted meanings, to discuss them, to analyze them in order to evaluate them, and then to recompose the

concept anew. The method I have chosen is not the only possible one (see, for comparison, the books by Judith Lee [1994] and Enid Cox and Ruth Parsons [1994]), but it has determined the character of the present study. I have chosen to divide the discussion into three categories, or levels, which in the literature on empowerment sometimes appear on their own and sometimes together, though not always in a differentiated way: individual empowerment—which focuses on what happens on the personal level in the individual's life; community empowerment—which emphasizes the collective processes and the social change; and empowerment as a professional practice—which sees empowerment as a means of professional intervention for the solution of social problems.

### Individual Empowerment

The personality structure, as we know, is significantly influenced by environmental conditions. A person is not formed only by heredity and conditions of growth and care, but also by opportunities and experiences in the world around him. Among these, especially important to us is the ability to make decisions and to act in order to attain goals. This ability (or its absence) shapes the person's character and influences the degree to which she will be the effective actor in her life (Pinderhughes, 1983).

Empowerment is an interactive process which occurs between the individual and his environment, in the course of which the sense of the self as worthless changes into an acceptance of the self as an assertive citizen with socio-political ability. The outcome of the process is skills, based on insights and abilities, the essential features of which are a critical political consciousness, an ability to participate with others, a capacity to cope with frustrations and to struggle for influence over the environment (Kieffer, 1984).

The process of empowerment is an active process. Its form is determined by the circumstances and the events, but its

essence is human activity in the direction of change from a passive state to an active one. The process brings about an integration of self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and a personal ability to take a significant part in decision-making and in control over resources in the environment. The sense of personal ability connects with civic commitment. Individual empowerment is an expression on the individual level of a multi-leveled process which may be applied to organizations, communities, and social policy (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).

Empowerment is a process of internal and external change. The internal process is the person's sense or belief in her ability to make decisions and to solve her own problems. The external change finds expression in the ability to act and to implement the practical knowledge, the information, the skills, the capabilities and the other new resources acquired in the course of the process (Parsons, 1988).

Some writers call the internal change psychological empowerment and the external change political empowerment. According to this distinction, psychological empowerment occurs on the level of a person's consciousness and sensations, while political empowerment is a real change which enables a person to take part in the making of decisions that affect his life. To achieve psychological empowerment a person requires only internal strengths, while to realize his political personal empowerment a person requires environmental conditions, mainly organizational ones, which will enable him to exercise new abilities (Gruber & Trickett, 1987).

In this discussion I do not intend to deal with the practical and the psychological processes of empowerment and the differences between them; rather, I want to emphasize the need for an integration of both. While the traditional approach sees political power as the possession of sufficient influence or authority to bring about a change, or even to impose it, the idea of empowerment adopts a different approach to power, one that does not attribute possession of power to anyone. When power is not conceived as a resource or a concrete

position in any particular site, then it is in any case both political and psychological. Indeed, people have testified that in their empowerment process they did not necessarily acquire more social influence or political control, but they did become more able participants in the political process and in local decision making. They estimated that they did not possess more absolute power to dictate the character of their environment, but they believed that they were beginning to be more effective in the dynamics of social and political negotiations (Kieffer, 1984).

### *Psychological Constructs and Empowerment*

Several attempts have been made to define individual empowerment by means of psychological constructs. Especially conspicuous is the desire to connect empowerment to two groups of psychological constructs. The first group is that of personality constructs which are called *locus of control* (Rotter, 1966); the second group is that of cognitive constructs, which focus on self-efficacy, i.e., the belief in one's efficacy to alter aspects of life over which one can exercise some control (Bandura, 1989).

*Locus of control* is a concept with an internal-external continuum, which in general terms determines that someone whose *locus of control* is inside him is *internal*—he expects reinforcement from himself, possesses inner motivation, and therefore his achievements will be more under his control as opposed to someone whose locus of control is external. The *external* person perceives reinforcements as beyond control and due to chance, fate or powerful others (Rotter, 1966, Levenson, 1981).

Several studies have attempted to define individual empowerment by means of the locus of control construct. Here an internal locus of control indicates the realization of the empowerment process, while an external locus of control means the continued existence of powerlessness (Chavis, 1984;

Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Hoffman, 1978; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Sue, 1981, in Hegar & Hunzeker, 1988).

However, studies on the *locus of control* construct indicate that there is no unequivocal connection between important factors connected with the concept of empowerment and this construct. For example, no significant connection has been found between the locus of control and political social activity. Likewise, especially in extreme states of powerlessness, no indication has been found of the advantage of *internality* over *externality*, particularly not among women. In many studies the *locus of control* has been revealed as a situation-contingent quality which may appear or disappear according to the circumstances, with no clear connection to the personality (Levenson, 1981; Sendler et al., 1983; Parsons, 1988).

The critique of *locus of control* sees it as a culture-dependent concept, which discriminates against those who are in a social and cultural state of powerlessness and lack of control. The *locus of control* research in fact presupposes that the researchers themselves have an *internal* locus, and attributes an *external locus of control* to certain especially weak population groups. If so, it is preferable to see this construct as an indicator of the social situation of those population groups, instead of using it to measure the personality of individuals (Antonovsky, 1979).

*Self-efficacy* (Bandura, 1989) is a central and ongoing individual mechanism (which operates by means of cognitive, motivational and affective processes) which is comprised of a person's perceived belief in her capability to exercise control over events. Studies indicate that a person's belief in her ability to achieve outcomes is, among other things, connected to her thinking patterns—to what extent they help or hinder her to realize goals. This belief determines how a person will judge her situation, and influences the degree of motivation that people mobilize and sustain in given tasks, their degree of endurance in situations of stress and their vulnerability to depression, and the activities and the environmental frameworks that people choose. The

social influences operating in the selected environments can contribute to personal development by the interests and competencies they cultivate and the social opportunities they provide, which subsequently shape their possibilities of development (Bandura, 1989, 1997). The connection between the self-efficacy mechanism and the empowerment process is so clear that there can be no doubt about the value of an integration between them.

The psychological constructs are not the subject of this book, for if we assume that every powerless person needs empowerment, and that potential empowerment exists in every person, then personality qualities are not essential for an understanding of the various levels of the empowerment process or its outcomes. Beyond this, the hidden message in the personality constructs is that an empowered person has changed psychologically in ways that only professionals can understand and measure. Such a message contradicts empowerment language, which calls for equal and transparent relations between professionals (including researchers) and the people in whose lives they intervene (Rappaport, 1985). I recommend that as part of adopting an empowering professional practice we should avoid using concepts which brand people in advance.

Since empowerment is not a particular quality of a person, but an important condition for his existence, its realization must correspond to the most diverse (theoretically, at least, the infinite) number of human variations. Paradoxically, this very complexity is what enables the process to harmoniously absorb a vast quantity of psychological constructs (Zimmerman, 1995). Although we cannot dismiss the attempt to make connections between psychological theories and the concept of empowerment, my preference is to develop empowerment in a less psychological and more social direction.

*Individual Empowerment as a Political Concept*

The advantage of the concept of empowerment lies in its integration of the level of individual analysis with the level of social and political meaning. This conjunction appears in feminist thinking, which connects the personal with the political: what happens in the life of an individual woman is not only her private affair, it is also an expression of her social situation (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brentley, 1988).

If we acknowledge that politics is the everyday activities of ordinary people who are attempting to change social and economic institutions, individual empowerment cannot consist only of personal assertiveness, mobility, and a psychological experience of power (Morgen & Bookman, 1988).

Feminist thinking presents the personal and the political as two sides of one coin, in remonstrance against a common social tendency to divide what is considered worthy of public discussion and is openly and publicly discussed from what is not such and belongs inside the private sphere (Ackelsberg, 1988). This division defined women's problems as *private*, prevented public recognition of their importance, excluded them and separated them from one another, and thus prevented them having a community life which would strengthen their perceptions, establishing a vicious circle that augmented their exclusion and institutionalized their disconnection from politics. In this way, too, the private space and the public space were divided: the home and the residential environment as one entity, and public life and work as another. Men are connected with the public domain—the world at large; women with the private domain—the home.

This division has been harmful not only to women. Any division that contributes to isolation and separation between domains in the individual's life brings it about that people do not comprehend the connection between what goes on in their work situation and what happens in their home and community, just as they do not understand the connection between political decisions (or non-decisions) and personal

economic outcomes. The severance between the private and the public has reinforced the view that citizens, as individuals, or as residents in a community, are not capable of effecting a change in politics or the economy: they are busy realizing personal goals and are involved in conflicts with one another for the sake of their own interests. *Self-interest* is natural (Perloff, 1987), and this implies that for people to cooperate and contribute to the general interest there needs to be a great change in behavior, attitudes, and human nature. Empowerment is a political concept because it comes out against these views, and connects the individual with a public, a community, and with politics. Individual empowerment is a political demand by women – and men – not to stop them at the door of their residences (Ackelsberg, 1988). Empowerment promotes involvement in politics because it broadens a person's social understanding and connects her with others in the same situation; empowerment broadens a person's horizons, imbues him with faith in social change, and accords him the ability to change.

*Group Empowerment – The Group as a Means of Empowerment*

Anyone who has gone through the experience of joining a self-help group in order to get help, and has discovered that she can also help others, knows how someone who begins the journey towards empowerment feels (Rappaport, 1985). The group is the perfect environment for consciousness-raising, for mutual help, for developing social skills, for exercising problem-solving, and for experiencing inter-personal influence. Empowerment means coming out from the limited boundaries of the *I* into the expanse of possibilities of the *we*. It was only natural that the professionals who in the seventies developed the concept of the self-help group would add the concept of empowerment to it in the eighties (Reismann, 1983, 1985; Kahn & Bender, 1985).

When the empowerment process is undergone by the individual in a group, it also includes the enabling influence of a peer group within a collective-organizational structure, and also relations with a mentor that enrich the experience (Kieffer, 1983). The conjunction of empowerment with mutuality – *mutual empowerment* – broadens people's possibilities of controlling their lives. It has been found that people in self-help groups who have both provided and received help have gained more satisfaction from their participation in the group and more self-esteem than people who only received help or only provided help (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Maton & Rappaport, 1984).

Participation in a self-help group is considered an ideal (though not exclusive) means of encouraging individual empowerment, for such a group produces empowerment beyond the individual as well: people receive emotional and social support in the course of a change process in which they provide concrete help to others and acquire new skills, including development of ability for future public action (Dodd & Gutierrez, 1990; Chesler & Chesney, 1995).

### *Critical Consciousness and Individual Empowerment*

The development of critical consciousness is, without doubt. The most significant personal experience in the empowerment process. Critical consciousness is the process by means of which people acquire an increasingly greater understanding of the cultural-social conditions that shape their lives, and of the extent of their ability to change these conditions. A person lives not only in the present but also in history, and is capable not only of interpreting but also of interpreting interpretations—hence a critical consciousness is essential and basic to all human learning (Freire, 1970).

Critical self-consciousness includes people's recognition of their right to give their experiences a name. People learn to speak in their own language, and to give names to the elements of their world (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986).

Critical consciousness is people's better understanding of their powerlessness and of the systematic forces that oppress them. The success or failure of a particular struggle or activity are only one aspect of empowerment. The change in people's outlook on themselves, and in their ability to understand the world in which they live, is more important. The empowerment of a woman who is poor, belongs to an ethnic minority, and is at the bottom of the social status and income levels, expresses itself in her understanding and her consciousness of the dynamics of her oppressed condition, and not in her success to liberate herself from it. Her power expresses itself in a translation of her consciousness into action with others in her situation in order to withstand the heavy burden of their lack of resources (Gilkes, 1988; Bookman, 1988).

We may distinguish two main approaches to the significance of critical consciousness in the empowerment process: those who see empowerment as essentially an internal process see the development of critical consciousness as the main realization of empowerment. On this view, critical consciousness is the outcome of empowerment (Luttrell, 1988; Morgen, 1988). Those who claim that the goal of empowerment is actual achievements see the development of critical consciousness as an important stage, but only an initial one in the process (Kieffer, 1984; Gruber & Trickett, 1987).

Consciousness is formed by means of praxis in the course of action (Morgen, 1988). Hence, one may also join in collective action without such consciousness and, through actual experience and learning about such experience, one may achieve consciousness and empowerment. Action alone does not deepen critical consciousness, just as learning with no experience at all does not achieve this. Theories of learning and education have long since recognized the importance of experiential learning. The empowerment process makes manifest the importance of the application of this approach to

the social domain (Rivera, 1990; Freire, 1970; Lane & Sawaia, 1991).

Empowerment, then, is a pro-active concept that encourages an active and initiative-taking approach to life, on the individual level as well. The individual process entails the will to influence the environment on all levels: it begins with a sense of faith in one's own strength, advances to activity in inter-personal domains, and continues from there to activity for social change. An elderly woman may feel empowered from the very fact that she is still independent and controls her own private affairs, but she can feel much greater control over her life when she is involved in neighborhood activity for herself and for other citizens in her situation. Action and consciousness are bound up with one another and vary from one person to another. They, together with the other constituents of the process, contribute to the vast variety of forms and contents of the empowerment process.

Individual empowerment is a process of personal development. The process involves both a development of skills and abilities, and a more positive self-definition. People testify to a better feeling about themselves, a sense of more self-respect and self-esteem. A new self-confidence and a feeling of self-efficacy are connected with a redefinition of the self, and the latter is closely linked with a real improvement in personal knowledge, abilities, skills, resources and life opportunities. A higher level of personal activity makes possible more effective inter-personal relations. Since self-perception is based on achievements in the real world, there is a clear positive interaction between development of self-confidence and reinforcement of personal ability.

The ability to redefine yourself and to act efficiently for yourself is the essence of individual empowerment. But individual empowerment cannot be an exclusive or principal component of the concept of empowerment because powerlessness is not only an individual problem, but also a social and structural condition. People, generally, are not

powerless because of lacks in their private lives or their personalities, but because they belong to a powerless group. Of course, in each such group there will always be those who, thanks to exceptional talent or luck, will attain to personal success and power (the converse situation also exists: in a group that possesses power there will always be some powerless individuals). Nonetheless, although these are known and accepted truths, psychological and individual explanations of success and failure are still prevalent, and the conservative social policy that reinforces them is still in vogue. These explanations remain in force because they cast the responsibility for the situation and the onus of change on the individual victims of inequality and oppression, instead of on the social structure which is the root of these problems. Empowerment is the opposite approach, and that is why its social dimensions are so important. Individual empowerment is only one constituent of the process which as a whole connects the personal and the individual with the collective and the social in people's lives.

### Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is the increased control of people as a collective over outcomes important to their lives. Before discussing community empowerment we need to clarify the concept *community* in the sense used in the present book.

#### *The Community and the Common Critical Characteristic*

Community has a meaning of a life that is more egalitarian, participatory and intimate than life in society at large, which demands the objectification of man and anonymous obedience to authority and law. The community as an image is a kind of antithesis of the bureaucratic, hierarchical, formal and judiciary society. The concept is to a certain extent abstract, but at the same time concrete, because it operates in the geographical, the ethnic, and the functional sense. The



need for a community is a need to live together, to trust, to communicate. In the Middle Ages the concept *commune* was used to describe a settlement with an independent identity and government. In English, *community* and *communication* are derived from the same root (Handler, 1990).

There are several approaches to community:

1. A utopian approach oriented to a vision of a future community whose members will be able to fulfill their human and social potential. This approach draws its inspiration from the utopians of the 19th century. Although it is far from the idyllic scene of adults and children who are cultured, educated, strong, healthy, and possess high moral qualities, who group together in a rural setting to grow vegetables and weave clothes, it too preaches egalitarianism and autarchy. The separation from society at large is necessary in order to realize important social goals of the members (Friedmann, 1987).
2. A rehabilitational approach which focuses on the situation of ethnic minorities, and more recently also of other minorities, such as the disabled (Dolnick, 1993). On this view, the community struggles with life beside a different and sometimes hostile society, and grapples with the dilemma of integration into this society. Here too a utopian vision exists: to revitalize the intimate and supportive community in which, more by necessity than because they want to, people whom the society isolates and discriminates against live today (O'Sullivan, 1984; Friedmann, 1989; Rivera & Erlich, 1984, Cendeluci, 1995).
3. A social approach which redefines community and departs, perhaps too sharply (because quite a few people still live in traditional communities in our time too) from the traditional community as it used to be (Warren, 1975). The new community is a social collective entity, and the image appropriate to it is one of people with common problems and generally a common dependence on service

providers. This is a community which does not include all the aspects of existence, but responds to those needs in people's lives for the sake of which it was created (Reinharz, 1984). Parents of children with Down's Syndrome can create a community for themselves to deal with all aspects of their lives as parents of these children: the care, the raising and the development of the child. However, they may also have life interests which they do not share with this community (Handler, 1990).

I will be referring mostly to this kind of partial and changing community. It has advantages for analysis on both the macro and the micro levels. On the macro level—the partial community which changes according to circumstances constitutes a recognition of the fact that not all the social needs can, or have to, find a response in a community setting. Community is not the supreme end, but a supportive and complementary means for human existence (Handler, 1990). On the micro level—this community softens the friction between the individual's needs for autonomy and the demand for loyalty to the collective and the imposition of group values implicit in the idea of the community. The individual can choose, and can create a community; he is free to leave a community and join a new one at his discretion.

The concept *common critical characteristic* (Sadan and Peri, 1990), too, supports the conceptualization of the partial community. For example, a geographical place is at times a common critical characteristic of many of the people living in a certain deprived neighborhood. When the basis for solidarity with others is not geographical, it is necessary to seek the common critical characteristic which causes people (or others in their environment) to define themselves in a similar way and apart from the environment. The common critical characteristic is what defines and distinguishes people, and cannot be ignored. Hence it has a potential for the creation of a community. For example, people suffering from hemophilia do not usually live in one geographical community, but they

have a potential to create a community around their common critical characteristic: they need special services, some of which are provided, and some of which are lacking, partial, or defective. Their everyday lives and the problems that preoccupy them are similar and they share a common fate. All these are a common basis for connection. The connection may be partial, unstable and changing, or permanent and requiring more commitment, but it exists, and a community may be built upon it.

It is important to remember not to define all people who share the same common critical characteristic as a community: not everyone who carries the critical characteristic has to belong to a community even if it exists—joining a community is a conscious and voluntary act. Nonetheless, these two concepts – community and common critical characteristic – complement and reinforce one another in very important ways. One of these, perhaps the most important one, is that the creation of the community helps the surrounding society to understand the critical characteristic as a social problem, instead of seeing it as an individual problem. While an individual view isolates those who suffer from a problem, and casts the responsibility for their situation and for changing it upon them as individuals, the creation of a community around a critical characteristic is an expression of an improvement of the human ability to cope with a social problem: there is an improvement both in the ability of those suffering from the problem to ease their suffering, and in the society's ability to understand their distress and to seek a social solution for it.

The definition of community empowerment contains processes that have diverse collective bases. As already noted, community empowerment on a basis of geographical boundaries, as in residential neighborhoods, is only one of the possibilities. Also important is community empowerment of people whose common characteristic is ethnic origin, gender (women), age (the elderly), or a difficult and limiting life problem (such as deaf or paraplegic people). Further on we

will discuss these various categories and also some issues that are common to community empowerment of all kinds.

### *Community Empowerment on a Geographical Basis*

The first thing that the idea of community empowerment brings to mind is a neighborhood, or any other defined residential area. It should be made clear that since human existence as such is anchored in a locale in a specific space, the discussion of community empowerment on a non-geographical basis may also take place within the bounds of a geographical neighborhood. In such a case, however, the common critical characteristic of the people involved may be their origin and not their place of residence (e.g., Greeks in Arcadia, New York, or Armenians in Jerusalem).

The discussion of community empowerment on a geographical basis is conducted almost separately in a number of professional disciplines, e.g.: community psychology (Wandersman & Florin, 1988), community work (Rubin & Rubin, 1992), urban studies and planning (Friedmann, 1992; Brower & Taylor, 1998), social action (Boyte, 1984), and social policy (Page-Adams & Sherraden, 1997). I have chosen to present the essentials without relating to each domain separately.

Techniques of resident participation in the affairs of their neighborhood are considered as encouraging individual empowerment: participation encourages perceived self-efficacy, expectations of successful group solutions, and increased civic commitment (Wandersman & Florin, 1988). Community empowerment is manifested in the increasing actual power of neighborhood groups, especially when the participation produces a change in decision making in the neighborhood and leads to residents' organizations having more control over their affairs (Biegel, 1984). Only when residents' participation in their neighborhood's agenda becomes an accepted procedure (where poor neighborhoods are concerned, this is in most cases an achievement that



entails considerable efforts) can community empowerment be defined as collective knowledge of problems and alternative solutions and skills in the presentation of issues, in groups leadership, and in implementation of tactics (Fawcett et al., 1984).

Community work builds the individual's ability to act together with others and to create a community. It teaches people to cooperate—to make group decisions, to solve common problems and to mobilize resources for the general good. The belief in an active democracy, in maximal participation of residents in the life of their community, in the realization of people's right to influence important decisions in their lives, are the basis of thought about empowerment, and undoubtedly originate in the values of community work.

However, in community work, as in any professional practice, the values do not attest to the actual practice. Hence it is possible to measure the degree of empowerment that is encouraged by community work in the process of professional intervention by means of the *DARE* criteria: 1. Who Determines the goals? 2. Who Acts to achievement the goals? 3. Who Receives the actions? 4. Who Evaluates the actions? (Rubin & Rubin, 1992).

The test of community empowerment, then, is the active participation of the people themselves in processes of decision making that affect the community, starting from the stage of formulating the goals, through to the stage of evaluating the outcomes of the effort. The more the *DARE* criteria point in the direction of resident groups and organizations and less in the direction of formal services and/or factors external to the community, the more community empowerment there is in that area of intervention.

Some writers believe that community empowerment is expressed in the community's ability to create new human, existential, economic, social and political values for its residents, as an alternative to dysfunctional values that penetrate into the community from the capitalist economy, such as intensive consumption separated from daily life,

isolated individualism. Community empowerment therefore depends on a de-linking from the system at large, and on greater local self-reliance based on resources that the community households can produce (Friedmann, 1987). The outcome may be an making change: *the recovery of the political community*. The goal is not community empowerment, but the reactivation of political life—a society whose residents are active in the processes of civil governance. This is an ideal way of life that includes: cooperative production of consumer goods, democracy at home and outside the home, and active participation in political and community life. Household economy, the society and the world economy are integrated together in the framework of a *moral economy* that is based on social justice in the division of resources and the care of people (Friedmann, 1989).

In the domain of urban planning models that declare goals of empowerment are occasionally presented (Bradbury et al., 1987); these models accord people more choice, proclaim a message of more equality, recommend that people should not be labeled, nor isolated in services of their own. The danger in these models is disempowerment resulting from inattention to the importance of the empowerment process. For example, the establishment of a city-wide pilot project means most significant changes in the lives of people who will not be participants in the planing or the implementation of the change. The deterministic premise that the outcomes of such a plan will lead to empowerment of people has no connection with the empowerment approach as it is presented here. A social plan which makes use of the word empowerment to describe final outcomes only, and does not deal with processes of community development or mobilization of participants from the area of intervention, is not empowering.

Following Berger and Neuhaus' classical article (1977), the idea of turning the community into an exclusive provider of welfare services to its members has also been called community empowerment. The critique of this trend stems from concern about the erosion of the idea of the welfare

state by means of such solutions. Although not all the present institutions are efficient as service providers or promoters of public participation, neighborhood organizations too can be “institutionalized, rigid, inaccessible, insensitive and undemocratic just like professional bureaucracies” (Kramer, 1988). Exaggerated enthusiasm about voluntary activity in the community, mutual help and social networks may cause harm, because the replacement of bureaucratic state services by community services is problematic for three reasons: 1. The social networks on which they rely do not always exist, or are not always acceptable to those in need. It also happens that the most needy are not wanted by the geographical community or by the community services (Borkman, 1984). 2. The resources of the community service may be inadequate to provide efficient service. 3. The accountability of community organizations is still particularly problematic. We often tend to forget that the present, formal and bureaucratic form of service provision developed in the wake of the failure of the mediating institutions – the community, the family, the church and the voluntary organization – to provide a response to complex needs.

John Friedmann (1992) claims that community empowerment is the creation of access to social and economic resources. Poverty, then, results from lack of access to essential resources, not only economic but also political and social resources. This being so, some writers claim that politics, not planning, is the major process by means of which needs should be identified and responses for them should be located (Marris, 1987; Hager, 1989).

The term community empowerment hints at the (at least theoretical) possibility that in a certain sense it is the community itself, and not only the individuals who belong to groups or organizations that comprise it, that undergoes an empowerment process. The question that precedes such a possibility is whether the geographical community can act collectively. Urban neighborhoods lack the primal connections of kinship, emotional connection and economic inter-relations

that in the past created a community and enabled community activity. The typical urban neighborhood of today is, in most cases, a place where individuals and families are separate entities which, by chance or intentionally, have chosen to live in a particular place. Such a divided and thin foundation cannot serve as a basis for solidarity (Davis, 1991). But solidarity can emerge in a residential area when the interests on which it is based stem from non-geographic sources, such as relations of race, religion, ethnicity and class that are expressed in residential neighborhoods. In other words, neighborhoods may serve as arenas in which races, religions, nations or classes are separated spatially and concentrated socially. People who live in the same locale can act collectively on the basis of political and material interests which are not local in origin (Harvey, 1973). However, experience shows that people act collectively on the basis of interests and out of a solidarity that are created in the place itself. Neighborhoods act as a community in order to improve security, services or quality of life, at times in order to protect the value of local property, and at times because inaction means participating in the destruction of the community through silent agreement (Davis, 1991).

Beside the organization of groups which manage to pool their resources into a common effort, there are also groups that act apart from one another. There are situations in which one neighborhood organizes itself for action against the establishment; there are cases when these neighborhood groups initiate separate efforts for interests of their own; and there is activity of neighborhood groups against one another and against the establishment (Atzmon, 1988). The relevant question is: what is the connection between all these kinds of community activity and community empowerment.

Some writers describe an empowered community as a place in which the residents have the skills, the will, and the resources to act in order to regulate the quality of life in their community, and where there exist a structure and relations between the organizations and the agencies: the

empowered community responds to threats to its quality of life, or initiates efforts for the improvement of the quality of life, by means of a network of community organizations. In addition, in an empowered community the following conditions exist: 1. Political openness, which is manifested in serious consideration of the residents' criticism and claims. 2. A strong leadership which seeks the residents' advice, and knows when to confront external forces and when to receive help from the outside. 3. Strong connections between the community's formal and informal leadership. 4. Access to the mass media, such as radio, television, the press, which reflect all sectors of the community (Zimmerman, n.d.). In my estimation, the conditions posited in these descriptions of the perfect community and the perfect environment are not attainable in most community empowerment processes. They may be aspired to, but positing too high a target for the realization of empowerment disregards the importance of primary stages in the process which involve development in the direction of control over the environment and the creation of a community.

Situations in which the community struggles for its survival connect well with community empowerment. In such situations, organized community activity to prevent external intervention that threatens its very existence is essential. If the community does not act, or does not act in time, or does not act efficiently, it does not survive. Those neighborhoods which lack consciousness of the danger they are in, and/or the organizational tools to prepare against it before it happens, are annihilated (Levine, 1982; Gans, 1982; Erikson, 1994). Community empowerment stems from the immense sense of achievement that comes from safeguarding the community's continued existence, and from the assurance of the well-being of its residents, but also from the struggle itself (Couto, 1989; O'Sullivan et al., 1984).

### *Community Empowerment on the Basis of a Common Critical Characteristic*

The common critical characteristic makes it possible to reveal further aspects of community empowerment, and especially to reinforce the non-geographical aspect.

### *Ethnic minorities*

Belonging to an ethnic minority is a common critical characteristic such as origin, language, at times religion or a difference in outward appearance, and life in a different and a more or less hostile environment—all or some of these signs. The dilemma in ethnic community empowerment (even if it is not always articulated explicitly) stems from the tension between the negative and the positive aspects of the barrier between the ethnic community and the environment in which it lives. While isolation by coercion and rejection leads to powerlessness, alienation and backwardness, voluntary segregation facilitates safeguarding of values, uniqueness, and authenticity.

Community empowerment of ethnic minorities, then, involves two sets of needs: needs for control, required by people who live in conditions of permanent marginality (Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Solomon, 1976), and need for autonomy, especially cultural. Autonomy is important to the ethnic minority in order to restore its lost dignity, and to enable the community to continue living in frameworks of its own—including the retention of their language and customs (O'Sullivan, 1984; Rivera & Erlich, 1984).

Consequently, two approaches to ethnic community empowerment may be identified: a *corrective* approach and a *preserving* approach. The corrective approach sees empowerment as a method of treatment which will ease problems created as a result of prolonged deprivation and discrimination, and will help a group overcome obstacles on the path to social equality. This approach affirms that it does

not cast blame on the victim, but it still contains a strong emphasis on the adaptation and adjustment of the minority itself to the society around it (Weaver, 1982; Solomon, 1976, 1985; Luttrell, 1988). The preserving approach also wants to overcome discrimination and deprivation, but to preserve the ethnic group's special qualities as well. This approach also demands from the society at large a degree of adjustment to the existence of an ethnic minority in its midst. The ethnic community as a deprived and discriminated-against minority needs empowerment in order to be able to contribute to the society within which it lives from the resources innate in it – original knowledge, values and life-style – and all these are not considered valuable as long as the community is powerless. Hence preserving community empowerment emphasizes the benefit the society at large may obtain from the ethnic community's valuable resources: the community values, the moral economy, the protection of ecological values and new sources of knowledge (Rivera, 1990; Friedmann, 1989, 1990). Instead of seeing the provision of services to ethnic minorities as an organizational problem, ethnicity should be seen as a permanent component in the deployment of the social services. The society at large needs to make an adjustment to the minorities living in its midst and to provide them with services in the appropriate language and in a style appropriate to the social values that are important to them (Morales, 1984).

We must beware, however, of a one-dimensional approach to the ethnic minority—to remain content with a sensitivity to the ethnic culture, and non-intervention in the minority's norms and the cultural expectations, cannot present a full picture of the ethnic group's situation. This is to attribute too much value to the cultural common denominator within the group, while ignoring the low and powerless status which informs the principal experiences that shape the life of the individual who belongs to this minority. Lack of self-esteem and a sense of self-blame are a part of the ethnic experience, no less than the culture (Horton & Freire, 1990).

Attention should also be devoted to those ethnic minorities whose absorption difficulties are not temporary. They live in separate communities in a society which is not interested in them. Their main goal is survival in a hostile environment. The more skilled these communities are in survival, the more distinctive in character they become. In contrast to the description of the open and partial community referred to above, communities which live in a deterministic life-reality of racial segregation and economic exploitation tend to be relatively closed and permanent. The points of entrance and exit into and out of them are sharply defined, and are based on the cultural, socio-political, and economic situation of the people (Rivera & Erlich, 1984).

Community empowerment of an ethnic minority has to do with overcoming the direct and indirect obstacles of power which are responsible for the ongoing disempowerment of this minority (Solomon, 1976). Some writers see self-help groups as method for empowerment of ethnic minorities (Gutierrez et al., 1990; Neighbors, 1991; Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991). Others side with organization and social action as main vehicles for solving difficult social problems of minorities, and attack the individual (and group) approach to solutions as unsuitable and hindering (Russel-Erlich & Rivera, 1986). Insistence on diverse means, which will always also include community methods, is the key to adapting empowering social solutions to the many and contradictory needs of these groups (Rappaport, 1987). People with special needs, such as disabled people, are beginning to interpret their special situation in society as analogous to that of an ethnic minority (Finkelstein, 1993; Dolnick, 1993; Deegan, 1998). Hence, the path to community empowerment of people with disabilities may be similar in some aspects to that of ethnic minorities (Morris, 1997).

### *Women*

Being marginal and powerless does not indicate a population's numerical weight in the society. Although women constitute half of the world's population, they are discussed in the present context because like the elderly, children, and disabled people, many women are powerless. At times it seems that the only population in the Western world that does not need empowerment is that of healthy, white, male members of the upper classes. This is also a superficial but quite comprehensive description of the decision and policy makers in Western democratic society who shape the social and physical environment and allocate resources, leaving the majority feeling worthless and marginal.

The significant connection between women and community empowerment is their high numerical participation in efforts to create community. The question of how it is that women are more active than men in the residential environment has occupied many researchers (Reinharz, 1984). Some writers explain this by the women's responsibility for social reproduction, an activity which is not acknowledged and is thus rendered valueless by the economic system. The kind of community action that women are generally involved in, at least at the outset of their empowerment process, is close to their social reproduction functions, like organizing a club for children or running a neighborhood laundromat. In this way women create community as an extension of home (Markusen, 1982; Feldman & Stall, 1992).

The greater participation of women in creating community among poor and weak populations is also explained by the fact that women can adopt alternative criteria for the definition of social success. While men of the same social class accept the definition of success that is accepted in society at large – that a successful man is rich and fulfills a valuable social role – society defines a successful woman as married, a mother, mature, responsible and caring. As a result of this difference, women do not experience the powerlessness that

stems from their social situation with the same intensity that men do (Luttrell, 1988). These interpretations suggest that the community empowerment process of women converts the sources of their powerlessness, which are their traditional roles as housewives and mothers, into a power base. From this starting point they become stronger and continue to extend their activities to additional domains with a political character.

### *The Elderly*

Another *special* population which also constitutes a considerable part of human society are the elderly. Especially powerless among these are the poor elderly. Elderly people suffer from lack of economic security more than other populations do. Elderly people suffer from physical and emotional stress, which stems from physical deterioration and from the loss of a marriage partner and of friends of the same age. Elderly people generally lack political influence. Western society has a negative attitude to old age and aging, and in this way increases the powerlessness of the elderly, as well as the social and psychological pressures upon them. The social services for elderly people encourage dependence and helplessness. They do not enable clients' involvement, and that is why the alienation of the elderly from the inappropriate services given to them is increasing (Cox, 1988).

The needs of the elderly are universal and are connected with their age and not with special problems. That is why their powerlessness must be understood as stemming from a social policy of deprivation and from discriminatory social values. Hence their conspicuous need for an empowering environment. Since they are very dependent on public services, encouragement of empowerment among the elderly depends on the creation of a service system based on empowering principles (Gallant et al., 1985).

*People with Disabilities*

I refer here to the empowerment of people with severe physical or mental disabilities, including people who are released from mental health institutions into life in the community. In addition to empowerment, these groups need advocacy (Rose & Black, 1985; Wolff, 1987). Advocacy/empowerment is an approach to empowerment which sees representation of the powerless as an essential preliminary stage in the empowerment of the most vulnerable people. This approach emphasizes the important role of the change agent who, among other things, serves as an advocate of the people who need empowerment. In contrast to the strong emphasis on self-help and the diminished role of professional assistance so common in empowerment practice, the advocacy/empowerment approach emphasizes the need for an external agent. The reason for this is simple. Very weak people will not succeed in embarking on an empowerment process without help in creating the minimal conditions for managing the environment. The goal of advocacy, then, is the creation of environmental conditions that will enable even the weakest people access to empowerment processes.

The environment relates to the mentally and physically disabled with hostility and rejection. These people need empowerment as part of a survival plan: they have to learn how to survive by their own strength and how to conduct independent lives. They need community empowerment because life isolation from others endangers their existence. For them, the residential area in which they have to learn to live is an object of social change, rather than a community to become integrated in, and the advocacy process is oriented primarily towards achieving this goal. To enable vulnerable people a basic existence and their rightful access to the various services, they need advocates who will pave a path for them to walk on so as to begin processes that will gain them some control over their lives (Rose & Black, 1985).

*Community Empowerment as Political Concept*

Some writers argue that community empowerment is a political concept, mainly because it does not content itself with local change and individual achievements, and openly aspires to social transformation. Empowerment means liberation of people from the oppression and deprivation they are subject to, and is oriented to populations which do not obtain social justice. Hence, someone who sees community empowerment as only a means of delivering public community services is manipulating the concept of community in order to exclude the local community and to prevent its members from developing a social consciousness (Russel-Erlich & Rivera, 1986; Boyte et al., 1986; Friedmann, 1987).

People's discovery that they have the right and the ability to control their destiny, their lives and their environment is the basis for political change. In spite of this, many people choose to ignore the political meaning implicit in the concept of empowerment. On the other hand, there are people who relate literally to the power component of empowerment, and interpret it as partisan intervention (Messinger, 1982). Politicians frequently make use of the word empowerment, and have made it a common political slogan, and hence a cliché. This state of affairs has only an indirect connection to the subject of the present chapter—it is a further proof of the reception and broad acceptance of the concept, but does not suffice to clarify its political meaning.

Political community empowerment opposes the conservative approach, which is also heavily represented in the empowerment literature. The conservative-liberal writing is not less *political* than the radical writing, but the consensus ideology has the ability and the talent to put on the form of a neutral, apolitical and rational paradigm, while writers on the left wing of the political spectrum appear more political in their outlook (Goodwin, 1980).

In determining that people come to politics as individuals and equals, conservative liberalism denies the roots that people



have in communities; it denies the creation of communities around class, race or ethnic origin, and ignores the influence of economic inequality on participation in politics. In the name of protection of individualism, the liberal viewpoint isolates people, and at the same time turns them into a homogeneous mass. A community whose members share interests only is a reduction of the ideas of the human community into an instrumental, arbitrary and unstable alliance (Ackelsberg, 1988).

Much evidence exists that people in the lower classes and in minority groups are not isolated in terms of community. Women, as noted, are especially known as *community builders* (Reinharz, 1984), and hence, creating a community is probably not the difficult part of their empowerment. The political problem encountered by the poor and vulnerable is their inability to connect their problems, desires and outlooks and those of their peers with the political establishment which is detached from them yet controls their lives. Politics is not a narrow framework of activities in which only a few people are involved with the aim of influencing structures of governmental power. Politics is a range of activities which people are involved in out of a concern for everyday problems of caring for the life of the home, the community and work. The basis for political activity and the source of community empowerment is, therefore, the need for social relations and for human contact, which is as universal as the need for profits and for representation of interests (Ackelsberg, 1988).

The political approach to community empowerment is part of the critique of conservative liberalism and its abandoning of the welfare state. The background for this is the hard social conditions in the United States, not only among the poor, but also among the lower middle class (Ehrenreich, 1992; Philips, 1993). Added to this is the perpetual lack of social security of elderly people, women, and ethnic minorities these past two decades (Edelman, 1997). The radicals accuse the conservatives of creating insoluble social problems as a consequence of a Darwinist social policy that supports only

slight reforms and ameliorative steps. The conservatives' use of an identical concept – empowerment – creates a new arena where an argument can take place between the various approaches. Moreover, the use of the same concept serves other interests of both sides as well. For example, each side can go on camouflaging its real intentions for tactical purposes. The liberals are interested in appearing more innovative and the radicals are interested in sounding more reasonable than they actually are. The creation of a social consensus is, on the face of it, an interest of conservative liberalism. Hence, the liberal approach prefers to pour its own contents into new concepts rather than to come out against them. This may be seen as a linguistic imperialism. The most important common interest is that the entire range of participants in the political discourse has a real need to reach new audiences by means of new messages—and empowerment is one of these messages.

#### *Organizational Empowerment—The Organization as a Means of Community Empowerment*

Participation in organizations and groups in the community is part of the definition of the empowerment of the individual and of his community as well. This combination leads to the question of how much empowerment the individuals bring to the organization and how much empowerment they receive from the organization. In other words, are organizations empowering because powerful people have joined them, or is empowerment what the people gain by means of their participation in the organization? (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Maton & Rappaport, 1984). Since empowerment can be realized only in connection with others, in groups, organizations and communities of people who feel and act together, the small local organization that is managed democratically is a dual vehicle of empowerment, both for social change and for individual empowerment (Crowfoot et al., 1983).

On the theoretical level, I think that organizational empowerment as a separate category of empowerment leads to a dead end, because the concept is defined by identical means to those of community empowerment (Zimmerman, n.d.). Beyond the tautology this produces, concern with organizational empowerment also entails an ethical flaw. Just as concentration of individual empowerment alone ignores the context of the individual as part of a collective with a history of powerlessness, so too emphasis on the organization as the goal of empowerment subordinates the goals of social change to organizational reforms, a knowledge-packed subject in itself, which in any case makes use of the concept of empowerment for its own purposes (Crowfoot et. al., 1983).

These organizations, then, are means of empowering individuals and communities, and not goals of empowerment in themselves. The creation of community organizations and their extension to as many as possible of the life domains that are important to the community are an indication of community empowerment (Couto, 1989). The sophistication of the community organization and the degree of cohesion of its members are expressions of community empowerment. A number of studies indicate that organizations that were created in a community by the community members (as distinct from organizations for the sake of the community created by outsider volunteers) have been responsible for a number of improvements: for physical improvements in the neighborhood; for more stability in the neighborhood; for the creation of a sense of community; for coping with social problems by setting up new services for the growth and development of the people who are members of the organizations (Florin, 1989).

Since empowerment is a process which can be set in motion only by the people concerned themselves, community organizations can provide the climate, the relations, the resources and the administrative means that enable people to achieve more control of their lives; in other words, community

organizations create empowering environments. While the environment that promotes individual empowerment is more intimate, involving interpersonal relations in a group framework, in an environment that promotes community empowerment the organizational aspect is conspicuous in two dimensions: 1. The organization itself: the climate, the relations, the resources and the procedures of the organization and their influence on members of the organization. 2. The community: the climate, the relations, the resources and the procedures that are established between the organization and its environment, which includes the community, other organizations in the community and outside it, and other factors that the organization decides to exert its influence on in order to achieve its goals (Simon, 1990). If so, it is not only the organization's success that signifies the community empowerment process; the very existence of community organizations is an indication of the process. In this context it is important to remember the warning against the use of *success* criteria as signs of empowerment, for success can be defined in more than one way, and an attempt to define it *objectively* and *professionally* may have disempowering effects (Rappaport, 1984).

Community empowerment is realized through organizations, and may be defined and identified by them. Community organizations exist at all levels of organization, starting from support and task groups through to volunteer organizations and social protest movements. The level and the sophistication of the organizations certainly have an important role in empowerment, but the very existence of community organizations, their number and their deployment over the various life domains point to the realization of community empowerment.

## Some Issues of Community Empowerment

### *Resistance*

Activity, organization, and creation of a community originate in resistance. People protest against injustice, deprivation, lack of resources and opportunities. Resistance is a catalyst for activism and empowerment (Kieffer, 1984; Feldman & Stall, 1994). Community empowerment develops in conditions of injustice by protest against the harsh conditions, the indifference and the lack of cooperation on the part of the bureaucratic institutions that are responsible for providing services to the neighborhood. When the injustice is overt and glaring it can be paralyzing (Gaventa, 1980). It is important to recall the vulnerability and the fragility of powerless people, beside the very same people's powers and the abilities to withstand failure and conditions of pressure (Erikson, 1994).

Some writers combine the establishment's hostility and indifference into a single thesis of disempowerment. In my view, in order to understand resistance that develops into empowerment, it is particularly important to differentiate between the two (Schuman, 1987). Indifference and lack of interest in what happens in the community on the part of the establishment make possible a certain level of organization and empowering activity within the community, while under a hostile regime the attempt to develop the empowerment process is difficult and even dangerous, for it arouses the regime to brutal activity against the community and its residents (Sanchez et al., 1988).

In a particular combination of circumstances and factors an empowerment process that will strengthen the community for further action may develop despite establishment hostility. But there are places and circumstances in which the hostility of the public mechanism, or of the regime itself, manages to effect disempowerment. The practice of empowerment, perhaps the

art of it, is the search for the *right* combination, which arouses resistance without defeating the people's spirit.

### *Conflict*

Part of the community experience is the division between the people who feel they are members of the community and the people who do not belong to it. Hence, the community may be a very stormy framework. Conflict is part of the reality in which the very idea of community is formed, and it is very possible that dealing with disputes and success in resolving them is an essential experience for the creation of people's social consciousness (Ackelsberg, 1988; Davis, 1991).

The literature is not rich in examples of actual implementation, but projects in which empowerment practice has been implemented (Rose & Black, 1985; Couto, 1989; Schuman, 1987; Heskin, 1991) show to what extent conflict is inevitable. Implementation of empowerment principles (in the organization, in the community and anywhere else), exposes the disempowering practices of existing services, and creates a confrontation with the accepted procedures and methods of these services. The ability to survive in a situation of inevitable conflict depends on the allocation of resources to train activists and practitioners for life in conditions of conflict and uncertainty (Delgado, 1986).

The indirect but systematic violence that the establishment exerts against weak people is a principal pretext for the rise of conflicts in the first stages of the empowerment process. Establishment violence manifests itself in the various ways in which people are barred from access to resources, knowledge and information that are essential for their existence and for their ability to control their lives. Like, for example, the delaying of material resources by means of budgetary policy, or control over information and data services in order to leave people in ignorance with regard to their rights and to possible options of change in their situation (Crawfoot et al., 1983; Solomon, 1976).

The literature on empowerment sometimes emphasizes harmony and social integration, but since conflict is an inseparable part of political life in a democracy it should not be feared; it certainly is inevitable in conditions of social injustice, and cannot be skipped over into realms of tranquillity which originate in quiescence and in lack of social consciousness.

### *Community Awareness*

Couto (1989) defines community awareness as the important part of the empowerment process, as a process of the community's rediscovery of its powerlessness. This is a recognition by people who have just achieved a degree of control over their lives and their future that there are limitations to their new ability. Empowerment is not merely action, says Couto; it is also reflection. Especially important is the community's understanding of the constraints on improving their situation in domains where the sources of the problems lie outside the community—the social, political and economical limits to their empowerment. Awareness is also the community's evaluation of its strengths and advantages and of how to exploit these usefully. For example, recognition of the ecological values of the physical environment, or understanding the economic worth of the land on which it is built.

The question of community awareness is interesting because of the surprising use of the terms *awareness* and *consciousness* in the community context. After all, these are in a very basic sense cognitive processes experienced by the individual. Yet here, in the context of community empowerment, we find writers presenting the ability to arrive at a collective consciousness without preparing a basis in theory or by research for understanding such a phenomenon. The main questions requiring clarification are: How does collective consciousness manifest itself? Is it synergetic? (Katz, 1984). Can it be subjected to empirical investigation? If so, with what

means? Who are the people in the community who represent this consciousness—activists? professionals? members of the community? a combination of all these? Is it possible to point to distinct manifestations that are characteristic of community-collective awareness?

### *Organizing and Creating a Community*

The basis of community empowerment is people organizing themselves around a common critical characteristic. Since the meaning of empowerment is, among other things, the overcoming of difficult experiences of isolation and alienation, it can be realized only in a stable and ongoing connection with others.

Organizing turns a collective into a community, while collectives are comprised of people who have a common characteristic of age, race, gender, occupation, income and the like. Where there is no organization, this common characteristic is a burden and a limitation that narrows the individuals' possibilities and their perception of reality. Community organizing is a step towards appropriation of the physical space the people live in. A residential neighborhood can become a community through the organized effort of the people living in it to appropriate their home place—an effort which brings about social change in this place and a personal change in the activists themselves (Feldman & Stall, 1994).

### *Outcome and Product*

Another question that remains open for discussion is whether community empowerment produces an outcome, and if so, what this outcome is. For the empowerment process, as already mentioned, is a creative process which transforms a powerless community into one that is capable of action for its interests and its environment. There is a synergy in the creation of a community, an abundance that stems from co-operation (Katz 1984). People who have a common goal, or

who have shared a common experience, become a community with new and expanded abilities, the influences of which spread beyond the place where they began. Empowerment is a dynamic process, and therefore has no final or absolute outcome. Just as there exists no final state of synthesis, so too there is no final state of empowerment. Empowerment is a continuing process which strengthens the capacity to act successfully in changing circumstances. Some writers distinguish between the empowerment process, which involves a feeling of control and of ability to act successfully, and its outcome, which is the real ability to act effectively (Staples 1990).

In empowerment there is a close connection between the process and the outcome, for both the feeling of ability and real ability are parts of a single, positive and self-reinforcing whole. Yet it is possible to gauge the success of empowerment at a given point in time from a number of what may be called *process outcomes*, such as the existence of community activity, the quality of its decision-making, the degree of its purposiveness, the standard of organization of community activity, and the usefulness of the latter to the community's interests (see also the *DARE* dimensions [Rubin and Rubin 1992], each of which may be seen as a community outcome). One could claim that the final product of empowerment is power, but power is not a legitimate goal, and hence must not be allowed to be more than a means for the attainment of moral goals. It is always essential to ask: Power for what?—as well as the Foucaultian question: What are the positive and negative by-products of the power that has been attained, and how do they find expression in the community, the society, and the environment?

The process through which a residential area, or a collective possessing a common critical characteristic, becomes transformed into a community is a complex one. Community empowerment is dependent on context, environment, behaviors and circumstances—some overt, and some covert. The present study aims to identify at least some of these:

personal motivations and qualities of the participants in the process, professional practices, and the organizational means which give expression to the aspirations and efforts of all the participants. The particular contents of the process may vary, but they have to include activity which on the one hand contributes to the growth and learning of individuals and groups, and on the other hand has a beneficial influence on the environment (Hegar & Hunzeker, 1988).

The connection between individuals and their environment is important not only for mutual improvement and development, as implied by what has been said so far, but also for human existence itself, for man's survival in the world (Bateson, 1979). The need to survive demands adaptation to changes in the environment, while the need for a degree of control of one's life motivates the will to influence the direction of these changes and not just to adapt to them. Community empowerment is an organized effort by people who, from a starting-point poor in resources and social advantages, attempt to influence the human environment, to achieve more control of their situation in order to improve their lives.

### Empowerment as a Professional Practice

The concept of empowerment was born in the context of the professional discourse on social problems. To a large extent, it expresses the disappointment of professionals with the existing social solutions which, not only do not provide an effective response to distress, but also in themselves constitute an obstacle in the lives of weak populations (Swift, 1984).

Although empowerment may also be realized without the intervention of practitioners, the theoretical discussion of empowerment is by its nature professional and academic. From this discussion arises the need for the development of professional tools that will encourage the spontaneous empowerment process. Not for those exceptional individuals who by virtue of their talents or their good fortune will manage to fulfill their potential for empowerment without

any help, but for the many people who need external support in order to liberate themselves from the powerlessness they are subject to. A systematic understanding of the process and a translation of it into policy and principles of action will advance the realization of empowerment, from an esoteric phenomenon occurring in the lives of a few, to a social and political solution.

In this section we will deal with values and beliefs held by the professional who uses empowering methods; with principles that guide empowerment practice and influence professional goals and the design of social programs; with the roles of the professional who encourages empowerment; with a selection of recommended methods of intervention, and, finally, with empowerment as a need of the practitioners themselves.

#### *Values Guiding Empowerment Practice*

Empowerment is based on the assumption that the environment has to be adapted to people, and not the other way around as is commonly perceived. In contrast to radical and Marxist approaches which focus on social change, this is an approach that focuses on the individual. Empowerment is indeed an idealistic approach, but this is a practical and rational idealism which can be implemented. Empowerment represents an alternative ideology of intervention that differs from traditional approaches in that it provides a different experience to the person who needs help, and to the professional as well: without dependence on the expertise of the professional and without any attempt to create such dependence (Payne, 1991).

Empowerment wants to create a practical and meta-practical whole which includes language, ideology, and action principles. It may be seen not as the intervention itself, but as a meta-practice—thought about intervention (Russel-Erlich & Rivera, 1986). Meta-practical thinking is essential in all the human service professions, because the professional's

thinking about the way he performs his role is one of the principal expressions of his professionalism.

The empowerment approach recognizes the paradoxical nature of social problems. Social problems do not belong to the kind of logical problems that have one correct solution; social problems may have a number of solutions which are all logical. Social problems are dialectical in character—they pull in different and contradictory directions. The main paradox that empowerment practice has to deal with is that the person most lacking in aptitudes, most lacking in ability to function, the person in the greatest distress, is the one who needs more, not less, control in his life (Rappaport, 1981).

Is empowerment a special method of treatment for defined – oppressed and deprived – groups, or is it a professional practice suitable for the entire human population? On the face of it, the answer to this question looks simple: just as empowerment is a potential innate in every person, so too empowering practice is suitable to general application. However, the equitable deployment of empowerment has a moral meaning. Indeed, the vision should be implementation of empowering social policy on the macro level—in the society at large. Until this is realized, however, the *equitable* distribution of empowerment is liable to create inequality, because those people who will know how to exploit professional resources better will enjoy more empowerment, and they, in most cases, will not be the powerless. Liberal thought demands social equality of opportunities, in the belief that all the actors in the social game begin competing for all the social resources from an equal starting-point, and that those who win probably deserve it more than others. Empowerment wants to grapple with difficult and complex social problems that have arisen as a consequence of this way of thinking. Empowerment is based on the recognition that a potential exists in every person, but that it is the social context and circumstances that determine who realizes this potential and who finds it difficult or almost impossible to realize it. This being the social reality, empowering professional practice



needs to aspire to become a comprehensive social policy, while focusing principally on programs for those who live in the most difficult social circumstances.

An empowerment approach is in many senses a translation of Paulo Freire's educational theory into the social domain (Handler, 1990; Parsons et al., 1994; Rose & Black, 1985). According to Freire (1985), the need for change is an inseparable part of social life. The conditions also oppress the ability to change, i.e., they distort the social development of the oppressed people. Hence, the professional has to believe in people's ability to learn and to change and, at the same time, to recognize that oppressed people are liable to possess a distorted consciousness due to their life circumstances. The consciousness of a person submerged in an oppressive reality may become distorted to the point of actual reconciliation with the oppression itself.

Dialogue is the core of the empowering change process. It is part of the ideology, and also of the principles of action and the methods of intervention. Dialogue is the true speech, with mutual trust, that takes place between the practitioner and the people she is helping. In the course of the dialogue, both the practitioners and their clients change. Its important components are trust and mutuality, each side relating to the other with attentiveness and equal worth. Without understanding, cooperation and trust, there can be no mutuality and no real dialogue.

The human condition is complex, fluid, and constantly changing. The individual does not live for or by himself. He is part of a context and is defined by his situation. Since the right solution for relations between weak people and the public services they depend on is not known, the creation of partial communities which will respond to selected aspects of life is the answer (Handler, 1990). In the framework of these communities, real dialogue and trust are fragile and delicate, but between practitioners and powerless people there is no substitute for them

Empowerment is based on the belief that people have skills and abilities, but need circumstances and opportunities in order to express them. Belief in empowerment claims that new abilities are best learned by means of activity in the life context itself, and not in artificial training programs controlled by professional experts. The sense of control the empowerment process develops is the converse of the sense of dependence. It fills people with energy, and it is self-nourishing. Empowerment is always a political process because it creates social change. Its political relevance stems from its tendency to spread to further aspects of life.

Empowerment is ecological and contextual in character. In the empowerment approach, the environment is always part of the picture. An ecological outlook on human behavior claims that behavior is a function of the interaction between the organism and the environment. Hence, problematic functioning may in certain cases indicate problems in the personality, but when it exists in the lives of entire populations, it is a consequence of a defective social structure and of lack of resources (Rappaport, 1987).

### *Principles Guiding Empowerment Practice*

The principles of action that stem from the values of empowerment are not rules which determine specifically what the professional should do, but guidelines for selecting suitable practices.

1. Empowerment has to be a permanent component in any problem-solving process, irrespective of the theoretical approach that shapes this process. As a meta-practice, it can and must be integrated into every kind of professional thinking, irrespective of the sort of program or the methods exercised. (Rose & Black, 1985).
2. Giving help. Those who receive help need to be able to give help as well. Hence, as already noted, self-help groups are considered as distinctive promoters of empowerment. Active participation in programs is an

empowering principle, and to achieve this it is worth causing a deliberate under-manning of social frameworks (Rappaport, 1985). This means the implementation of programs without sufficient salaried manning of various functions, a situation that mobilizes participants in the program to perform these functions. Frameworks which operate in this way foster empowerment efficiently, because it is essential for the people to help not only as consumers but as people who care for the organization's operation. They enter naturally into a position of worth, and concurrently receive professional and social support with their problems while they perform their valuable role as helpers.

Manning of important functions in a program by those using it emphasizes a corollary principle, one that is accepted in community work and essential to the empowerment process: the professional must see his role as temporary. As he encourages empowerment, he also works towards a diminution of his professional presence. He trains leaders local functionaries to take their positions as soon as possible, so that they can take responsibility and be less in need of outside help.

3. Lack of power cannot be compensated for by means which increase lack of power. Economic dependence, which is one of the forms of powerlessness, cannot be improved by means of a program that humiliates and oppresses those in need of it. Hence, an empowering professional ascribes the same importance to the means of activating social programs as to their objectives (at the same time, it is necessary to be cautious and to avoid programs where the means are strongly emphasized but the goals are unimportant).
4. Think big and act small. An important principle in empowerment is to analyze phenomena on the macro level, but to intervene with attention to the micro level. Empowerment demands simultaneous concern for the environment, the collective, its organization and the

individuals who organize. This is the distinctiveness of the integration of the personal change as part of the organizing for social justice (Friedmann, 1992).

5. The collective is a central principle of the empowerment process. Even when the objective is individual the means are collective. Collectivity provides a true rationale for empowerment (Staples, 1990); if the empowerment process were solely individual, it would have no social significance. Collectivity is the source of the synergy in the process, because it grows in power and extends the boundaries of its influence.
6. Empowerment is a multi-leveled concept. It integrates individuals, groups, organizations, communities and states, as well as contexts—the environmental, cultural, and historical contexts. The influence that each of the levels of empowerment radiates upon all the other levels is of much importance. The principle of levels leads to the conclusion that we should aspire to a policy of empowerment, and to the conjecture that professionals need empowerment in order to be able to empower people who need their help (Rappaport, 1987).

*Principles Guiding the Relationship Between Practitioners and the People Who Need Their Help*

Empowerment requires a re-examination of the whole of social public policy, and demands of the practitioner a re-examination of the professional relationship.

1. Different people require different solutions for the same problems. In order to arrive at a variety of solutions we must emphasize the strengths of those in need of help, and to use a mixture of resources: of the practitioners, and of those who come for help (Solomon, 1985).
2. Cooperation between the helpers and the helped is essential to the empowerment process. The helped bring a distinctive knowledge about their lives and their own point of view about their problems, and the helpers bring specialized knowledge that stems from formal training

and work experience with people suffering from the same problems. In this connection the helped are not seen as responsible for the problems, but as responsible for the solutions. This cooperation also changes the research, not only the practice. The researcher has to make the people he studies participants in his research, and to reward them according to the circumstances: if they contribute to the research they should gain from it (Tyler et al., 1983; Sohng, 1998).

3. Respect for people is the basis for professional relationships. Respect is expressed in treating the request for help not as a sign of weakness or dependence, but as an expression of a need to receive professional service. Respect expresses itself in accepting people's interpretation of reality. Respect for a person and recognition of his strengths confirm his very existence and give it a validity. Powerless people tend to cast doubt on the existence of reality as they perceive it. The low self-image of vulnerable people, which involves doubt and self-denial, serves the existing order. People are willing to accept the problems they suffer from as justified, thus reinforcing the negative opinions prevalent about them (Mullender & Ward, 1985; Rose & Black, 1991).
4. Empowerment has a language of its own that influences immediate communication and the meta-communication level. It prefers clarity and simplicity of expression and is very wary of using professional jargon. For example, practitioners who use and think in terms of concepts such as *the placebo effect* and *spontaneous remission* contradict messages of empowerment, because they express a lack of faith in people's ability to help themselves outside the professional context (Rappaport, 1985, 1987).

#### *Principles Guiding the Design of Social Programs*

The quality of social programs is critical in determining people's destiny. In the connection between people in need

of help and the services that provide help, an oppressive dependence may develop, or an opportunity may grow to develop independent social skills. The welfare service system has to change from an obstacle route to a system of opportunities (Solomon, 1985).

All that has been said so far does not imply dilettantism. In order to encourage empowerment, the social service system has to be professional. Outcomes are not produced by policy statements. There has to be training of professionals in the field so that they will understand and respect community norms and work with an open approach to people. On the face of it, this demand for professionalism contradicts the messages of participation and equity that were presented earlier as part of the principles guiding the relations of the professional with those in need of his help. However, I see no contradiction here, because in practice one needs considerable professional confidence and knowledge to work in an equitable and empowering manner (Handler, 1990)

1. Social programs need a structure and a design which serve dialogue and openness to the other. A dispersed organizational structure, a free and informal climate, and professional autonomy for the professionals, are suitable for the achievement of the objectives of empowerment. A centralized structure, rigid rules and hierarchical supervision disempower participants in the program (Handler, 1990)
2. Small-scale local projects are preferable to a large central solution. Social projects have to be small enough to provide participant with socially valuable roles, and large enough to assure themselves of resources from various sources. Some writers believe that in any case a program with an empowerment ideology will succeed better in obtaining resources and developing them than a program dominated by professionals and professional treatment methods, irrespective of its size (Rappaport, 1987).

3. Empowerment needs to express itself on three levels of a social program: on the personal level, between the professional and the person who needs his help, empowerment expresses itself in the increase of the person's resources so that he may control his life better; on the organizational level, people in need of the program have to become an important interest and influence group in the program. On the policy level, greater control of the program participants in the program's resources has to be facilitated, as well as an improvement in their access to alternative services (Handler, 1990).
4. For a social program to be empowering, it should preferably be open to outcomes. It should be built on a principle of an open-ended process, rather than on planning that aspires to one particular outcome, as is generally the case (Adams, 1990).

### *The Professional's Roles*

Empowerment demands that professionals have a different set of expectations than what is customary: instead of relying on their professional training and on their socialization into a structured role, they must dare to open up to situations as involved human beings who have taken it upon themselves to fill a role and to survive in it (Rose & Black, 1985). Empowerment also sets up criteria for criticism of professional models. A professional approach which is contradictory to empowerment requires a change of approach or has to be totally rejected, and this is not simple at all. For example, some writers note the contradiction between the empowerment approach and the psychodynamic medical model which focuses on the person as the source of the problems, blames the victim for them, and mostly ignores the direct and indirect influence that social circumstances have on these problems (Solomon, 1985).

The crisis theory is attacked in a similar way. This theory relates to social problems as transient and extraordinary

phenomena, focuses on the symptoms of the crisis and on changing the victims of the crisis, and ignores the structural conditions that caused it, as well as the need to change people and institutions that create or sustain the crisis. The crisis theory is a soporific for policy makers: they get used to thinking in crisis terms and expect the crisis situation to pass, and thus encourage the seeing of problems as extraordinary and unrelated to one another. The crisis theory has a bad influence on practitioners, because it guides them to deal with immediate problems only, and to neglect work on processes of social change (Crowfoot et al, 1983).

The mainstream of social work earns similar criticism for its conservative social approach, for basing itself on liberal principles, and for its recoiling from politics. The institutional submissiveness of the social services and their agreement to serve as social shock absorbers impede their ability to encourage empowerment of people who receive services and prevent professionals employed in them from developing a critical consciousness and empowering themselves (Russell-Erlich & Rivera, 1986).

In contrast, the role of the professional engaged in empowerment is to help people who live with a continuous and systematic stigma to perceive themselves as capable of exerting influence on their world and on other people. In contrast to conventional professional approaches, in the empowerment approach the emphasis on the individual does not mean looking for the problem in the individual himself, but moving away from the traditional professional models and emphasizing that the individual is a motivating force who creates change and solves problems.

Empowerment is a professional role by means of which the professional involves the (individual or collective) client in a series of activities aimed at reducing the powerlessness that has been created as a consequence of a negative evaluation towards their belonging to a stigmatized group. This series of activities involves identifying the power blocks that contribute to the problem, and specific strategies intended to reduce the

influence of direct and indirect power obstacles (Solomon, 1976).

In the literature on empowerment a number of professional roles are emphasized:

**Resource consultant.** More than anything, poor people need provision of resources, such as housing, money, health care, homemaker services. The resource consultant is a role which connects people with resources in a way which enhances their self-esteem as well as their problem-solving capacities. The consultant makes his knowledge about resource systems, and his expertise in using them, available to the client. He has to create an intensive partnership with the people, involving them in each step of the process, from the identifying stage through to the locating and activating of resources (Solomon, 1976).

**Sensitizer.** People require self-knowledge in order to be able to act upon their problems. The role of sensitizer is performed in a variety of methods of intervention, with the objective of providing people with the maximal opportunities of understanding themselves and their environment (Solomon, 1976).

**Teacher/trainer.** Many people have difficulties learning because of experiences of failure and boredom in formal educational settings during their childhood. The professional's role is to find suitable ways of helping people to acquire information, knowledge and skills. Teaching is a major professional role of empowering professionals (Rose & Black, 1985). Mutuality is emphasized in the empowering teaching process: the professional learns from the people themselves what their preferred social solutions are and what they need to know. Likewise, from settings in which empowerment is realized, the professional also learns how to plan and activate empowerment enhancing programs.

**Service planner.** Since the structure of the welfare services contributes to the sense of powerlessness and worthlessness of the people who receive the services, it is important to re-plan this system so that it may operate on different organizational

principles through which the services will be able to provide new opportunities to people instead of disempowering them.

**Coordinator and networker.** It is the professional's role to shape the environment by coordinating and networking the various services that are connected with the people in whose lives she intervenes. The emphasis in this role is on re-planning of services by way of creating mutual connections among them and an atmosphere of community consensus while avoiding conflict (Biegel, 1984; Wolff, 1987).

**Advocate.** The advocate represents her clients herself, knowing that in the particular situation which requires advocacy, this is the only possible way to stand up for the client's rights. The advocacy aims at a change of environmental conditions that have a bad influence on the immediate situation of people in need of the service. The use of the dual strategy of advocacy/empowerment obliges the professional to watch out for a dual stumbling-block: she must not neglect her responsibility as a leader, and she must not incline in the opposite direction, of excessive directing and taking control of people. The role of advocate complements all the other professional roles, because while encouragement of empowerment is a role performed towards the clients, advocacy is the role towards the environment, and in many cases it precedes empowerment, especially when it is the environmental conditions that create the problems and contribute to their becoming more severe. Advocacy is a role that involves certain professional risks which need to be prepared for well (Rose & Black, 1985, Parsons et al., 1994; Beresford & Croft, 1993). The advocate is often in conflict with the establishment, with other services, and even with colleagues. He is liable to be very isolated; he may not infrequently be considered a crank fighting with windmills, and may even get fired. To contend with all these, organizations dealing with advocacy have been founded in recent years, and people working in them act as a team and have the protection of their organization.



### *Methods of Intervention*

The literature on empowerment is full of recommendations to professionals about methods of intervention that encourage empowerment. The methods of intervention that appear below are a selection from the literature which illustrates how it is possible to implement empowerment in professional practice.

The problem in presenting the various methods of intervention was the great lack of uniformity in their levels and in the content that they represent. I have chosen to classify them in two groups:

1. Strategies, which are methods of intervention that also contain principles, a rationale, and a special role.
2. Tactics, which are more specific ways of action focused on achieving a defined objective and/or a particular outcome which the professional is interested in as part of a strategy she has developed to achieve her goals.

### *Strategies*

**Participation** is a basic method of intervention for empowerment, which is much emphasized in the literature as encouraging empowerment (Wandersman & Florin, 1988; Beresford & Croft, 1993; Rubin & Rubin, 1992). Participation reinforces a sense of personal and political ability, creates expectations for a successful solution of problems, and encourages civic commitment. People's participation in group and organizational frameworks promotes community empowerment as well as individual empowerment. This method of intervention has aged and become rigid, and needs to be used not in its old form but as a basis for improvements (Arenstein, 1969; Hanna & Robinson, 1994; Condeluci, 1995).

**Organization.** Organization is the collective voice of those whose voice would otherwise not be heard. By organizing,

people learn alternatives to a life of quiet despair. They learn that what looks like a private grievance is part of a broad pattern which influences many people. They translate their general dissatisfaction with life into a set of practical objectives of changing the physical and social environment. Organizing teaches people to administer, to plan, to write, to speak, to conduct negotiations and to activate projects and large budgets (Boyte et al., 1986).

**Integration of Levels of Intervention.** Empowerment practice integrates clinical, group and community intervention methods into a single intervention system, in order to respond to people's diverse needs and to encourage empowerment (Cox & Parsons, 1994; Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Lee, 1994). Empowerment is opposed to the traditional medical model, which tends to sever the interactional connection between the concrete reality (the environment and its influence) and the subjective reality (self-perception and emotional life), and to emphasize only one side in every field of specialization. An empowerment strategy integrates these two, and focuses on an integration that emphasizes the interpretative, dialectical character, which stems from the mutual connection between social reality and human activity. The professional working with an empowerment approach needs to recognize the existence of a vicious circle in the form of a downward spiral: oppressive conditions create alienation, which leads to powerlessness and lack of self-esteem, which reinforce the oppressive conditions.

**Praxis—integration of learning and action.** A strategy of empowerment is not interested in a separation between theory and practice. The desirable combination, for both the professionals and their clients, is constant practice and thought about this practice. Thought about practice develops critical consciousness among the community and among the professionals. In the empowerment process the professional too undergoes a change, as a person and as a worker. An integration is created between the professional person's fate and the fate of the people in whose life she intervenes.



*Tactics*

**Enabling.** People have resources but are not always aware of possibilities of implementing and using them to achieve what they require. Enabling involves actions carried out by practitioners in order to guide people to information or connections with the help of which they will be able to activate their resources more effectively.

**Linking.** Professional activity which stems from the need to strengthen people by creating connections among them. Linking aims at providing people with more power in confrontations with external systems. The professional connects among people and creates groups and networks that can strengthen individuals and families by providing them with collective support.

**Catalyzing.** Although people have resources of their own, they need additional resources in order to be able to activate their own resources fully. The professional seeks complementary resources to accelerate processes and to reinforce the activity.

**Priming.** The assumption behind this professional activity is that part of the problem of powerlessness is caused, or reinforced, by people's unsatisfactory encounters with services that are important to their existence. These systems respond more positively when the conditions are not threatening to them. For example, if an action is not perceived as an infringement of policy, or as submission to external pressure, there is a better chance that the system will perform it. The professional who deals with priming prepares the systems and the clients for a positive connection between them even before problems requiring solutions arise (Solomon, 1985).

**Providing information and knowledge.** Professionals provide people with information in areas that they have identified together as important: for example, the socio-economic conditions of the country, past endeavors in community development, and the platforms of political parties. The information is transmitted in various ways, in

written summaries, in talks and informal meetings (Couto, 1989; Serrano-Garcia, 1984). The difficulty that people without a formal education have in understanding professional knowledge and in processing information obliges professionals to be better teachers—to improve the ways of imparting knowledge and information. The principle is that there is no subject that cannot be learned or spoken about. There must be no withholding of information or knowledge from people because of their *difficulties of understanding*. Each difficulty of comprehension that people have is the professional's responsibility.

**Developing Skills.** Planning, organizational, and evaluative skills are generally developed in a group framework. The professional works in the following ways: she facilitates the participation of as many people as possible in the groups, identifies the community's resources, guides the people on how to pool these resources, makes sure activities are planned in advance, outlines a clear process of decision making that emphasizes problem definition, assessment and choice of alternatives, allocation of tasks and monitoring of their execution; she refuses to perform tasks that the people themselves have refused to perform, promotes group norms that reward the completion of tasks, devotes structured time at each meeting and after each activity to evaluation, and promotes a non-hierarchical organizational structure in which decisions are made in a consensus and tasks are divided as equally as possible (Serrano-Garcia, 1984).

**Modeling.** The practitioner serves as a model of collaborative behavior and dialogue. In this method, important interpersonal skills are demonstrated by showing, not by telling, and these are thus reinforced in the course of action. Modeling involves performing various tasks such as cooking, cleaning, preparing collection tins for donations, hauling, and the like. Within the organizational framework the professional does everything that the people do, and while doing so reinforces values important to empowerment. For example, women conduct most of the meetings, the participants have a more active

role than the professionals, and decisions are presented as decisions of the entire team.

**Precise formulation of values.** The practitioners give verbal expression to values that are important to the group and the community, such as: the residents' ability to perform tasks by themselves; the people's abilities to identify their needs and problems; cultural diversity and individual differences; that leadership potential exists in every man and woman; the importance of effective organization; the need to express, together with others, the sense of pride and of belonging to the community; the importance of collective responsibility.

**The use of doubt.** In the professional's vocabulary, why is an important word. He has to teach the people to doubt and to investigate each situation. Why can this not be done? Why must this be done in the regular way and not otherwise? Why is it always done this way? Why doesn't everyone think this way? The questions are more important than the answers, because the goal is to encourage a critical approach to the social situation (Serrano-Garcia, 1984).

**Informality in the professional intervention.** An informal structure of activity is important, because courses or workshops reinforce the specialists, emphasize the learners' lack of skill, and create a distance between the professional and the other people, and this may lead to resistance to the acquisition of skills. Some writers prefer intervention methods which focus on observation, team thinking, trial and error, feedback and critical analysis (Serrano-Garcia, 1984).

**Developing social technologies.** Designing professional tools as a set of procedures which can be duplicated, with the aim of reinforcing abilities and skills in the social domain. A social technology has to be simple, inexpensive, effective, decentralized, flexible, and adapted to local values, beliefs and customs. The *technologies* are particularly important in order to diminish – by means of an accessible set of procedures and briefings – the hegemony of experts in the social domain over certain techniques, and to reduce dependence on these experts and their opinions (Fawcett et al., 1984).

**Technical assistance.** Many professionals can be engaged in empowerment enhancing technical assistance. They can: teach people how to create connections between the community and other communities with similar needs; help people understand the reasons for local problems; help with research which harnesses local knowledge to planning a better future for the locale; provide specialized help in domains important to community life, such as marketing, economics, pricing and planning of transport (Couto, 1989).

### *Empowerment of Professionals*

In the past decade, new approaches to organizational development connect the empowerment of employees at all levels of the organization with ideas of progressive management and team development (Tjosvold, 1990; Plunkett & Fournier, 1991; Peters, 1992). Empowerment is presented as an essential means for the business advancement of organizations which are in need of innovative ideas and are facing competition. Here the CEO is seen as the empowering professional, and the employees in the organization as the people in need of empowerment. The principal claim of these organizational approaches is that a humiliated and submissive worker will not initiate innovations and will not take responsibility for solving problems at his work place. An active worker who is confident of his own strengths will also act beyond the defined limits of his job, will take initiatives, invent, and contribute to the success of the firm and his own success as well. Education for empowerment means the opening up of possibilities: to take risks, to struggle for a place in the decision-making process, to acquire knowledge in a critical manner, beyond one's immediate personal experience, and to imagine versions of the future world. All these have to be imparted to the professionals themselves.

Through the empowerment process people become strong enough to take part in events, to participate in institutions which influence their lives, and to attempt to influence them.

A person's empowerment involves her ability to acquire knowledge and skills in order to influence and control her life, and to be an active partner in the lives of others for whom she cares. The need for empowerment of professionals stems from the apprehension that they will not succeed in encouraging empowerment of others from a position of submission and humiliation. The claim is that a person who does not implement empowerment in her own life will not be able to encourage this process in others.

Teachers, for example, have to be intellectuals who use knowledge and information to guide pupils to think, not technicians who transmit knowledge. Today the education system isolates teachers, limits them with regulations and instructions, and does not enable them to use their knowledge in the selection and disposition of study material. A teacher who is treated as a person who is incapable of making a mature decision cannot prepare others for maturity; if she is closely supervised and is not trusted, she will not be able to teach others what autonomy and trust are. Teachers are expected to teach how to take risks, to consider alternatives and to form alliances, while they themselves are limited to technical and mechanical aspects of their profession (Giroux, 1987). For professionals to be able to teach clients how to form alliances, set up coalitions, overcome organizational obstacles and act in a political way, they must first experience all these themselves (Pinderhughes, 1983).

Practitioners implement empowerment in their relations with clients, but are captive within a conception of equality that denies the existence of power relations (and of inequality) in their connection with their clients (Hasenfeld, 1987; Hopps et al., 1994). Besides this contradiction, the organization greatly limits their power as autonomous professionals. The responses of powerless employees are characterized by various forms of withdrawal, ineffectiveness, burnout, and leaving the service. The empowering solution proposed is a mutual support group as a means of self-empowerment. We may learn from this recommendation how essential the

group is for any kind of empowerment: professionals will not succeed in attaining to individual empowerment on their own. The mutual support group creates for the professional employees a sub-culture of their own in the organization, and weakens the influence of the disempowering processes that the organizational culture produces (Sherman & Wenocur, 1983). Beyond the peer group, in order to develop an empowerment policy and practice within the welfare services, professionals need more autonomy and more discretion, as well as a different organizational structure — one that is less hierarchical and more decentralized (Handler, 1990).

In my opinion, focus on empowerment of the professionals themselves is a marginal concern which must not become the major issue in the discussion of empowering professional practice. The question of whether empowerment of practitioners will lead to their becoming empowering practitioners has a different meaning for the individual professional and for the professional organization as a whole. On the personal level, empowerment is a value-based ideological choice, and involvement in empowerment demands a moral and a professional decision. A professional choice such as this is not dependent only, or mainly, on the professional's position and status in the organizational power relations, but on his commitment to the profession and on his professional world-view. On the organizational level, the empowerment of employees as a method of organizational development is an efficient method of advancing empowering professional practice, because it proposes empowerment as a comprehensive change, both in relation to clients and in relation to organizational personnel, and presents it as effective and profitable for the organization itself, thus facilitating the dissemination of an empowerment approach both towards the employees and among them. Even when the change process is organizational, the same rules of choice and discretion mentioned above apply to the individual employee. However, in this situation, the organizational context changes completely. The choice is no longer a moral one, because the

empowering practitioner active in an empowering organization is free from dilemmas of conscience and from conflicts of loyalty connected with the choice of empowerment as a professional path.

Empowerment has to be a mutual process. In the relations between the professional and the people in whose lives she intervenes, each side encourages and actively contributes to the empowerment of the other. At the same time, the focus of attention must be on the empowerment of the people, not of the professionals (Adams, 1990). At the conclusion of the discussion it is important to recall that powerful professionals (physicians, lawyers, and other specialists who come to mind in this context) are not famous for encouraging empowerment of their clients. Hence there is no certainty that increasing the power of powerless professionals will lead them to this. It is possible that particularly those professionals who experience or have experienced powerlessness in their private or professional lives are more capable of identification and of understanding the harm in this situation, and of sustaining more equitable relations of help and dialogue in order to change it. This, however, is in the nature of a speculation, and its realization depends on many complex circumstances.

To sum up, empowerment is a source of inspiration and innovation in the domains of practice of professionals who are interested in social change and in the personal change that it entails. It may be assumed that adoption of an empowering professional practice will not limit itself to the professional's working hours, but will influence her as a person on various levels of her views and beliefs. A theory of empowerment is a theory that is conscious that it is a world-view. The professional who adopts it does so because she agrees with a number of premises about professionalism, about subjectivity, and about the origin of social problems, and these correspond to her beliefs, values, goals and intentions.

## Summary

Individual empowerment is a process of personal development in a social framework: a transition from a feeling of powerlessness, and from a life in the shadow of this feeling, to an active life of real ability to act and to take initiatives in relation to the environment and the future. Community empowerment also includes a definition of a community as a partial, temporary and dynamic unit that originates in the human need for a sense of togetherness and identification with others. Community empowerment can be realized in geographically defined areas that constitute the common critical characteristic of their residents, or it can develop in groups with other common critical characteristics, such as origin, age, gender, or physical disability.

The discussion of individual and community empowerment has also touched upon the political meaning of empowerment. The perception of the empowerment process on all its levels as a political process is important to the present study, and is influenced by feminist thought, which accords a new meaning to social change.

The group and the community organization are the main means of activating environmental processes. These are the settings which actively connect the individual with his environment and make possible a change which includes the individual, the group, and the environment in the one process.

The *professionalism* of empowering professional practice is expressed in the professional's critical approach to himself and his practice. Empowering professionalism means placing the profession at the service of processes that empower people. Empowering professionals choose, from their professional repertoire, those strategies and ways of action that encourage empowerment.

In the framework of the discussion on professional practice a discussion generally also takes place on empowerment of the professionals themselves, The need for empowerment of

professionals (such as teachers and social workers employed by complex organizations) is emphasized beyond the universal need for empowerment that every person has. The claim is made that empowered professionals will be more empowering professionals; this claim still needs to find support in a reality in which a majority of powerful professionals (such as physicians and lawyers) have no interest in the discourse on empowerment.

## Chapter 3 Developing a Theory of Empowerment

### In Search of a Meta-theory

Empowerment theory wants to make a place for itself among those new social theories that are attempting to connect the personal and the social, the individual and society, the micro and the macro. Connecting the individual and the collective in a way which is not organic-biological or systemic-mechanical is not unique to the present study: this is the great challenge of sociology in recent years (Ritzer, 1988). In our case, the search is for a connection between the micro level and the macro level. For the individual – the micro level – the empowerment process is a process of increasing control and transition from a state of powerlessness. Community empowerment – the macro level – is a collective social process of creating a community, achieving better control over the environment, and decision making in which groups, organizations or communities participate. Beside these two we have to develop the theoretical meaning of empowering professional practice, through which an abstract theory is translated into a practical tool of intervention.

An empowerment theory requires a convincing integration of the micro and macro levels in order to make clear the interrelations among individual, community, and professional empowerment. In the search for this integration, I will present three theories which have taken on the challenge of connecting the individual and his behavior with the society and its processes. Drawing on these, I will go on to propose a theory of empowerment processes.



### Integration of Micro and Macro Levels in Feminist Thought

The declaration that the personal is political is the feminist rationale for removing the separating fence between the micro as a personal domain and the macro as a public domain. The split between the personal and the public domains is essentially a social means of isolating women and separating them from communities which could validate their views about life and society (Ackelsberg, 1988). The recognition of the existence of mutual influence between private activity and social structures demands a connection between the personal world and what happens in political and public life. The change in the values and beliefs of the individual woman, in the goals that she sets herself, in the life-style she chooses and in the understanding of her existential problems is a political declaration that is aimed at a change of the social structures that influence her life (Van Den Bergh & Cooper, 1986).

The concept *social individuality* (Griscom, 1992) makes the feminist dialectics explicit. The woman is an individual within the social reality in which she grows up and develops with the contradictions between her and society. According to this holistic view, the separation between self, others, and community, is artificial, because these three create one another within a single complex whole. The powerlessness of one woman, which changes by means of her activism in collaboration with others in her situation, is a process that empowers the entire community of women.

Feminist thought attacks the illusion of objectivity. Since knowledge about the social world is always created from a social position, no comprehensive and uniform social outlook really exists. People positioned in different places in the social structure know different things about the world. Hence, when a social view is presented as objective and exclusively valid, it is only an expression of the excessive rights that a certain group has appropriated for itself in the social order (Lengermann & Neibrugge-Brantley, 1988).

Several important ideas follows from this thinking:

The work of production and maintenance in society is done by subordinates whose work is in most cases invisible, and because of a dominant social ideology is not appreciated either by the society or by those who actually do the work. As a consequence, the understanding of the real components of production in society is distorted (Markusen, 1980). A senior manager in a large company can devote all his time to his job thanks to his wife, who takes care of him, their children, his elderly parents, and their home. For the firm, and for the society as well, the invisible work of this woman is of no economic value. It is women, irrespective of their status, who do most of this invisible work, not only in the domestic domain, cleaning, cooking, maintenance, and providing emotional and sexual services. In paid work too they do most of the activities of coordinating, such as waiting, arranging meetings, mediating, being interrupted, which are also considered unimportant. Another part of women's work, which is more obvious in its contribution to social production – motherhood – receives social glorification and idealization, which convert it into an unrealistic experience.

As a consequence of this women walk on a *line of fault* that separates the dominant ideology about their role in social life from their actual experience as they understand it. The incompatibility between the private reality and the social generalizations creates a constant dissonance with reality, and women navigate their lives according to this sense of separation between them and the society. On this line of fault, women navigate in different ways: some by repression, some by acquiescence, some by rebellion, and some by an attempt to organize social change (Lengermann & Neibrugge-Brantley, 1988).

All that has been said here about women may be applied analogously, although not in a totally identical form, to all powerless people who are subordinate to others. These people cannot express themselves as individuals, and silently accept other people's interpretations of their actions and failures.

This is the source of the culture of silence that characterizes life in conditions of inequality (Gaventa, 1980).

The conclusion of feminist theory is to question accepted categorizations that were developed by disciplines that are basically dominated by men (such as sociology, for example). The aim is to create alternative concepts which can help to explain the world as it appears to its invisible and disadvantaged subordinate subjects (Lengermann & Neibrugge-Brantley, 1988).

Theorists must engage in dialectical analysis of the knowledge process, and be conscious of the constant tension that exists between the subject and the object—each affecting and changing the other. The knower (the subject, the theorist) has to admit his interaction with the knowledge (the object), for knowledge about the social world is always created from a social position.

The connection between the personal and the political, which characterizes the feminist approach, has been warmly adopted into the theory of empowerment, as has the premise that feminism is valid not only for women, but also for everyone whose world is characterized by oppression and marginality. Empowerment wants to turn public attention to the distress of groups that are in need of social change.

### The Transactional Approach in Environmental Psychology

The transactional theory in environmental psychology (Altmann & Rogoff, 1987) proposes a bridge between the micro level – the person – and the macro level—the environment. In the transactional approach, which is influenced by both phenomenology and ethnomethodology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Mehan & Wood, 1975), the unit of analysis is a holistic entity – an event, generally – in which people, psychological processes, and environments are involved. The transactional whole is not composed of separate parts (like the whole in systems theory), but is a compound of inseparable factors that

are dependent upon one another for their very meaning and definition. The whole – person-environment – is a happening that is changing all the time. Various aspects of the event accord mutual meaning to one another, for in a different setting, or with different actors, a particular person would have acted differently. The observer (the researcher), too, is part of the event, since she defines the event and its boundaries, and her approach and behavior dictate part of the phenomenon. Understanding the observer during the event, her point of view, her role and her position, is part of the interpretation of the event. The transactional theory is pragmatic, eclectic, and relativistic. Despite its ambition to be able to predict, it recognizes that the events are liable to be idiosyncratic and non-recurrent.

Several principles stem from this theory:

1. Change is a property of the whole entity—of the event itself. Change is expected since processes are temporary by their very definition. An understanding of the change – of how it comes about and of its form – is required in order to understand the phenomenon, and not, as in other approaches, in order to understand the change and its reasons. The description and analysis of the event focus on the study of process and change.
2. Since the basic research unit is *an event* involving psychological, temporal, environmental, and social aspects, any focus of the research on one of these aspects turns the others into a context. For example, if the focus of the study is the psychological aspects of an event, then the physical environment is its context.
3. The perceptions and perspectives of the participants in an event are important for an understanding of the event. The analysis is not done solely from the perspective of the researcher who, as already noted, is one aspect of the event. The transactional approach studies the ways different observers interpret the same event.
4. Methodological eclecticism: Research methods are produced out of the event, not imposed upon it. The

theory and the structure of assumptions are constants, while the strategies of study may vary. A study is designed according to the problem and the question being studied. Hence, even when it is not possible to do the research empirically, it is important to report and acknowledge this, so that even without empirical research it will be possible to understand the entire picture theoretically.

From transactional theory, empowerment theory has taken the place of the professional as an inseparable part of the social situation itself, the emphasis on the process, and the freedom to move between focus and context that this theory permits the researcher.

### Structuration Theory: Giddens' Duality of Structure

Giddens' structuration theory (1982, 1984) – which is also called the theory of duality of structure, after its central principle – is the most developed among those sociological theories that integrate micro and macro levels of analysis (Ritzer, 1988). On this theory, the social structure has neither primacy nor preference over the human agency, and vice versa. Social structure is the outcome of human action, and this action is made possible within the boundaries of the social structure in which it takes place.

Giddens makes use of the term “system” to describe the overt pattern of social structures. The social outcomes – both the intentional and the unexpected – are an embodiment of the actions of human agencies. Social systems are reproduced social practices that are embedded in time and space.

Rules and resources are drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action. At the same time they are the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure). Human agency is enabled by means of social rules and resources. The rules guide and inform the action, and the resources provide it with energy: purpose, power, and efficacy.

The three concepts that are central to an understanding of human agency and the social structure are communication, power, and sanction. These represent human actions as well as structures of meaning (communication), systems of rule and authority (power) and systems of morality and legitimation (sanctions).

Giddens breaks the mechanical character of *social structure*, in that he sees it as a cluster of rules and resources, and hence a fundamental part of human activity, and not as an obstacle to activity. Structure is always both constraining and enabling (Ritzer, 1988).

**Communication.** In order to communicate, people draw interpretative schemes from symbolic structures of signification.

**Power.** A system of domination is made possible due to the existence of social structures of rule and authority.

**Sanctions.** In order to impose sanctions, people rely on norms which are part of a social structure of morality and of a system of legitimation.

The concepts of structure and action are produced and reproduced on the human agency level, and exist as concepts of meaning on the social structure level.

I have chosen the structuration theory as a basis for empowerment theory because it is critical, self-critical, holistic, relates directly to the concept of power, and binds micro and macro phenomena in the one explanation.

The principle of duality of structure is suitable as an explanation for the various levels of empowerment, as it is for analysis of any social process. Individual empowerment is human agency whose structural outcomes are not intentional; it may have structural consequences but these are not the essence of the process. Community empowerment is human activity that has structural and organizational aspects, which are aimed at changing social systems and creating structural alternatives. Professional practice is another form of human agency, one that is made possible through existing social systems. When its outcomes are oriented to producing the two kinds of empowerment, it is called *empowering*.

## A Theory of Empowerment

### *A Definition of Empowerment*

In my search for a suitable meta-theory, I wanted to establish the idea that the development of a theory of empowerment needs to draw its inspiration from interdisciplinary and multidimensional theories. From here on, I will present a contextual, interdisciplinary and multidimensional theory of empowerment.

Empowerment is a process of transition from a state of powerlessness to a state of relative control over one's life, destiny, and environment. This transition can manifest itself in an improvement in the perceived ability to control, as well as in an improvement in the actual ability to control.

Disempowering social processes are responsible for creating a sense of powerlessness among people who belong to groups that suffer from stigma and discrimination. A sense of powerlessness leads to a lack of self-worth, to self-blame, to indifference towards and alienation from the environment, beside inability to act for oneself and growing dependence on social services and specialists for the solution of problems in one's life.

Empowerment is a transition from this passive situation to a more active situation of control. The need for it is part of the realization of one's very humanity, so much so that one could say that a person who is powerless with regard to his life and his environment is not realizing his innate human potential. Since the sources of powerlessness are rooted in social processes that disempower entire populations, the empowerment process aims to influence the oppressed human agency and the social structure within the limitations and possibilities in which this human agency exists and reacts.

We may therefore conceptualize empowerment processes as three interwoven processes which complement and contribute to one another:

The process of individual empowerment, which actually can occur in an immense variety of circumstances and conditions, without any connection to the other two processes, but when it occurs in the course of active participation in social change processes in groups and organizations it has a special value for both the individual and the environment.

The process of community empowerment is a social change process which involves organizing and creating a community. A collective with a common critical characteristic, that suffers from social stigmas and discrimination, acquires ability to control its relevant environment better and to influence its future. Community empowerment processes develop a sense of responsibility, commitment, and ability to care for collective survival, as well as skills in problem solving, and political efficacy to influence changes in environments relevant to their quality of life.

Empowering professional practice is methodical intervention aimed at encouraging processes of individual and community empowerment. Empowering professional practice is professional activity that stems from social systems with the aim of encouraging processes of increased control of those individuals and communities in whose lives these systems intervene.

### *Individual Empowerment, or the Importance of the Human Agency*

The potential for empowerment, like one's very humanity, exists in everyone, and the ability to make a difference is a component of human existence. Systematic and permanent limitation of one's ability to exert power is a negation of one's very humanity. A human agency ceases to be such if it loses the ability to influence the world in some way (Giddens, 1984). To be a human being in the full sense of the word,

then, means to carry out intentional acts in order to achieve defined goals, that is to say, to influence the environment, to be able to bring about change.

Circumstances exist in which people's humanity, in this sense, is not realized. At times so many limitations are placed upon a person's ability to exert power that he is unable to act at all. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental difference between inability to act because one has no choice, and lack of ability to act. Not every case of inactivity may be seen as lack of ability to act (Mann, 1986).

The contextual theory of empowerment confirms the connection between the private and the political. It analyzes individual issues in social life politically. The individual interprets the politics of her life on the basis of the knowledge available to her about political achievements in the social domain. In the Western democracies, people are conscious of certain social values. They know that there exists a fundamental demand for autonomy and free independent functioning; and also that freedom and responsibility co-exist socially in a certain balance. Although people are not free in any absolute sense of the word, they are supposed to be free from limitations and conditions of exploitation, inequality and oppression. On the individual level a *private* political response to these ideas develops; Giddens calls this *life politics* (1991). On the collective level, life politics focuses on what happens to people who have achieved a degree of consciousness and initial ability to act, and are in need of community empowerment processes in order to realize their aspirations for personal autonomy.

#### *Community Empowerment, or the Social Structure's Shaping Influence*

The individual, then, in seeking his personal political interpretation – a quest which is a result of the individual empowerment process – creates expectations for change on the social structure level. Community empowerment takes

place when expectations for change which have accumulated in the social structure in the form of abstract structures begin to materialize. In other words, one could say that individual empowerment creates a reservoir of community potential. Beyond this potential, community empowerment requires resources of its own in order to be realized. It draws these resources from two sources which must be available with a certain coordination between them:

1. Individuals who have come to recognize that they are interested in acting not only to realize their own personal desires, although still in the framework of improving their quality of life.
2. External change agent – professionals and others who are involved in a planned change process and contribute rules and resources to it – meaning, legitimation, and power – which support the creation of a community and its growing ability to influence the environment.

The concept of *life politics* emphasizes the democratic context of the concept of empowerment. The empowerment process is conditioned by what already exists – by the social structure that enables or limits it. Regimes that do not recognize the individual's right to act and to change, and emphasize the duty of obedience as the essence of man, shape social processes in a very different way than the democratic regime which, at least on the expectations level, permits and encourages the individual's participation in public decisions.

This is how the duality of structure principle operates. Beside the social activity, the extent to which there exists a social structure that provides legitimation to civic participation – political regime, policy, resources – influences the character and the route of the empowerment process, and is a critical factor for the chances of initiating it. However, human agency has a variety of ways and means available to it in order to exert control on life, even in conditions of severe structural limitations. Hence, social relations, even when they are asymmetrical, are always mutual, and a person is never

without resources to the point of absolute lack of ability to exert influence on others (even if they have privileged access and control over ability and resources) (Davis, 1988).

Empowering professional practice encourages and facilitates processes of increased control of individuals and collectives over their lives and environments. It develops intervention methods through which people can effect changes in their lives. In the empowerment process people learn to take on socially valuable roles, to exercise social skills, to exert interpersonal influence, to develop commitment, to take responsibility and to acquire political efficacy. The acquired abilities contribute to the joint goals of empowering themselves as individuals and as a community.

Resources of the individual kind exist in every environment and may also be discovered there spontaneously. Few communities have developed from situations of powerlessness to belief in themselves and ability to make independent decisions through their own inner resources alone (by *boot straps* processes). The encounter between the community and practitioners who use empowering professional methods is not spontaneous; it is generally a synthetic occurrence embedded in a social system. It can stem from planned policy (Couto, 1989; Feldman & Stall, 1994), or from the professional's individual moral decision (Schuman, 1987).

The empowerment process produces a synergy that encourages the preservation and reproduction of the process (Katz, 1984). As the empowerment process progresses the empowering professional practice is reinforced, and from the outcomes of the process and from the process itself it receives proofs of its effectiveness and in certain cases also legitimation from the system. On the action level, the practitioner accumulates experience and professional confidence, as well as new knowledge. On the structure level a potential for creating new social systems based on empowerment-enhancing communications, norms, and forms of authority is created. The empowerment process also limits the professional practice, because at its peak it eliminates

the need for its services. The more the empowerment process progresses, the weaker becomes the dependence on professionals (principally on the empowering professionals, who deliberately avoid developing dependence), and they become less essential for the continuation of the process. When a community achieves empowerment it no longer needs the professional services that were essential in the stages of transition from powerlessness.

Social knowledge is neither objective nor neutral; it either contributes to social liberation or it encourages exploitation and social domination. By the same principle, empowerment practice cannot be neutral either: a professional who does not advance empowerment almost certainly hinders it. The rules of empowering practice also apply to an interpretative social theory, which must therefore be a critical theory too, because it is not only the social scientist who produces and interprets knowledge, but also the people who are the objects of the research participate in its creation through their activities that produce and reproduce it (Giddens, 1982). Such double hermeneutics is called for in order to give validity to the knowledge created both by the people living in the society and by the social sciences.

#### *Duality of Structure Dynamics in Empowerment Processes*

**Empowerment Processes.** Duality of structure emphasizes an important dynamic aspect of the empowerment process: empowerment potential exists not only in terms of people's personal resources and abilities, but also in terms of the rules and regulations of the social structure. The connection made by Giddens (1984) between social structure and human agency reinforces the theoretical explanation of the way community empowerment contributes to individual empowerment. Hence, empowerment may be compared to a circular process of social change and activation of abilities and resources, in which human agents in need of empowerment act together with empowering human agents. The social structure that is



produced by means of this activity includes preservation and reproduction of elements from the existing social structure, and a moral process of critical social analysis.

In the communications domain, empowered people learn to understand their situation differently, and thus create a symbolic structure that they share, one which gives them a new social meaning of their situation and their relations with others. In the normative domain, people learn to appreciate anew certain social norms that affect them. They start taking an active part in the moral discourse, and change it by the very fact of their joining it. Through this new social participation they can impose sanctions against social systems with which they had previously acquiesced to their own detriment. Empowerment may be described in terms of individuals' ability to effect change, but one cannot understand the power of a particular person, which is expressed in his own specific activity, without relating to the existing structures of control that this person reinforces, interprets and changes through his behavior. Personal efficacy draws its strength from structural forms of control that are embedded in social systems (Clegg, 1989). Hence, the empowerment process depends on what already exists in the society, but the success of the process is defined by what and how much changes on the personal level, the community level, and the social systems connected with the process.

Community empowerment depends on the acquisition of ability and on access to essential resources, which can be divided into two kinds: allocative resources and authoritative resources. Allocative resources are material resources such as raw materials, technologies, and products produced through the combination of these. Authoritative resources are organizational resources which can be divided into three kinds: 1. Organization of social time-space, i.e., the creation of paths of daily life. 2. Organization of human beings in mutual association. 3. Organization of life chances: the constitution of chances of self-development and self-expression (Giddens, 1984).

The degree of access to necessary resources of both these kinds is what determines the degree of ability to act and to influence. The less accessible these resources are to a person, the further she is from the ability to influence the social structure or to influence the creation of rules and laws (which also determine the degree of people's distance from resources).

Empowerment creates a change in human behavior and in the social structure. The potential for community empowerment exists in every environment, just as the potential for individual empowerment exists in every person. In every process of individual empowerment there also exists a potential for community empowerment, and every process of community empowerment creates an environment that facilitates individual empowerment and at the same time also shapes and determines its form (Maton & Rappaport, 1984).

What are the intended outcomes of this process? Since we are speaking about a theoretical process, it is open to an infinite number of variations, but we may note a number of outcomes in the course of it:

1. The empowerment process in most cases begins from a sense of frustration: people's sense that there exists an unbridgeable gap between their aspirations and their possibilities of realizing them. People discover that the realization of their aspirations depends on abilities and resources that are beyond their reach (Kieffer, 1984).
2. For the empowerment process to be able to develop, this sense needs to be accompanied by a minimal level of ability and resources to enable organized activity, as well a minimum of social legitimation to permit such activity.
3. Empowerment begins, then, with people's will to obtain resources and means to develop ability in order to achieve something in their lives. The mobilization of resolve and will is a first outcome in the process.

4. People's recognition of their right to express aspirations and their ability to define them is an outcome of developing a critical consciousness of the existing situation (Freire, 1985).
5. People's belief in their own ability to achieve outcomes is an achievement in terms of a sense of individual ability to control one's life (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy may become collective efficacy if it gets translated into the community's practical ability to organize itself for a collective effort to achieve outcomes in the environment.
6. Success in mobilizing resources to continue the process, including resources of knowledge about organizing and setting up community organizations, are outcomes that indicate that the empowerment process has established itself (Mann, 1986). This is a proof that the people have secured for themselves an ongoing ability to achieve outcomes: to control their lives, to participate in decision making, and to influence the environment.

The entire sequence of stages may be any hypothetical empowerment process, and each one of the stages is an end in itself and may also be a starting point for a different empowerment process. The point of departure for change depends on the opening conditions of the particular empowerment process.

**Powerlessness.** It is the social systems which are intended to solve social problems that produce the powerlessness of the people in need of their services, generally not out of bad intentions, but as a by-product of the flawed way that social policy is executed and that public services are given to people in distress (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977; Rappaport, 1981). Hence, empowerment theory diagnoses powerlessness as a social problem and not an individual problem, and criticizes the conservative tendency to diagnose manifestations of powerlessness, dependence, despair, and self-blame as the personal (at times cultural) problems of individuals.

What all situations of powerlessness have in common is the personal psychological experience of loss of control, which every human being can identify with emotionally. Since there is nobody who has not experienced moments of helplessness and powerlessness, there exists an intuitive understanding of the injuries caused by constant and ongoing powerlessness, and this validates the universality of the need for empowerment.

Disempowerment of people who belong to a particular population group produces powerlessness that influences the lives and futures of the individuals and the fate of the entire community. Powerless people, as already noted, expect a lack of connection between their behavior and desirable outcomes, and defend themselves by means of extreme fatalism, self-contempt, and indifference to their deplorable situation.

As a consequence of the negative valuation that is part of the disempowering processes directed towards a social group, this group is systematically denied identities and roles possessing social value, and important resources (Solomon, 1976, 1985). These two – roles and resources – are the basis for the exertion of interpersonal influence and for effective social functioning. Hence, inability to exert interpersonal influence and inability to function effectively in society, which various theories identify as personal problems, are structural manifestations of powerlessness.

Duration is what differentiates between states of constant and ongoing powerlessness and situations of powerlessness that originate in a crisis or in stress and can happen to any person or any group. In crisis situations, too, there are manifestations of powerlessness, but without systematic and structured disempowerment.

Nonetheless, there may be a subtle difference between the two situations of powerlessness, the temporary and the chronic. We can learn something about this from the vulnerable situation of new immigrants in Israel, who in the first stages of their absorption into the society should be regarded as a population in crisis. The transition from the country of origin

to Israel creates a rupture that is accompanied by feelings and manifestations of powerlessness. The expectations of both the immigrants and of the established society are that this is a temporary situation which will pass when they become part of the local society. However, beside groups of immigrants who experience a temporary crisis and then do become part of the society, other groups of immigrants are exposed to systematic and ongoing disempowerment that includes discrimination and stigma, and leads to powerlessness with all its difficult manifestations. The conclusion is that in Israeli society a tendency exists to selectively disempower certain groups of immigrants. To identify the victims is a relatively simple matter. They are always the poorest, the weakest both physically and psychologically, or those who are most conspicuously different in cultural or ethnic terms. The combination of economic/organizational weakness and cultural difference creates an especially high risk of powerlessness.

From this example we can learn that in every case where a crisis event occurs in the life of a social group, even if this crisis is planned, expected and temporary, there needs to be criticism of the practices activated by the social systems that treat the event, in order to identify disempowering policies and practices, to prevent these and thus to prevent the constant and perpetual powerlessness of an entire social group.

Powerlessness, like any social situation, produces adaptive mechanisms in those subject to it, and it is important to identify the principal mechanisms. Powerless people internalize their impossible situation and the blame it entails. They identify with the negative social opinions and accept the society's judgment of their worthlessness. As a means of escaping from their hopelessness and their knowledge that there is no way out of this situation, they tend to internalize the society's values, beliefs and game rules, including those that are directed against themselves. People who are prevented from participating in action that defines them, and from expressing thoughts about their actions, develop a passivity

and give up on the idea of controlling their destiny and their future (Gaventa, 1980). Even when the passive quiescence breaks, it does not totally vanish; its remnants make it difficult for people who have become accustomed to quiescence to express themselves in a clear and stable way. The new consciousness in the stage of emerging from powerlessness is a source of instability and that can easily be manipulated (Freire, 1970). The quiescence of the powerless endangers their future, for it enables the society to speak for them, and tacitly endorses the development of a victim-blaming rationale of powerlessness and a legitimization of its continued existence.

An example of such a rationale is the prevalent conservative position, which claims that a developed political consciousness is the reason for participation in political processes. According to this position, someone who does not participate chooses this course because she lacks political consciousness and therefore prefers to be represented by others. This is a way of explaining non-participation, and also of giving legitimation to the existing situation. However, research has shown that people's participation in political processes augmented their political consciousness (Pateman, 1970). In other words, participation itself creates consciousness no less than consciousness leads to participation, and hence someone who does not receive an opportunity to participate is prevented from developing political consciousness and becoming involved in public matters. In empowerment theory terms, what we have here is not the human agency's choice not to act, but a structural duality which creates a deliberate social outcome: the social structure systematically, by means of structures of sanctions, communications and domination, limits the human agency of particular groups. This limitation is manifested in limited allocation of resources, resulting in the human agency's inability to develop abilities, which condemns them to playing a passive subordinate role in society's production.

**Power Barriers.** How does the allocation of meager and powerlessness-producing resources come about? The society has direct and indirect ways of effecting disempowerment. The indirect power barriers are the ones that are incorporated into a person's growth and development stages, and are transmitted to the child and the adolescent by means of significant others in his life (Solomon, 1976). These are the authoritative resources that the society provides by its organization of social relations and life opportunities, in ways which, although covert, have a most profound influence (Giddens, 1984). The direct power barriers, that originate in the allocative resources, are implemented against the individual directly through the practices of social systems. The authoritative and allocative resources integrate the direct and indirect power barriers into a single structure of rationalization and legitimation: the liberal approach, which encourages the non-participation of the poor in political life, gets internalized in the child by means of his parents, who have accepted their negative social valuation, and when he grows up, it is transmitted to him directly by means of the meager allocation of the allocative resources, from the education system through to old-age pensions.

Due to the penetrating thoroughness of the integrated power barriers, as long as the consciousness of the powerless does not change in a stable and fundamental manner, no significant change in their situation may be expected (Gaventa, 1980). Their emergence from a situation of powerlessness, then, demands a great effort, in contrast to the relatively small steps that need to be taken to maintain their existing situation. To overcome the power barriers is much harder than to preserve them. However, when a change process begins, it is self-reinforcing. When a barrier collapses, this means a change in the rules and structures of meaning and legitimation. These lead first to changes in the allocation of the allocative resources (the material resources), and, with much more difficulty, also to changes in the authoritative resources (the organizational resources) (Clegg, 1989). Hence

the breaking-down of one power barrier accelerates and facilitates further progress. This is an example of the synergy involved in the empowerment process and of the motivating power of success, which brings about an improvement of self-image in the course of acquiring abilities and obtaining resources which originate in the empowering professional practice. The question of whether these processes fundamentally influence the field of power relations will be discussed further on (Gaventa, 1980; Clegg, 1989).

**Organizational Outflanking.** Organizational outflanking is yet another conceptualization, sophisticated in its simplicity, of the power barriers (Mann, 1986). Its claim is that powerlessness is nothing but a submission to power's organizational advantage. Because of this concept's strategic importance to empowering practice, it is worthwhile to become acquainted with the two categories of response to organizational outflanking.

#### *Conscious Submission to Organizational Outflanking*

In certain social conditions, the knowledge and consciousness of the outflanked is of no practical value. Their inactivity stems from knowing the price they would have to pay for struggling with the organizational outflanking. Such submission covertly undermines the conception that development of critical consciousness is the beginning of a practical change process. This gives further support to the claim that individual empowerment does not necessarily lead to community empowerment.

The conscious submission to organizational outflanking makes perceptible the affinity of the concept of empowerment, on all its levels, with the democratic context. An event which occurred in a different context describes the regime's brutal response to a community empowerment process in a town in Venezuela, where the residents built homes for themselves by themselves, assisted by professional practice of people from the nearby university. The regime's response made it clear to anyone who needed clarifications that a dictatorial regime

sees even personal empowerment as a threat that has to be eliminated. Although they were conscious of their situation, and possessed not-inconsiderable abilities, the local residents did not manage to advance in their community empowerment process, because the social structure they live in entails dangers to the lives and property of any human agency focused on change (Sanchez et al., 1988). In Israel, the occupation regime in the territories provides daily examples of frustration of attempts to organize and of independent community expression.

An example of conscious submission to organizational outflanking in a democratic society is an event in which a group of parents participated in the running of an open school, but was pushed to the margins as a consequence of the teachers' taking control of all the school's organizational frameworks. The parents, who lacked organizational means of their own, remained outside the decision making process and ceased having an influence. The researchers Gruber & Trickett (1987) analyzed the process by dividing the concept of empowerment into psychological empowerment and political empowerment. Psychological empowerment was described as a personal process that is not dependent on organizational means, and this was achieved by the parents. Political empowerment was defined as actual participation in decision making; this was not achieved by the parents. Had the researchers analyzed the situation with the assistance of the organizational outflanking theory, they would have reached the conclusion that the parents, despite their consciousness of their situation, had difficulties in realizing empowerment because they were organizationally outflanked by the school.

#### *Unconscious Submission to Organizational Outflanking*

The unconscious response to organizational outflanking is attributed to three factors: the ignorance, the isolation, and the exclusion of the outflanked (Mann, 1986).

Ignorance is considered the major cause of powerlessness, mainly because of the absence of tools and abilities that

accompanies lack of knowledge. People are unable to describe and conceptualize their situation, and their powerlessness deepens because of the quiescence that accompanies ignorance. This connects with the two other factors – exclusion and isolation – which are responsible for preserving the status quo of the ignorance of the outflanked (Gaventa, 1980).

Isolation of groups from one another so that they will not be able or interested to organize themselves is an old and tested strategy in the service of power. The advantage of strategies of isolation and exclusion is that they are commonplace to the point of banality, and at the same time are easy to camouflage.

An example that demonstrates how common is the use of methods of exclusion for purposes of organizational outflanking are the procedures for the participation of residents in the Israeli *Urban Renewal* project, which began in 1978 and has actually not been completed to this day. From 1980 on, the authorities engaged in the project instituted neighborhood elections as a condition for participation of residents in the formal decision making processes. In this way a separation was effected between the elected representatives of the residents, who received appointments to participate in the committees, and other representatives of the residents, who were not given right of entry into the official decision making process. Further separations were also instituted in the same project. For example: between owners and rent payers in public housing; and between the more established residents of the neighborhood and people in need of welfare services (Alterman and Churchman, 1991).

#### *Empowerment as Social Transformation*

Does empowerment create a fundamental change in the power field that it occurs in? This is a Foucaultian question, which therefore has no simple answers, for an answer which is not complex and dialectical, which generalizes and simplifies, serves the existing power relations. If we see empowerment

as a local resistance to power, then its occurrence does not transform the field of power relations itself very much. This analysis is correct for individual empowerment in particular. Through his own empowerment a person gains a higher level of consciousness about his place in the power relations, but his achievements are not felt in the existing power fields (although they do add to the potential for social change, as Giddens [1984] presumes).

Michel Foucault claimed that there are human actions and phenomena that have managed to elude the net of power and to preserve their freedom, and then institutionalization is the major danger to their existence. In his view, the very endeavor to develop new knowledge around empowerment, and to organize it in an institutionalized way, as the present book is attempting to do, is liable to turn a phenomenon that means more control by the individual over her life and her fate into yet another domain under the supervision and surveillance of power. Conceptualization of empowerment may be interpreted as yet another attempt by power/knowledge to take control of the field of humane social phenomena.

This is one of the problems in a Foucaultian analysis. Any attempt to organize knowledge in an ordered way is suspect as an attempt at *normalization*—at judgment and domination. Nonetheless, there is truth in this extreme position: a phenomenon that is adopted by the scientific establishment and is disseminated under its auspices to social institutions is liable to lose its authenticity (as a substantiation of the validity of Foucault's claim, we may cite the mechanical use of the concept of *creativity* since it was adopted by educational and therapeutic institutions and became distorted while being activated in their framework). Foucault justified his refraining from creating a theory in the domain of power as a refusal to cause harm to any social subject that is condemned to scientific generalization. Anyone who agrees with him can go on developing a theory only within this contradiction, in the hope that Foucault's evaluation of the extent of the interconnections between

the technologies of power and social knowledge was an exaggerated one.

Although insufficient evidence exists about the fundamental social change that empowerment will bring about if and when it is adopted as a policy and a professional practice, Foucault himself demonstrated how a written idea may serve power relations and provide a direction for development of technologies (1979). Any new idea, any linguistic innovation, then, has this opportunity of bringing some fresh innovation to the accepted perspectives and conceptions in the domain in which it appears. Likewise, any such innovation may be implemented in different and contradictory directions. Empowerment emphasizes the ability to control that is innate in every person, the importance of context for an understanding of this ability, the special place of human solidarity and of community in this context, and the roles of professional people in changing the disempowerment produced by social systems. It is thus different from the ideas about achievement, competition, and selfish individualism that (according to Foucault as well) characterize the knowledge that acts in the service of technologies of power.

A Foucaultian interpretation will also claim that empowerment promises too few outcomes in the field, and places too much emphasis on the consciousness and feelings of individuals and groups without changing their actual situation. In this way empowering practice is liable to turn into a technology in the service of power, which helps deprived groups to be more contented in their deprivation. This is not a totally groundless possibility, especially if we agree with Foucault's evaluation that power in the Western world is characterized by the sophistication with which it conceals itself.

Any focus on individual empowerment arouses a Foucaultian interpreter's suspicion, and in the writing on empowerment in social work such an orientation exists (Lee, 1994; Miley et al., 1998). When the professional practice focuses on the individual question of who is empowered and who is



not, this question becomes yet another criterion for judging people and separating between them, as is common in typical power technologies. Hence, empowerment as knowledge cannot limit itself to developing an individualistic therapeutic approach. Despite its originality and importance, such an approach will limit itself to implementing knowledge in the service of veteran social institutions (the welfare services, for example). Empowerment is valid as a new approach (and a new idea) only when it is implemented on the social level.

### *Politics of Empowerment*

When a chance for social change exists, the next question that follows is what will be the character of the process of social change, or what kind of politics characterizes empowerment. One could answer that generally it seeks social legitimation and consensus, and the use of the concept of life politics attests to this (see above). Empowerment is not interested in appearing as a revolution, but as a new social agreement—a social contract. Empowerment is a demand, in the name of shared social values, for recognition of the harm caused to certain populations as a consequence of manipulation of some of these values against them. Empowerment is a hope that on the basis of a platform of shared values it will be possible to reach conclusions and to change policies and practices that are prevalent in social systems.

From a Foucaultian perspective, at least three remarks are called for on this subject.

1. Since there are no possessors of power, there is in fact no-one to approach. However, it is necessary to ensure the development of a new professional consciousness. In too many cases people ask technical questions – such as *How is it possible to improve the welfare system?* – and do not ask essential ones—such as *What does the welfare system do to the people in need of it?* Empowerment poses such questions (Rappaport, 1985).

2. Since there is no-one who stands outside power, and everyone is activated by the same technologies, then, as already stated, even someone who feels he has power is manipulated and entrapped by it. If only for this reason, it is worth abandoning the prevalent belief that power relations are a zero sum game. This belief results in a refusal to share resources of power with others, thus perpetuating isolation and separation among people, even in opposition to their interests.
3. In a democratic regime we can relate to empowerment as a kind of legitimate resistance that serves as a brake and a substitute for much more dangerous alternatives (Minson, 1986). Empowerment is an idea that is compatible with liberal democratic ideas, and hence Western democratic society is capable of digesting it without shocks, and even to gain some advantages through it. Power is prepared for tactical losses in order to gain a strategic advantage, and empowerment may be a tactical loss of this kind.

### *“What Does Empowerment Do?”*

Foucault, and Giddens after him, would have wanted to investigate the unintentional outcomes of the empowerment processes. At first glance this would be a superfluous investigation, because empowerment was born out of the critique of harmful by-products of social programs that have not asked What does the program do? (Swift, 1984). In fact, however, it is important to investigate the connection between the discourse on empowerment and the empowering professional practice, and also to analyze technologies that declare themselves as empowering, in order to understand what does empowerment do, or how it influences people beyond its overt messages (Rojek, 1986). Like any new concept, empowerment too can lead intentionally or unintentionally to the establishment of new social structures and the preservation of existing structures that contradict its principal goals.

If we believe Foucault, power penetrates more and more into our lives as individuals, but at the same time it increasingly camouflages itself behind knowledge and practices that have goals, aims, and a logic of their own. The question is whether empowerment teaches us something new about the existing power relations. Does it expose these relations and increase our consciousness about them, or, conversely, does it contribute to the concealment of the mechanisms of power? Empowerment's test of authenticity, then, lies in its contribution to the creation of a critical social consciousness by means of speaking the truth and exposing unilluminated levels of oppression and discrimination (Habermas, 1975; Forester 1989).

#### *Does Empowerment Stand a Chance?*

In order to realize empowerment processes, reinforcing systems of meaning, power and legitimation are necessary on the level of the social structure. A democratic regime and democratic values provide these better than other regimes. However, the theories of power, as well as everyday human experience, make it clear that in democracy there is no guarantee of fairer or more equitable power relations in every case. The democratic system provides a mechanism, a legitimation, and a moral endorsement for extreme and structured powerlessness. Empowerment theory, then is a product of a democratic climate, and its goal is to deal explicitly with problems of powerlessness created by structures and systems of meaning operating in democratic society.

The advantage of the structuration theory as a meta-theory of empowerment lies not only in the integrated explanations that it provides for phenomena that a contextual theory of empowerment is interested in understanding, but also in the sense of optimism that this theory contributes to the empowerment process itself. Exercise of power is primarily an action oriented to achieving strategic advantages in social relations. The right strategy is more important than the

quantity and the possession of power resources. Instead of asking who has power and who doesn't, and how much power, a more challenging and more optimistic question is redefined from the viewpoint of weak and poor people: how to activate what exists in order to influence the power field in a way that will make possible more control in their lives. The perception of the power relations as mutual and as *a non-zero sum* provides a way out of the catch involved in the lack of material resources, and turns the realization of empowerment into a more realistic challenge. The centrality of strategic thought reinforces the rationale which says that development of abilities is the main means of emerging from situations of powerlessness, despite the fact that powerless populations suffer also, and perhaps mainly, from a lack of resources.

#### Summary of Part One

The first part of this study dealt with a theoretical development of the concept of empowerment: the first chapter explored insights connected with empowerment in various theories of power. The second chapter presented the connection between empowerment as a personal process and community processes and their influence on powerless people, and also emphasized the role of professional practices as an essential component in the definition of empowerment.

In the third chapter, I looked for a meta-theory suitable to empowerment theory. In the course of my search I found out that not a few theorists look for an integrated explanation for social macro-micro phenomena. I examined three such endeavors, and from these I chose Giddens' structuration theory to serve as a meta-theory for empowerment. Giddens is suitable for this role not only because of the quality of his theory, but also for his values. I appreciated the way he discusses the various theoretical influences that guide him; his sources of inspiration and his values are revealed in the course of his theoretical discussion, and are suitable to a theory of empowerment no less than his theory itself is. The

way in which Giddens exposes the sources of his professional method made my choice of him easier for me, on the meta-practical level of my work as well, and has enriched my approach to the development of a theory in many significant ways.

The contextual theory of empowerment presents the transition from powerlessness to more control in life as a change in both human activity and the social structure. Powerlessness is a social phenomenon that has structural aspects which are rooted in the power relations and the disempowering practices that originate in the social systems.

In the second part I will focus on the empowerment process in the context of community planning. The discussion of the professional practice will illuminate and illustrate various issues of the three empowerment processes, the individual process, the community process, and the professional process.