

From Stories about Living to Living the Stories: Composing a Collective Idea of Home in an Independent Living Project

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Abstract

Being able to choose where to live and with whom is a right. However, the issue of self-determined living is complex and can't be taken for granted, especially in presence of disability conditions. It involves the micro level of individual stories, the meso level of family stories, professional actions and community relations, and the macro level of the culture of social inclusion within society. In this contribution, the author narrates a cooperative enquiry with social workers, volunteers and family members of people with intellectual disabilities involved in an independent living project in Northern Italy. Thinking by stories (Bateson, Bateson, 1987) constituted a biographical, poetic and imaginative way to activate a process of systemic reflexivity (Formenti, Rigamonti, 2020) starting from the relationships between the participants. This way of thinking together created conditions to question dominant discourses and to compose a new collective idea of home in independent living projects.

Keywords

independent living – disability – systemic reflexivity – life stories

Introduction

Being able to choose where to live and with whom is a right. However, the issue of self-determined living is complex and can't be taken for granted, especially in the

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presence of disability conditions. It involves the micro level of individual stories, the meso level of family stories, professional actions and community relations, and the macro level of the culture of social inclusion within society.

In Italy, services for the social inclusion of people with disabilities are accredited by the regions and classified on the basis of standardised social-health needs. This organisational structure has made it possible to create uniform forms of service on both a national and regional level but, at the same time, has led to a hegemony of medical-specialist classificatory language which has objectivised the person with disabilities and placed excessive emphasis on technical-instrumental responsibility.

Internationally, the bureaucratisation of social educational practices has generated approaches that have sought to validate the wisdom of practice (Fook, 1999; Parton, O’Byrne, 2000) but have also highlighted potential risks of oppression (D’Cruz, Gillingham, Melendez, 2007). In the field of disability, the colonisation of the imaginary (Latouche, 2003), which is translated into standards of performance, minutes, observation sheets, diagnoses and classifications, has led to an impoverishment of the relational choreography in terms of practitioner-user, in which the person with disabilities is considered the ‘passive object’ of performance and intervention. The prevalence of this type of thinking and social organisation, moreover, has emphasised a continuous proliferation of the ‘places of disability’, and an isolation of people within their pathology (Medeghini, Valtellina, 2006; Goffman, 1961).

In a different way, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the construct of quality of life (Schalock, Verdugo Alonso, 2002; Brown, Brown, 2003; Emerson et al., 2004) and the perspective of capacitation (Sen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2002) and self-determination have promoted a view that tries to recognise the person and his or her being part of an ecosystem of relationships and norms that define reciprocal rights and duties. In Italy, Law 112/2016, commonly referred to as “Dopo di Noi” (“After Us”), introduces the possibility of “guaranteeing people with disabilities innovative residential interventions that are able to reproduce, beyond the horizon of life of their families, the housing and relational conditions of the home of origin” (Giacconi et al., 2020, p. 275). From this perspective, living becomes the theme of the life project of the person with disabilities and is contextualised, starting with the constraints and possibilities present in the ecosystem of relationships of which the person is part.

The shift in emphasis from services, understood as specialised places for the person with disabilities, to living, understood as a being-in-the-world, is

a paradigm shift that tries to restore citizenship to the condition of disability. Designing contexts attentive to an inclusive living experience becomes an action focused on taking care of the condition of displacement generated by a reductive conception of the social work of services, often limited to special places that preclude rather than promote authentic relationships between people living in the same places. Heidegger (1976) writes on this subject:

However hard and painful, however serious and dangerous the dwelling shortage may be, the real living crisis does not consist in the lack of dwellings. (...) The real crisis of dwelling consists in the fact that mortals are still searching for the authentic essence of living, which they must first learn to live. (Ibid., *my translation*, p. 108)

Living goes beyond the search for a dwelling, but translates into a dance that symbolically and operationally creates a landscape. This landscape differs from the environment and the location in that it emerges from the narratives and symbolisations that arise from the continuous search for meanings (Morelli, 2020). Living in the presence of disability raises personal, family and social stories, and requires a reflexivity on practices and their implicit premises, in order to generate new meanings around words and to illuminate the power dynamics of in relationships, including those of education and care.

In the following paragraphs, I narrate a cooperative enquiry (Heron, 1996; Formenti, 2017) with social workers, volunteers and family members of people with intellectual disabilities involved in an independent living project in Northern Italy. The project, called “Step by Step” (2020-2023), is promoted by the Federazione Coordinamento Handicap, a network of associations and social cooperatives in the province of Lecco, in collaboration with local institutions, and is co-financed by Fondazione Cariplo. It aims to design independent living in the form of co-housing for people with intellectual disabilities. The spatial context of this project is characterised by a special landscape dimension, in which mountains and watercourses of rivers and lakes and a mutual familiarity between people living in the same neighbourhood are present.

Looking through the door: methodological and ethical aspects

The idea to work with the stories of living within this cooperative enquiry (Heron, 1996) arose from the need to create contexts and relationships that promote inclusive living. Stories can change power relations, modify the relationship with knowledge (Fabbri, Munari, 2005) and contribute to the

creation of new landscapes and new relational choreographies. Formenti (2017) writes:

Storytelling, before being a research method, is the most common way to make sense of our lives, (...) it involves mind and body, connects us to the world and to others, stimulates reflection. (...) Research begins when stories open up to multiple interpretations and levels of interpretation. Training begins when we decide to make something of it. (*my translation*, pp.8-9)

Thinking by stories (Bateson, Bateson, 1987) can constitute a biographical, poetic and imaginative way to activate a process of systemic reflexivity (Formenti, Rigamonti, 2020; Jude, 2018) starting from the relationships between the participants. Systemic reflexivity is a compositional meta-competence (Formenti, 2017), relational, emotional and imaginative, individual and collective, epistemic, critical and embedded (Rigamonti, Formenti, 2020, *my translation*, p.123). The involvement of micro (self-reflexivity), meso (inter-subjectivity) and macro (epistemology and dominant cultural discourses) levels allows for the composition of seemingly different systems and worlds into a transformative device that aims at complex, layered, situated and relational learnings (Formenti, 2017; Mezirow, 1991).

I describe here a particular declination of cooperative enquiry methodology (Heron, 1996) called research-training (Formenti, 2017). Research-training is a pedagogical device based on a systemic epistemology that conceived understanding and change as two strongly intertwined processes (Formenti, 2017). I proposed the use of a narrative approach as a way of accessing reflection on practices and promoting transformative learning through a recursive and circular process capable of showing the power dynamics present in practices and changing them by questioning their tacit premises and assumptions.

The research-training course involved 22 social workers, 20 volunteers and 19 family members of people with intellectual disabilities in 7 meetings held between November 2020 and June 2021. The participants were people active in independent living experiences. They were free to choose whether to take part in the course, which started with an invitation circulated on the via e-mail from the service providers and associations involved in the project.

According to cooperative enquiry methodology (Heron, Reason, 2001), the first meeting was dedicated to the construction of the research questions, the creation of a participatory agreement and the construction of the method. Participants were asked to reflect on differences in social roles (volunteer, family member, social worker) regarding aspects such as risk, power dynamics and

opportunity, to explore the possibility of composing more complex visions on the topic. Reflexivity was conceived in a relational sense (Simon, 2014). Relational reflexivity is an ethical processing in and of research activities. According to Simon (2014), relational reflexivity:

might be described as a dance which requires attention to certain themes: a sensibility to any externally imposed tempo and other environmental demands and influences; a sensibility to a relational tempo in which dancers respectfully share the directorship of pace, challenge and movement; a responsivity to the invitations of others and a selectivity about the choices offered and taken up. (p. 21)

On the one hand, I enacted relational reflexivity by constantly coordinating with others, asking questions, checking comfort levels, understanding and meaning and, on the other hand, through self-supervision driven by the desire to coordinate with participants in an ethical manner. In particular, I used some questions proposed by Simon (*ibid.*):

Coming from I am making and with what possible consequences for me, for them, for others not present? What is informing those choices? What other choices am I overlooking? Where are those guiding values/prejudices coming from? (p. 21)

The research questions identified with participants/co-researchers were: What makes a context a home? How does living shape relationships inside and outside a home? How are living relationships organised in the presence of a disability condition? The objective, which was shared with the participants, was to develop a reflective and stratified local theory, starting from the research questions identified together, which could generate practical choices to be implemented in the independent living pathways.

I used the 'knowledge spiral' method (Formenti, 2017) which promotes holistic knowledge, based on the here and now of experience and relationships. The movement of the knowledge spiral can be heuristically described as passing through four phases.

The first stage, that of authentic experience, draws on embodied and bodily experience, which is accessed through the immediacy of perception, empathy, and resonance (Heron, Reason, 2001). Such a pathway to knowledge opens the possibility of restarting thought and going in search of new words through the experience of the body (Formenti, 2017). In the research narrated here the recall of autobiographical experiences, through the activation of a radical memory based on sensations coming from the sensitive body (Heron, 1996), constituted the basis for exploring the feeling of being at home.

The second phase is that of aesthetic representation. It allows a critical re-reading of the biographically internalised constraints and provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through different artistic ways, such as dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, poetry, drama and so on (Heron, Reason, 2001). In the research-training course described here, for example, the landscape linked to one's own home was photographed, identifying the most significant objects, spaces, and relationships of one's daily life.

The third phase involves the activation of a Collective Mind (Formenti, 2017). It is based on thinking together, in groups, on the setting in motion of an ecology of ideas that allows one to become aware of one's own implicit theories and perspectives of meaning (Mezirow, 2012) in order to see, name and challenge them. In the research, it allowed us to move from a micro, self-reflective level to a meso level of group and macro, epistemic reflexivity, also challenging the dominant discourses present in independent living projects.

The fourth phase, finally, is that of deliberate action and is expressed in choices to be acted upon in reality. In the research-training project, the deliberate actions were translated into operational proposals involving services, families and associations active in independent living projects.

The research-training was carried out remotely due to the rules in force in Italy to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. The research material included photographs, drawings, narrative material, poetic compositions that were spontaneously shared by the participants. My field notes and autoethnographic reflections from my research journal were also added.

For the analysis and interpretation of the research material, I chose to refer to the method of analysis and interpretation proposed by West (Merrill, West, 2009). In the research, this method provided a means of recording key issues relating to content and process, while also integrating my field notes, reflections from my research journal and quotes from the scientific literature but also from art. In particular, the aspects touched by this way of analysing the data allowed me to identify and deal with several dimensions: 1) the emerging themes and critical issues; 2) the research process, also being mindful of its power aspects; 3) the ethnographic and autoethnographic dimension, focusing on the circumstances in which the encounters and events took place; 4) the emerging gestalt. The process of analysis and interpretation of the research material was also constantly the subject of reflection and dialogue with the participants, who were also considered co-researchers (Heron, Reason, 2001).

During the first research-training meeting, I chose to share a quote from the scholar MacIntyre (1999):

A form of political society in which disability and dependence on others is something we all experience at some point in our lives, at an unpredictable level (...) is not a special interest - the interest of a particular group rather than others - but the interest of the whole of political society: an interest that is an integral part of the conception of the common good (p. 130).

After the reading of this quote, a woman, the sister of an adult with a complex disability, replied: "This is utopia, you know that, don't you? In the evening, when the door of our home closes, we are alone". The choice to read this quote was based on my tautological premise. Tautology, for Bateson (1979) consists of a body of propositions linked together in such a way that the links between the propositions are necessarily valid. In social educational work, the presence of a significant tautological component constitutes a real risk of creating a chain of logical prepositions that often end up becoming taken for granted "perspectives of meaning" (Mezirow, 1991). Specifically, the choice to read this quote was based on the assumption that considering disability as a common good would make the different participants feel part of a group. However, the unexpected "closed door" reaction of this sister immediately took me out of the frame of my assumptions, leaving me speechless. The utopia that this woman was referring to in that situation highlighted a gap between what I as a social worker was seeing and what I was missing from the subjective experience of that person and many others like her. In the Treccani dictionary, utopia is defined as:

Formulation of a political, social, religious set-up that is not reflected in reality but which is proposed as an ideal and as a model; the term is sometimes taken with a strongly limiting value (a model that cannot be realised, abstract), while at other times its critical force towards existing situations and its positive capacity to orient forms of social renewal are emphasised (in this sense utopia has been contrasted with ideology). (<https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/utopia/>)

What was preventing the woman from seeing the critical and constructive aspect of utopia and what had I been unable to see in my choice of that quotation? I recounted this episode to contextualise the narrative of the research process, including in relation to my positioning in it (Formenti, West, 2018). This research is part of a workplace doctorate that involves an agreement between the social cooperative I work for and the university. It arises from the need to innovate social

educational practices aimed at the social inclusion of people with disabilities. I am therefore part of the culture investigated by my doctoral research, as I coordinate and supervise projects and services in the cooperative that also include independent living.

Starting from this uncomfortable position, I therefore chose to approach the research with an autoethnographic gaze, in order to use my personal experience to describe and critique the cultural beliefs and practices (Adams, Holman Jones, Ellis, 2015) connected to the design of independent living projects. The collection of autoethnographic writings through the research journal allowed me to reflect on my ‘insiderness’ (ibid), understood as inside knowledge that draws attention to the complexity of taken-for-granted assumptions present in my professional context, and at the same time to my ‘outsiderness’ (Bakhtin, 1986), understood as an awareness of difference that, as a researcher, I introduced into the professional context of which I am a part.

In the next paragraphs, the description of the co-operative enquiry process, the themes that emerged in the relational and systemic reflexivity with the participant-co-researchers (Simon, 2014; Formenti, Rigamonti, 2020) and my own autoethnographic writings will form a complex interweaving of levels and perspectives in dialogue with each other. This interweaving will try to explore the questions identified by the group, celebrating their complexity (Formenti, West, 2018) and challenging a reductive view of social work aimed at inclusive living.

Living in own landscape-home

“It is in us that landscapes have landscape. So if I imagine them I create them; if I create them they exist; if they exist I see them (...). What we see is not what we see, but what we are.”

(F. Pessoa, 2020, *my translation*, p. 123)

What makes a place a home? How can the sensation of “feeling at home” be described? Based on these questions, the participants went in search of a shared and biographically informed idea of living.

The Italian word for “living” is “abitare”. This word shares the same Latin etymology with the Italian word “abitudine” (in English “habit”). Drawing inspiration from this common etymological origin, the scholar Morelli (2021) argues that it is not enough for human beings to have a den to live in, but they need a “home-landscape” in which to live and build their habits. Living is therefore a significant and creative action that generates and intensifies habits. The

perception of the landscape-home generates feelings and emotions of which life is made up. However, Western culture is immersed in a chain of dualisms (mind-body, individual-environment, observer-observed, etc.), which has reduced the spaces of liveability and the spaces of thinkability (ibidem) and separated them. However, they are profoundly interconnected and inseparable, a single existential field of an embodied and situated body-mind and extended in relationships (Luraschi, 2021).



Figure 1. What objects and spaces make you feel at home? Some pictures by participants, December 2020

What idea of “living” did we want to promote? The choice to not take for granted the meaning of this word constituted the first step for the participants to distance themselves from a technical-specialist approach to the theme and let themselves be questioned by their own experience of living. I therefore proposed to the participants that they give voice to their home-landscapes, drawing on

the photovoice technique (Wang & al., 1998). The photovoice technique is an interesting way to elicit and represent perspectives of people habitually excluded from decision-making processes. In a participatory approaches, it allows one to learn about a particular social reality as perceived by the protagonists and to increase the participants’ awareness of certain aspects of that reality. The immediacy of images allows for easier communication of perspectives. In addition, this technique involves a narrative dimension, in which stories have the power to organize and make sense of the experience. The creation of photos of their own home-landscapes (Figure 1) was followed by the production of written texts that attempted to give a verbal voice to the images and the emotions they aroused.



Figure 2. What is the landscape of your everyday life? What are your places of the heart? Some pictures by participants, December 2020

Below are some sentences shared by a volunteer and a social worker respectively:

This is the little mermaid that my grandmother, with whom I spent my early years, kept on the dining room sideboard. A little memento passed down from hand to hand to me.

Here there is our study library, a sort of map of our lives, a catalogue of wishes, dreams, utopias.

In some narratives, the stories reflected hope and thoughts about the future, as in the case of this participant, the father of a young adult with disabilities:

The veranda, our little winter garden, a space for relations between inside and outside while we wait for the return of the good season to open up to nature, albeit tamed, in the garden. Perhaps it is also a metaphor in which I hope our son can become independent in the future.

Shifting the focus from the inside to the outside of their homes, the participants' gaze photographed both the human and natural environment (Figure 2) of the landscape around their homes.

This activity allowed to highlight "The neighbourhood shop where I buy sliced meats", "the bar where I hang out with friends", "the bench where I take my dog", "the little wall in the yard where I watch my children play with others", "Mount S. Martino, which every morning awaits me there outside the living room window to say good morning".

Here too, the images were then narrated through words, giving life to small fragments of everyday life: "patterns of closeness and distance in human interactions that shape the emotions we experience about relationships to ourselves, each other, and the world around us" (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1056). For some participants, this complex interweaving of people, places and feelings took the form of a map of their living and habits (Figure 3).

The emotional geographies generated by working on one's landscape-home provided narrative material that then informed the reflective phase in the group. In Formenti's (2017) knowledge spiral method, this step corresponds to the activation of the Collective Mind.

Participants' stories, shared and re-signified together, can generate an ecology of ideas that can then be used to compose a satisfying, situated and embodied theory of the research object. Deliberate action, which corresponds to the fourth stage of the method, creates a connection between the previous ways of knowing and practical knowledge and allows a cycle of learning to be closed, put through the lens of experience to open it up to new questions or considerations.

In(ter)dependent Living

The exploration of the home-scapes and emotional geographies that make up one's daily life led to the identification of a second emerging theme, that of the relationships created in living together, particularly in the presence of conditions of disability.

The starting point was to question the relevance of the adjective “independent” when it is associated with the living experience of a person with disabilities. Why do we talk about “independent” living? What are the cultural premises behind this definition?

In a meeting with family members, I proposed that they each select a photograph from their family albums showing them in a significant moment next to their son, daughter, brother or sister with disabilities. Using this picture as a starting-off point, I then invited the participants to describe this relationship in terms of autonomy-dependence. The stories shared became the vehicle for a discussion on relationships in which the aspects of dependency and autonomy were not so clearly separated:

She is totally dependent on us but is interested in everything. Her life is made up of small daily autonomies: asking to go to the toilet, drinking alone. She has personality, she is not a girl who lets herself live. She wants to live.

My brother was totally dependent on my mother. When she passed away, the balance and peace were upset. We had to reorganize ourselves. There is an emotional autonomy that is easier if there are more points of reference.

We parents depend on her and she on us. She asks us problematic questions. She asks us to be autonomous, to live alone. But she is our life and we are hers.

The embodied experience of living together, recalled through the photographs selected and narrated by the participants, made it possible to get away from a reductive idea of autonomy and independence, based on a paradoxically abilistic view of disability.

Reflecting as a group on these stories created a polyphony (Rigamonti, Formenti, 2020) in which the voices of brothers and sisters, seldom heard in educational and social planning with people with disabilities, could also be expressed. Here are some of their reflections:

If I went back I would insist to my parents that they see my brother as a person free from them. (...) Instead they had the idea that only they knew how to treat my brother well. They should have tried. I grew up with an expectation: “You were born for your brother. We made you for your brother.” I have been so angered by this phrase over the years. Why me? I lived this fate with resignation. Then I realised that I could do something different.

I don't feel like living the life my mother did. I am not the mother, I am the sister. My sister must find her own way, live her own life. And she seems to have understood that.

Even in this situation, the use of types of aesthetic representation in some cases facilitated the sharing of experiences and concerns. During a meeting in which participants were able to look at, choose and give voice to an illustrated card that represented them in relation to the theme of living, the sister of a young man with intellectual disabilities, after showing her card (Figure 5), said:

I am a tree and behind me there is both serene and stormy weather. I am still young. My parents have done their best but now there is a need for an act of trust in professionals who can take care of my brother now that he has become an adult. (...) I feel the need to take charge of my life, without guilt and without the fear of being trapped in a situation bigger than myself.



Figure 5. Illustrated card 40 – “Athmos” by artist Pierluigi Pintori

The group reflection on the concepts of autonomy and independence in relation to living then led to a questioning of some of the assumptions present in the same law that regulates independent living projects. As I mentioned above, in Italy the law that protects the right of people with disabilities to autonomous and self-determined living is 112/2016, commonly called “Dopo di Noi” – “After Us”. This expression brings with it some implicit premises that could be challenged starting from two questions: What comes “after”? And who is “us”?

The reference to the loss of parental support following their death is not only implicitly present in the legislative name but also in the regional decrees that implement it, such as, for example, D.G.R. 3404/2020 and D.G.R. 4749/2021. What seems to be missing in these references is the role that brothers and sisters can play in this type of project. Nonetheless, the possibility to bring one’s own voice into the research-training space allowed the participants to go beyond the reductiveness of the norm and make choices such as, for example, the active involvement of all family members, including brothers and sisters, in every phase of the planning and implementation of living arrangements.

Tomorrow is already here

The discovery of the links of interdependence present in the stories of living also made it possible to focus on the temporal aspect of these paths. “After Us” is an expression that refers to a future that for many family members can be a source of great anxiety. In one of the first meetings, the sister of a woman with a severe disability said, “Maybe in a hundred years things will change. But now the only wish I have is that she might die the day after I die.” Several times in my professional history in the services I have met family members who have shared this sad scenario about their future.

In the research-training course, the polyphony of voices, including those of the brothers and sisters, challenged the idea of an “After Us” so focused on an exclusive parent-child relationship that it did not take into account that this “after”, in the case of the brothers and sisters, concerns their “during”.

In the last research-training meeting, I proposed to the participants that they share a word or a short sentence that they considered significant in relation to the course they had followed. Through a process of poetic composition, the words came together in a poem whose title bears the name of the project itself, “Step by step”:

*Life is about going
 You stumble and you go.
 I lengthened my stride
 I go forward
 Step by step.*

*The future! There is work to be done!
 Tomorrow is already here
 Already and not yet.*

*A circle, a network
 Holding hands
 A commitment
 to build the future together.*

*Holding hands,
 letting us go
 letting you go
 to that future we built together.*

*Built together
 With strength and courage.
 No longer alone.
 Thank you, goodbye.
 Tomorrow is already here.*

In this poem “we” acquires a broader meaning that includes not only parents but also brothers, sisters and the network of professionals and volunteers who can, together with the families, contribute to the planning of independent living paths. Similarly, in this poem the “after” is no longer just a frightening future scenario but something that can also be rooted in the present (“tomorrow is already here”) and can proceed towards a possible future, “step by step”.

Conclusion

I am reminded of the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty in which Aurora receives the blessing of the three fairy godmothers, and then I am reminded of the sudden and unwanted arrival of the one fairy who had not been invited to the party and who casts her curse on Aurora. When she is supposed to die on her sixteenth birthday, the fairy godmothers manage to prevent death and change it to a long sleep of

over a hundred years. The disorientation I felt in front of that sister's closed door is very similar to what I presume Aurora's parents, the fairy godmothers and the guests all felt. However, I would not be telling this story of Aurora and her long sleep that ended in a great love, if the fourth fairy, unexpected and unwanted, had not arrived to play her part. In the end, it is her curse, together with the magic of the fairy godmothers, that gives Aurora the time she needs to meet her true love after 100 years.

Recalling the disorienting "closed door" remark made by the sister of a woman with a complex disability at the end of the first research-training course, in this narrative excerpt from my research journal, I associate the feeling of disorientation with the curse of the unwanted fairy in the fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty*. That closed door was an image that challenged me as a social worker before being a researcher. Who had closed that door? What was it not possible for me to see beyond the door? What had we, as social workers, failed to see until then?

The words of that sister, spoken at the beginning of the journey, were for me both the curse of the unwanted fairy and the awakening by Prince Philip from a sleep that had closed my eyes to a part of reality, the one beyond that door. I omitted to say that this sister, after this first meeting, chose not to continue the research-formation path, like the fairy godmother who then disappeared in the story of Princess Aurora. Even today, this "exit from the scene" makes me question myself as a researcher and reminds me of the responsibility inherent in my role. On the other hand, her disorienting question ("This is utopia, you know?"), has continued to echo in the research process. The frames of meaning (Mezirow, 1991) that had guided my professional actions up to that point, were met with a closed door. But the fairy tale did not stop and the curse intertwined with the stories and biographies of the participants in the research-training process and challenged the paradoxes and dilemmas of the way of approaching the subject of independent living.

This interweaving of my autoethnographic experience and the cooperative enquiry process with participants, held together by a form of ethically engaged relational reflexivity (Simon, 2014), allowed me to explore the critical force of a utopia aimed at challenging a reductive view of social work oriented toward inclusive living. In the research, reflexivity took the form of "thinking with theory" (Jackson, Mazzei, 2017), an emergent, immanent and becoming process that stood on the threshold of 'in-between-ness'. In contrast to representational logic and analytical practices of data that lead to generalities, themes and categories, thinking on the threshold does not stand outside, isolated and elevated from the 'data', but

keeps things moving, becoming and, in this sense, is also ontological because of its ability to create new stories. Stories about living, whether implicit, acted out or generically defined at the legislative level, have become emotional landscapes and geographies that have inhabited the process. The connection between micro (self-reflexivity), meso (group reflexivity) and macro (epistemic reflexivity) levels of reflexivity and the creation of embedded polyphonies (Rigamonti, Formenti, 2020) have made it possible not only to challenge the dominant discourses implicit in the same law aimed at promoting the autonomous and self-determined living of people with disabilities, but also to identify new viable ways (Von Glasersfeld, 1982) of designing this type of pathways.

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