

Art and Social Change: A Methodological Proposal for Community Social Work

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Abstract: This study explores the intersection between art and Community Social Work, proposing an innovative methodology based on artistic practices. Through semi-structured interviews with social work professionals in the central region of Portugal, it was analyzed how artistic interventions can promote empowerment and capacity-building among individuals and communities. The results revealed that art, when used from a social perspective, can be an effective tool in addressing issues such as human rights, poverty, and inequality. Four key phases in the intervention were identified: diagnosis, planning, action, and closure. The research highlights the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration between social workers and artists, as well as the need to consider the socio-cultural context of the participants. This methodological approach provides social workers with a framework to implement art-based interventions, enhancing their ability to promote change and social justice. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for stronger training in artistic practices within social work education and suggests future research directions to validate and expand this methodological proposal in various social intervention contexts.

Keywords: Community Social Work; Art; Empowerment; Intervention Methodology; Social Change.

^{ES} Arte y cambio social: Una propuesta metodológica para el Trabajo Social Comunitario

Resumen: Este estudio explora la intersección entre el arte y el Trabajo Social Comunitario, proponiendo una metodología innovadora basada en prácticas artísticas. A través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con profesionales del Trabajo Social de la región central de Portugal, se analizó la capacidad de las intervenciones artísticas para fomentar el empoderamiento y desarrollar las capacidades de individuos y comunidades. Los resultados revelaron que el arte, cuando se utiliza desde una perspectiva social, puede ser una herramienta eficaz para abordar cuestiones como los derechos humanos, la pobreza y la desigualdad. Se identificaron cuatro fases clave en la intervención: diagnóstico, planificación, acción y desenlace. La investigación destaca la importancia de la colaboración interdisciplinaria entre trabajadores sociales y artistas. Asimismo, subraya la necesidad de considerar el contexto sociocultural de los participantes. Este enfoque metodológico ofrece a los trabajadores sociales una estructura para implementar intervenciones basadas en el arte, potenciando su capacidad para promover el cambio y la justicia social. Además, el estudio subraya la necesidad de una formación más sólida en prácticas artísticas dentro de la educación en Trabajo Social y sugiere futuras líneas de investigación para validar y expandir esta propuesta metodológica en diversos contextos de intervención social.

Palabras clave: Trabajo Social Comunitario; Arte; Empoderamiento; Metodología de intervención; Cambio social.

Summary: Introduction. Methodology. Results. Discussion of the Results. Conclusions. References.

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Introduction

Research in Social Work assumes particular relevance in contributing to professional and academic identity and affirmation. In this sense, as an interventive profession, the current trend is to develop innovative studies aimed at the reality of social workers (Granja & Queiroz, 2011; Ferreira, 2014). In fact, there is a growing interest in the theoretical development of the arts in Social Work and in an arts-based research perspective, useful for its application in professional practice (Heinonen et al., 2018).

Artistic approaches are gaining ground in intervention, and for Social Work, the arts can offer useful perspectives, approaches, and tools to engage individuals and communities (Heinonen et al., 2018). This relationship dates to the beginning of the profession, developed by Jane Addams with immigrants. However, reality indicates that social workers have paid limited attention to this intervention due to the lack of an artistic methodological structure that underpins professional practice (Flynn & Sela-Amit, 2019).

With the aim of fostering and strengthening this relationship, the present research adopts the perspective of the arts in Community Social Work intervention, creating a methodological proposal based on the arts so that social workers have means applicable to reality. This perspective is based on the work of Riggs & Pulla (2014) on “art practice in community development social work” and on the person-in-context paradigm referenced by Huss & Sela-Amit (2018). To understand this perspective, it is necessary to characterize community development in the context of Social Work and then relate it to art.

Community Social Work adopts various terminologies such as “community development,” “community organization,” and “community intervention,” with communities being the central point in the history and development of Social Work (Herranz & Nadal, 2010).

Community development is a relevant social intervention method for working with oppressed, disadvantaged, and marginalized communities. Its objective is for the subjects of intervention to develop personal, group, and community capacities to assume control and collective responsibility for their own development. It focuses on providing support mechanisms for the community to make autonomous decisions about its needs and to promote self-help and solidarity (Goel et al., 2014; Herranz & Nadal, 2010).

There are various types of methodologies that can be used in social interventions; however, there is a particular interest in the visual arts. Visual arts include audiovisual, architecture, plastic arts, painting, cinema, poetry, urban art, and photography, although dance and theater are also worked with (Silva, 2022). According to Segal-Engelchin (2020:1291), “The use of visual media for individual and social transformation can generate powerful expression, insights, and empowerment for people.”

Based on this assumption, community development and the processes of Social Work can incorporate artistic work, as this triad shares a similar vision and commitment to solutions and individual and community well-being. Social Work and community development use the arts as a resource to support and understand the subjects of intervention and the communities. Social workers seek to understand conscious and unconscious feelings, emotions, and conflicts, and the arts can foster the expression of emotions, memories, and ideas (Riggs & Pulla, 2014).

The theoretical framework of Riggs & Pulla (2014), supported by extensive research, highlights the potential for collaboration between social workers, other community development professionals, educators, and artists. However, this perspective needs to be developed and aligned with the person-in-context paradigm, as discussed by Huss and Sela-Amit (2018).

For an effective intervention using art practice in Community Social Work, it is essential to work from the sociocultural context of the participants and communities, considering the interactions of people with their ecological structures. This implies a personal interpretation of the sociocultural context, closely related to problem-solving within that context. Thus, the professional must consider the real constructions of everyone, as the intervention will be conditioned and influenced by the identity and subjectivity of the participants. Therefore, the focus of interest in the social worker’s intervention is the people (Adams, 2018; Huss & Sela-Amit, 2018; Perth, 1993).

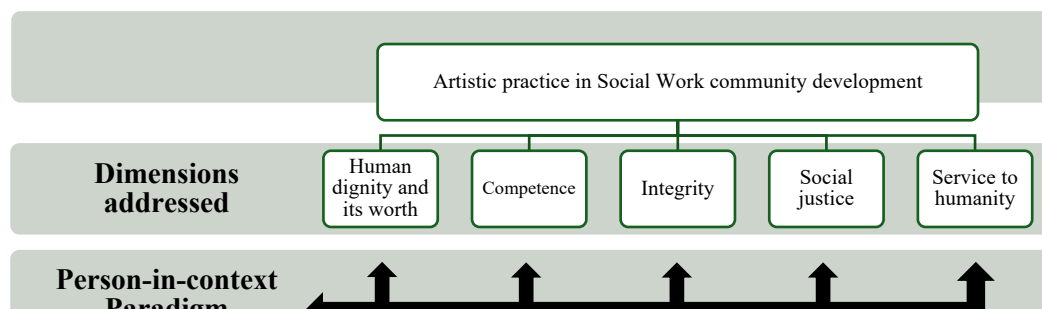


Figure 1. Own elaboration based on Pulla & Riggs, 2014 and Huss & Sela-Amit, 2018

This becomes the reference point for the intervention, and Social Work, by working with and for individuals in a logic of personal and social change, needs to develop research focused on the “person-in-context” paradigm, in line with arts-based research (Huss and Sela-Amit, 2018).

For this reason, when speaking of artistic practice, community development, and the values and principles of Social Work (Riggs & Pulla, 2014), the person-in-context paradigm is integrated (Huss & Sela-Amit, 2018).

Artistic Practice in Community Social Work

In recent years, researchers in Social Work have shown great interest in the use of the arts as a complementary method for the profession, establishing connections between theory and practice. Since the late 19th century, with the Hull House of Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, the arts have played a crucial role for communities (Flynn, 2019; Flynn & Sela-Amit, 2019; Heinonen et al., 2018; Konrad, 2019; Mayor, 2020).

Currently, research follows two main lines: one focused on the theoretical development of the arts in Social Work and another oriented towards an arts-based research perspective, with notable applicability in professional practice. Both recognize that social and psychological theories are central, complementary, and promoters of individual changes and transformations, as well as resilience, communication, empowerment, and capacity (Heinonen et al., 2018).

It is evident that these theories are intrinsically linked to the field of Social Work, which is “a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social development and change, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.” (IFSW, 2014).

The confluence between artistic practice and community development in the field of Social Work has generated growing academic interest and has been the subject of various studies. The Escambray Theater, founded in 1968, has been the subject of research due to its emphasis on communication between art, especially theater, and the public (Rodríguez et al., 1996). This focus on communication underscores the importance of involving the community through artistic media in the practice of Social Work. Fook et al. (1997) discuss the implications of research findings in developing a theory of experience in Social Work, with a focus on structural and feminist perspectives in direct practice. The foregoing suggests that professional practice in Social Work requires the understanding and use of diverse perspectives and approaches, including artistic ones. Froggett (2004) emphasizes the importance of professional creativity in Social Work, drawing on the artistic movement for health. The creative process is considered central to personal and organizational development, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating artistic practices into community development efforts. Dang (2005) discusses the role of community cultural development in addressing cultural displacement and fostering creative synergies. Sharing examples of collaborative projects, Dang emphasizes the importance of community engagement and meaningful connections in the practice of Social Work. Crawshaw et al. (2018) explore the catalyzing role of art in community engagement and reflection, based on relational perspectives of artistic practice. This suggests that artistic experiences can facilitate connections within and between communities and their natural environments, contributing to an integral community development.

In summary, the literature highlights the value of incorporating artistic practices into community development efforts within Social Work. By involving the community through art, social workers can foster communication, creativity, and significant connections that contribute to personal and collective well-being (Rodríguez et al., 1996; Fook et al., 1997; Froggett, 2004; Dang, 2005; Crawshaw et al., 2018).

Being a field centered on people and in a society facing complex and diverse social problems (Ewijk, 2018), the use of artistic perspectives, approaches, and tools is relevant and useful for addressing issues such as oppression, inequality, poverty, and human rights (Heinonen et al., 2018). Based on this premise, in the Portuguese context, art becomes a tool for the profession and communities, gaining space among national initiatives.

Initiatives such as PARTIS of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and *Portugal Inovação Social* are mentioned, which are developed in various regions of the country and show the role that the arts can play in vulnerable communities, promoting inclusion, learning, and equality through plastic, audiovisual, and/or performing artistic practices (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2021).

In parallel with the analyzed literature, practice establishes a consolidated and positive vision of what intervention through the arts means as an added value for the profession, the subjects of intervention, and the community. However, for this to occur, the social worker must play a central role in the process. That is, when working with the community and considering it as a whole, professionals must collaborate with the subjects of intervention to achieve results that benefit their lives (Huss & Bos, 2018). For this intervention to be successful, professionals must be guided by a framework that reflects values and principles based on human rights, justice, and ecology (APSS, 2000; CASW, 2024; IFSW, 2014; NASW, 2021; OCSWSSW, 2023), as well as considering service to humanity, competence, integrity, human dignity, and social justice.

Social Work, as a profession and discipline, has evolved significantly over the years, developing inter and transdisciplinary approaches to address the complex needs of communities and individuals. Through the scheme presented in Figure 2, it can be understood that the social worker, acting at inter and transdisciplinary levels, must possess specific skills for the intervention that are complementary and specific to this type of work, including political, relational, psychosocial, and assistance competencies. Furthermore, these professionals must work conscious of their ethical principles, professional standards, mission, and values. It is essential to act responsibly within organizations, ensuring that their services benefit the subject of intervention and, therefore, the community.

The orientation towards service to humanity translates into three interconnected actions: addressing human dignity and its value; training and promoting social justice to enhance individual and community change; and raising awareness among the subjects of intervention to influence the political system and public opinion. These dimensions are addressed simultaneously and can be considered a cyclical process. Although the central focus is on the subject of intervention and the community, the social worker can also be represented

in this type of intervention, as addressing the subject of intervention implies discussing and reflecting on professional practice, based on the values and principles of Social Work.

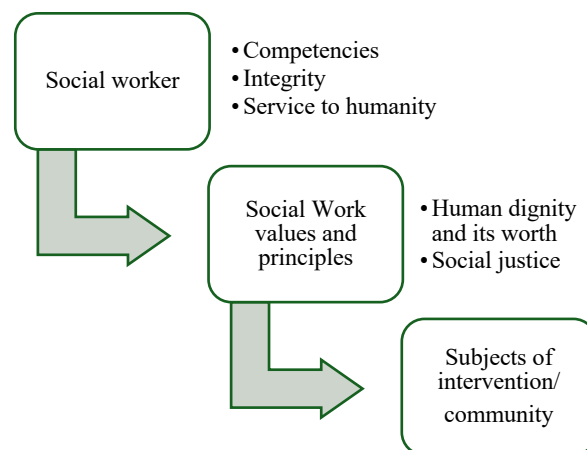


Figure 2. Dimensions of Social Work in artistic practices for community development
(Own elaboration based on Riggs & Pulla, 2014)

Methodology

Universe and sample of the study

For this exploratory study, a preliminary analysis was carried out using contacts provided by social workers and through the web, in order to identify relevant entities and projects for the research. From a total of 28 analyzed projects, it was revealed that the involved entities work with communities in various regions of the country, evidencing a scope that transcends the capital. It is understood that there is an interest on the part of these entities in diversifying their areas of action, including children and youth, the elderly, the Roma community, and the population in a situation of economic vulnerability.

This idea is aligned with what Huss & Bos (2018) advocate, who argue that art should not be considered exclusively as a tool for a particular type of population, thus limiting professional action. Projects in Portugal have turned art into a tool for Social Work and communities, fostering critical, reflective, ethical, and creative thinking (Marques, 2013).

However, effective access in the field proved to be complex, as for this research the participants had to identify themselves as social workers responsible for community projects that use artistic methodologies. It was found that the majority of the projects were not directed by social workers, a situation that could be attributed to two main factors: the reluctance of organizations to hire these profiles and the lack of knowledge of this practice by the professionals themselves.

It is significant that, of the 28 analyzed projects, only 10 met the requirement of being led by social workers; these constituted the universe for the selection of the sample. From these 10 projects, 7 social workers were interviewed, which represents 70% of the available sample.

To reach this final sample, several programs were consulted, and numerous contacts were made. Through the PARTIS program, 6 institutions were contacted, of which 5 responded affirmatively. Regarding *Portugal Inovação Social*, a public initiative to promote social innovation, 6 institutions were contacted, of which 1 was used in the research, 3 did not respond, and 2 did not have a social worker on the team. As for the *Escolhas* program, a national governmental program, an attempt was made to contact the 7 funded institutions, but no response was obtained. In addition to these contacts obtained through the web, additional contacts from 9 institutions were received from social worker colleagues, of which 2 agreed to participate, but 1 was unavailable to conduct the interview, 2 did not have a social worker, and 5 did not respond.

In summary, the scope of the study included 7 professionals responsible for different artistic projects, of which 6 were social workers from various areas and one professional with a degree in Early Childhood Education, who temporarily replaced the project's social worker.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characterization of the interviewees

Gender				
	Female 6		Male 1	
Age				
	30-40 4		40-50 3	

Academic background				
Bachelor's degree 7	Post-graduation 2		Master's degree 1	PhD 1
Workplace				
Leiria 3	Lisboa 2		Castelo Branco 1	Caldas da Rainha 1

Techniques and instruments of data collection

Regarding the selection of data collection techniques, semi-structured interviews were chosen, chosen for their flexibility to explore the participants' perceptions in depth. For the choice of this technique, an interview guide was developed with questions related to the research and based on the "artistic practice in the community development of Social Work" by Riggs & Pulla (2014) and the person-in-context paradigm referenced by Huss & Sela-Amit (2018). Although the guide was sequential, this type of interview allowed for changing the order as necessary, granting greater freedom to the interviewees and flexibility for the emergence of new questions (Given, 2008; Ruslin et al., 2022).

Data analysis strategy

Data analysis was performed through categorical content analysis, a suitable method for the systematic identification of emerging patterns and themes for a better understanding of the relationship between Social Work and artistic practices, through four categories previously identified in the literature: (1) sociodemographic characterization, (2) subject of intervention, (3) social worker, and (4) intervention through the arts, each with its respective subcategories. The focus was on the professional's perception of the use of the arts in Social Work and the intervention of artistic practices in communities.

To improve the quality of the analysis (Evers, 2010), the MAXQDA software version 2022 was used, which allows (MAXQDA, n.d.): a) greater robustness and flexibility, by offering a wide range of functionalities that support both detailed coding and advanced analysis of textual data, as well as the management of large volumes of data; b) advanced functionalities, such as data visualization in quote matrices, word clouds, and concept maps, which enrich the understanding of emerging categories and their interrelationships; c) facilitation of triangulation and validation, necessary practices to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. The software allows for the comparison and integration of data from different sources, as well as the application of various analysis techniques to validate the data; d) visual analysis and data representation, through semantic network graphs and code diagrams, providing visual insights into the relationships between categories and the distribution of themes, useful for clear and accessible interpretation and communication of results; e) data integrity and auditability, as the program maintains a detailed record of all operations performed during the analysis, including the stages of coding and the modifications made to the data, ensuring the integrity of the analysis process and facilitating the review and replication of the study.

For this study, the analysis of semantic networks was privileged due to a) its relevance and effectiveness in exploring the complex relationships between categories; b) its capacity to map and visualize the interconnections between the various emerging concepts and themes. in textual data, useful for identifying co-occurrence patterns; c) data visualization, facilitating interpretation by making interactions between concepts more understandable; d) the identification of emerging patterns and themes that might not be immediately apparent through traditional analytical methods.

For the analysis of semantic networks, we followed the following steps: 1) identification and grouping of codes: all codes generated during the coding were reviewed and grouped into thematic categories; 2) construction of the semantic network: we used the semantic network function of MAXQDA to visualize the relationships between the codes. This tool allows for the creation of maps that illustrate how concepts are interconnected within the data corpus; 3) analysis of relationships: to identify co-occurrence patterns and relationships between the main concepts; 4) visualization and interpretation: using the network graphs provided by MAXQDA, facilitating the interpretation and presentation of results.

Results

Systematization of the constituent elements of artistic practice in Community Social Work

The starting point is to understand the constituent elements of a social intervention based on artistic methodologies from the perspective of Social Work, with the objective of creating an artistic methodological proposal for social workers, being necessary to identify the dimensions of the subject of intervention/community, of the social worker, and of the professionals of the visual and performing arts.

From the analysis of Figure 3, the semantic network establishes the connection between the content analysis categories and interrelates the contents and information. These categories will present fundamental elements for the analysis and construction of the methodological proposal.

We observe that the category on the benefits for the subject of intervention presents a strong co-occurrence relationship, which demonstrates its importance and relevance for practice, as evidenced in the information extracted from the interview segments.

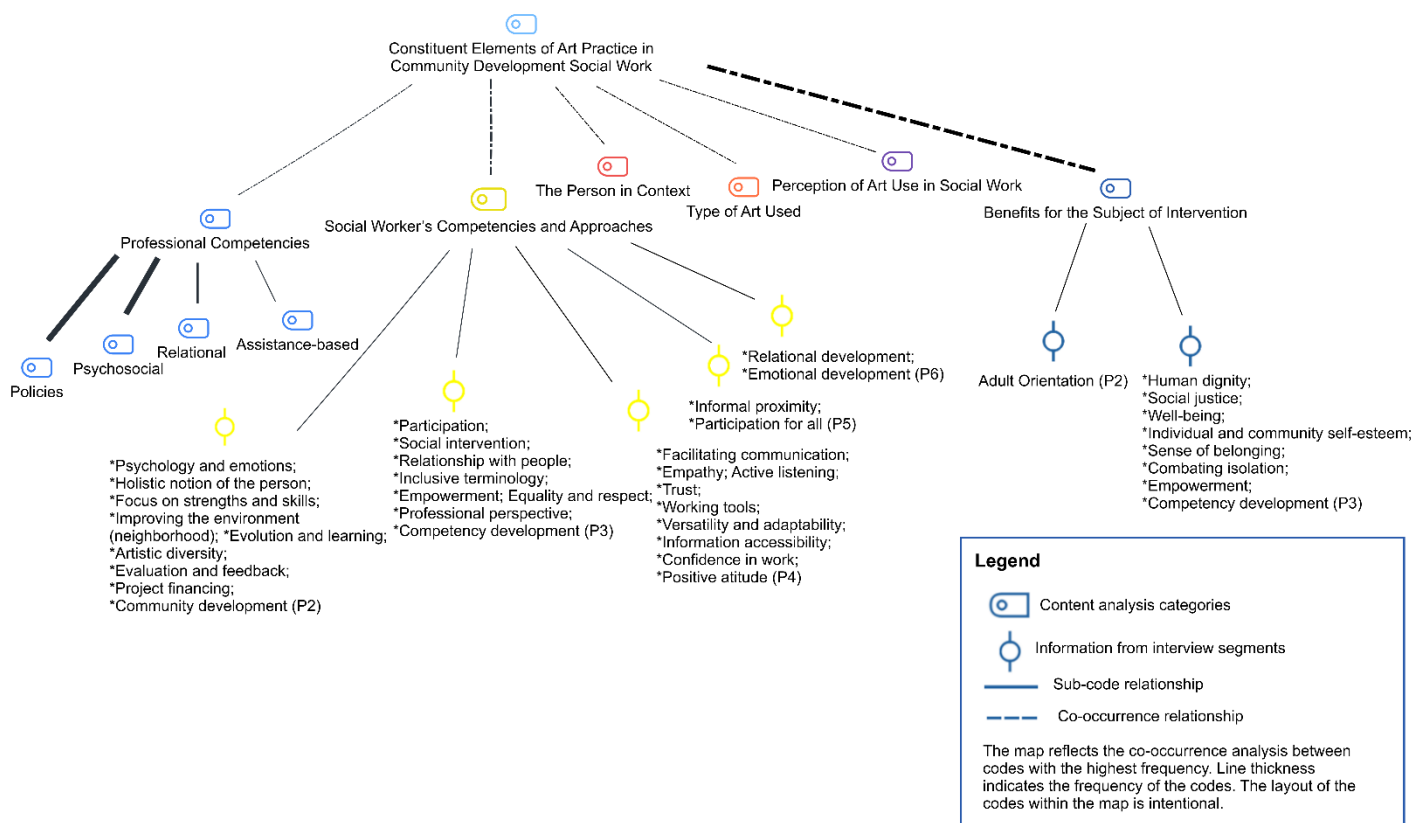


Figure 3. Semantic network. Constituent elements of art practice in community development social work

Furthermore, the fundamental element of intervention is the subject of intervention, considering its diversity and heterogeneity within the various publics reached in the communities. The interventions focus on children, youth, the elderly, and various contexts, especially prioritizing vulnerable communities.

Regarding the dimension of the social worker, the categories of competencies and approaches of these professionals also present a high frequency of co-occurrence, considering that the professional must acquire a set of professional competencies to ensure the effectiveness of the work with art in the context of community development. However, this is only possible if the person is considered in their context and in an integral way. The intervention must, therefore, recognize that each individual possesses their own resources and methods to address the processes, which implies a diversity of approaches and techniques (P2). Consequently, it is essential that the professional respects and works from these inherent capacities of the subject of intervention. Within the professional competencies, the political (P1, P2, P3, and P4), relational (P1, P3, and P7), and psychosocial (P1, P6, and P7) stand out, which have a significant weight in the intervention compared to the assistance competencies (P4 and P7). In terms of political populations and professionals report that these interventions help to raise awareness among the subjects of intervention and the community, highlighting important issues in the territories and their populations, and allowing new ways of seeing and thinking about the community. They also mention that, through the arts, they can influence the political system and public opinion to change the local community, social, political, and collaborative agents (P3 and P6).

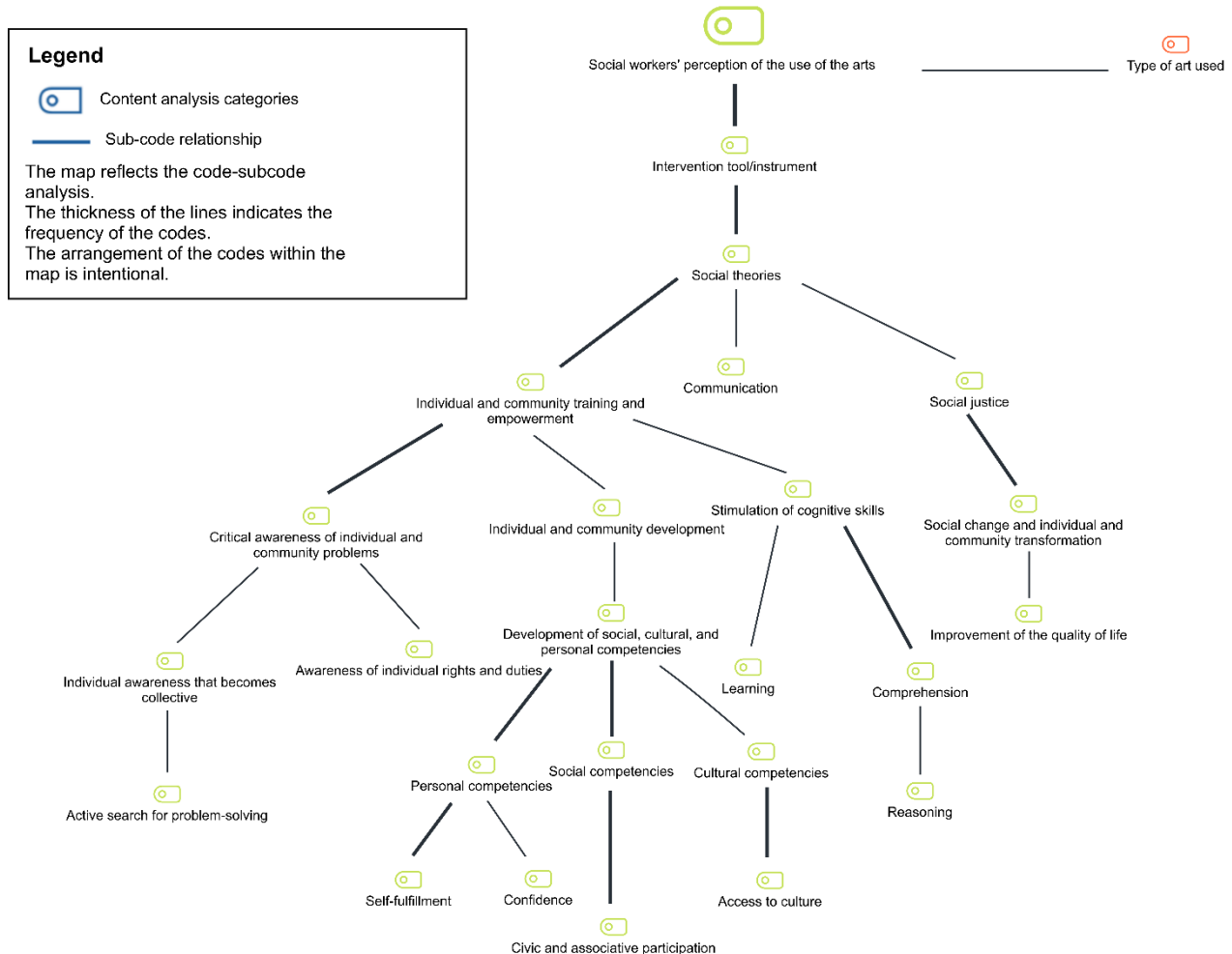
Relational competencies are also emphasized, as the interviewees reported feeling closer to the subjects of intervention. For their part, psychosocial competencies are considered key because they allow for the development of training and empowerment processes for both individuals and the community (P3, P4).

Regarding artistic performance, the testimonies reveal that the majority of social workers do not consider having the necessary competencies to apply artistic practices directly (P1, P2, and P7), and therefore, this responsibility was not assigned to them in the project or in the intervention (P1 and P3). Some mention the excessive workload as a limitation ("I couldn't do it because we have two simultaneous projects here" - P5). One participant mentions that the work should focus more on "mobilizing resources" and "dynamizing the process" to work with the artists and their competencies, thus benefiting the intervention and the work with the community and its members (P3).

In summary, the effectiveness of the intervention resides in the collaboration between professionals from the visual, performing, and social arts. Furthermore, the semantic network provides a global vision through the analysis of the main categories on the practice, providing a diversity of elements that are interconnected, the need for the professional to avail themselves of competencies and skills, and the need and attention in the choice of the type of art to be used.

Integration of art and the practice of Social Work

Based on an articulation between the artistic and social dimension, the vision presented by these professionals highlights art as the central axis of the intervention, considering it as “a tool (...) to achieve social ends” (P3), rather than under an aesthetic lens, although all projects have an artistic background. “This does not imply that people become artists, but that they contribute to the development of artistic works conceived by themselves” (P3). Art is considered a means to observe the benefits that the arts bring to users and how integrating these artistic practices with Social Work can enhance the professional’s work.



The use of art, based on diverse theoretical perspectives, is conceived as a means to train subjects, promote empowerment, and foster social justice. From the perspective of training, art stimulates cognitive abilities and learning. As an instrument of social inclusion, it promotes cultural competencies and facilitates access to culture. In addition, it positively impacts people's social skills, improving interpersonal relationships and fostering greater critical awareness, which in turn enhances civic and community participation. (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6). This fosters group and community work (P1 and P7), as one of the participants points out:

“I consider that the arts are privileged tools for social intervention because they involve individuals in artistic processes and allow for the generation of an internal individual and external collective awareness” (P1).

Given that art is an instrument of individual training and collective empowerment, it also drives social justice by providing conditions for social change and improving people's quality of life.

The alliance between the various artistic expressions and Social Work is based, according to the participants, on the sharing of principles and purposes between both disciplines. “Both art and Social Work share the same mission” (P4), supported by other interviewees (P1 and P6). This implies that both disciplines share a common starting point—the reality of people—transforming their world, fostering emancipation, citizenship, autonomy, and the reflection of individuals and communities (P1 and P4).

Phases of social intervention through artistic practice in Community Social Work

The intervention process begins with the diagnosis, that is, the collection of information that will allow studying the needs of the community and thus justify the need for the project itself for the community. The second phase, the planning of the intervention, is composed of two different moments. On the one hand, what they call “resource allocation” (P1, P2, and P7), that is, the application to funding programs. Although this moment does not have great weight in the analysis, it is important to highlight it, since through conversations with the professionals it becomes evident that the financing of these projects is often based on the existence of a financing program in this area, which justifies the importance of the application. But this phase also includes the “participation” element, mentioned by all the interviewees, or as some call it, “community assemblies” (P1 and P3). It is at this moment that people are mobilized, making the project known to the community and essentially dividing into three moments: 1) Through collective consultation in which people from the community are invited to participate and be an active voice to respond to the needs of the territory; 2) through the community assemblies of association, where the project is made known to local partners (P2, P3, and P7); and 3) through individual assemblies, giving a greater focus to the subject of intervention (P2 and P6). Participation is a key element of the projects, “the first objective of the project was participation. It was to mobilize people, and for that to happen, we always organized community assemblies, that is, people were called to participate” (P3). And although participation has a special emphasis in this phase, it is not absent throughout the development of the project, “in the course of the activity there is space for the acceptance of constructive ideas always in line with the main objective of the activity” (P5). The “execution of the intervention,” which constitutes the third phase, is divided into the “exploratory axis” (P1) and the “artistic axis” (P1), with the “exploratory axis” presenting the most evidence, which can be explained by the fact that the arts are not worked directly by these professionals, but by a multidisciplinary team trained in the matter. However, it is evident that this is worked in the same way, as they are social interventions supported by artistic practices. The two axes worked simultaneously, without separation. Although it is not the social worker who works directly on the “artistic axis,” both are worked on with the aim of achieving social objectives. In other words, the professionals from both fields collaborate to generate a positive impact on the community and its territory. Finally, the “closure” (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, and P7) occurs, which symbolizes above all the dissemination, the “sharing of results” (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6) of what happened in the project, that is, the final product that often takes the form of the “moment of exhibition” (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P7), whether through a documentary, a newspaper, an exhibition, a book, or other media.

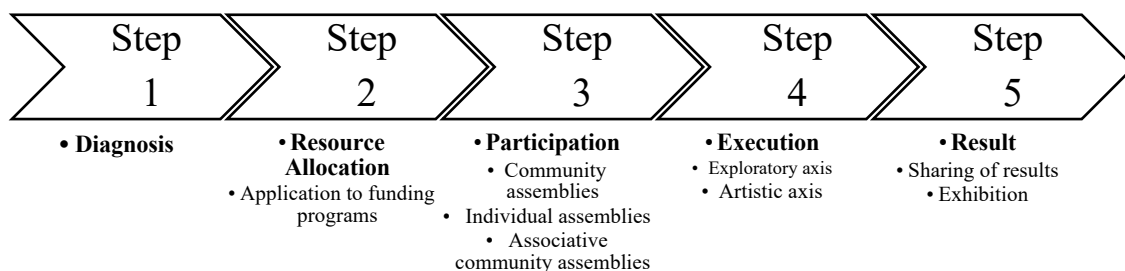


Figure 5. Phases identified by intervention professionals for using the arts (Own elaboration based on Domingues, 2016)

Discussion of the Results

We observe that these results are the fruit of a wide range of social interventions based on various types of artistic interventions, with a focus on the community, in different social contexts, and with different target audiences. As observed throughout the research, we address an indissoluble triad composed of 1) the subject of intervention/community; 2) the professionals, encompassing both social workers and artists; and 3) the artistic practice in the community development of Social Work.

The subject of intervention and their personal context are the central axis and the engine of all the work carried out. That is, for the success of the intervention, the realities and needs of the subjects of intervention must be considered. If this is not considered, there is a risk of biasing the entire project.

Furthermore, the importance of their participation in the intervention is emphasized so that they can commit to their own personal development. That is, they must have an active participation and a commitment to the intervention carried out to achieve a positive result. This personal development will be achieved essentially through training and empowerment, and not necessarily by the final works carried out using art, whether visual arts, dance, or theater.

This is a clearly defined idea in recent studies and observed in this research, where the objective is not to turn these people into artists, but, through the arts, to promote their involvement in the reconstruction processes. Therefore, art is conceived as a tool for social change. This is a notion that must be transmitted with firmness so that the professionals of the area do not deviate from this objective.

This vision coincides with the study of Konrad (2019), which presents a perspective on the ethics, objectives, and conflicting interests that the arts can bring to the area. This research took special care with these issues. As also corroborated by Riggs & Pulla (2014), social workers use the arts using political, relational, and psychosocial competencies, as well as dimensions of human dignity and its value, integrity, social justice,

and service to humanity. Essentially, it is the values of human dignity, service to humanity, and social justice that will define the professional action oriented to practice. In addition, they will allow intervention in the community, effectively considering issues of training and empowerment; this can also be achieved by using the person-in-context paradigm of Huss & Sela-Amit (2018).

Therefore, care must be taken with the dimensions worked on and the personal interpretation of the subjects must be considered so that art does not become “a tool of oppression between the interactions of the social worker and the subject of intervention” (Silva, 2022:7).

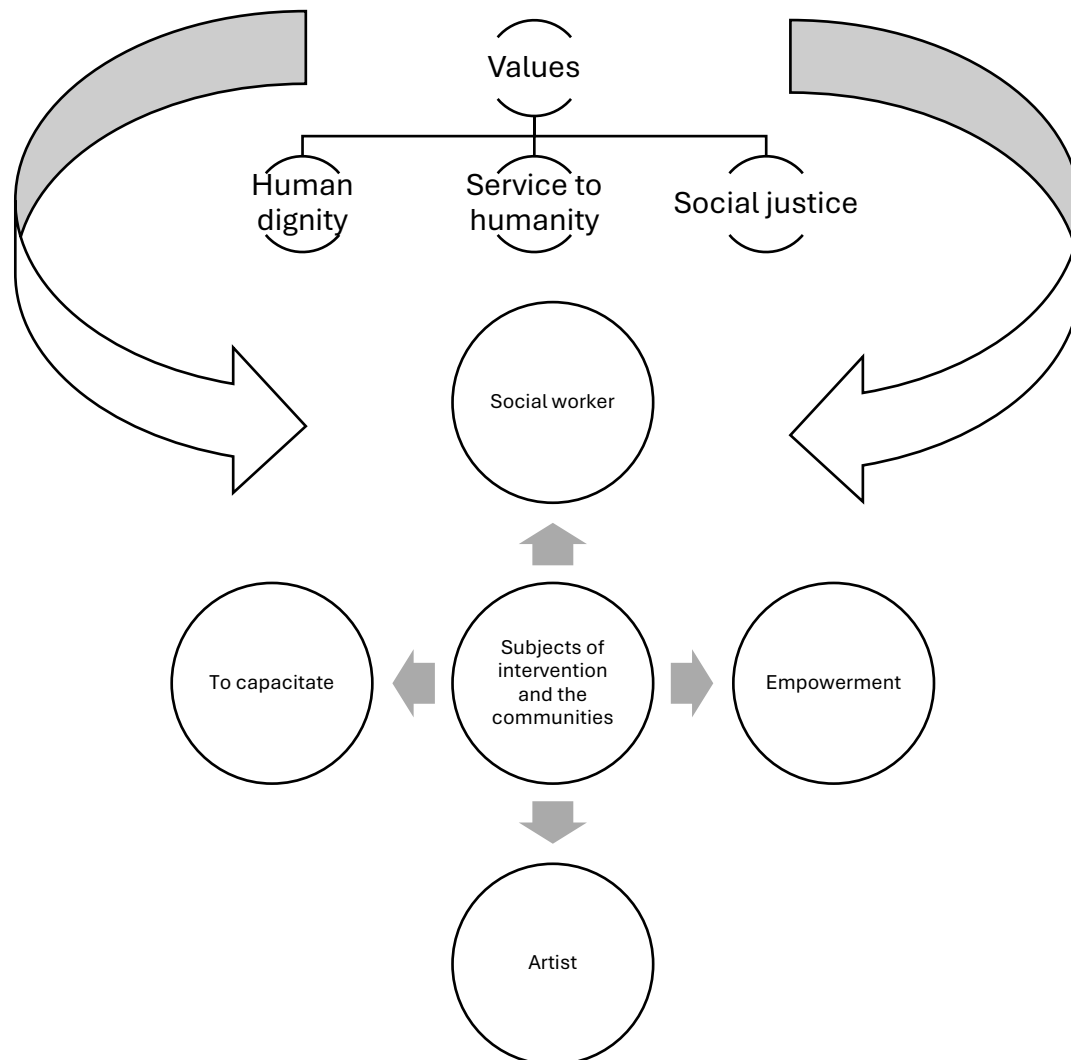


Figure 6. Key components for the practice of art in community development Social Work (Own elaboration)

Furthermore, there must be interdisciplinary collaboration with the artists who will apply their knowledge to the intervention. This is an idea that has not been developed exhaustively; however, the results of this research show that the union of these two spheres of knowledge enriches the success of the interventions, each using strategies and techniques based on different experiences and knowledge. This means that the professionals of the social area must allow this collaboration to enhance the results and, above all, to respond to a limitation mentioned by most of the professionals: the perception of their lack of specific training in arts.

With this, it is possible to draw a parallel between social worker and artist versus Social Work and art. Taking into account that they are different areas and professionals, to reach a favorable result for the subjects of intervention/community, it is necessary to converge the purposes of these areas, highlighting the common points: individual change and transformation, resilience, communication, training, and empowerment (Heinonen et al. cited in Silva, 2022). This convergence positions art as a useful and pertinent tool for Social Work. Therefore, these professionals need to work together so that each one contributes an element that the other does not have and so that these interventions prosper and the methodological proposal is made effective.

This proposal, in fact, was the starting point for this investigation. The studies pointed to an inadequacy of social workers in the use of this type of practice, considering the lack of knowledge (Flynn & Sela-Amit, 2019) and the scarce dissemination provided by teaching and education establishments (Silva, 2022).

To counteract this and transmit new updated knowledge to the professionals of the area (APSS, 2000), a proposal was created based on the investigation and on Domingues (2016), which should be contrasted in

future studies, of an intervention model/method divided essentially into four interconnected phases/stages: diagnosis, planning, action, and closure.

The diagnosis is the nuclear moment in the practice of Social Work and is the phase by which the social worker will justify the decision-making of the project. Therefore, they must understand the problems and needs of the community by collecting data. This data collection can be theoretical, with research in the field, or practical, through interviews or direct observation. After a critical analysis of the current situation where the information is collected, analyzed, and evaluated, the planning is developed (Pena, 2012).

The planning establishes a plan with specific actions that respond to the objectives of the project. It is in this phase/stage where the need to allocate resources arises by requesting funding programs. This occurs with the programs and public initiatives that will allow for greater visibility and a sense of security for the continuity of the project. In addition, the participation factor is fundamental, as it enhances the success of the intervention and creates a sense of belonging, promoting group and community work (Silva, 2022).

This participation is tripartite between the collective consultation, the community assemblies of association, and the individual ones. In the collective consultation, the social worker organizes meetings open to the public to listen to the needs of the subjects of intervention. In the community assemblies of association, the project is presented for dissemination purposes to local partners and the possibility of collaboration and mutual support. Finally, individual consultations allow for more personalized conversations between the professional and the subject of intervention to respond to more particular needs.

The action is the stage/phase in which what was planned is concretized. Therefore, the social worker and the artist—collaboration between the multidisciplinary team—implement activities, both on the social axis with the particularities of the area, and on the artistic axis, with the use of artistic practices. Finally, this methodological proposal culminates with the phase of the closure. This is the opportunity to evaluate all the work done and share the results with the community, both the social aspects of the intervention and the products created by the subjects of intervention. This means that the social worker must present to the public programs/initiatives and to the local partners reports of the project with the results and the impact of the intervention. This presentation must also be disseminated to the community; however, the most important thing is to highlight the results through a “documentary, newspaper, exhibition, book, or other media” exhibition (Silva, 2022:26).

Throughout the investigation, it was possible to show a panorama of what the studies point out about the use of art in Social Service and to understand what the highlighted points are in current research and the lines followed. Although the historical context is favorable, this relationship has not been strengthened due to the lack of its own methodology. However, observing the Portuguese case, art can become an important tool/instrument for communities. There are Portuguese projects that prove these useful results for the area and that show what the theory indicates: art brings emancipation and empowerment to the subjects of intervention and, consequently, to the communities when seen from its social sphere and not from the aesthetic side (Huss & Bos, 2018).

In light of the results, we know that there are five main functions of social workers for this practice, namely: (1) awareness and influence; (2) psychosocial intervention and training; (3) articulation and referral; (4) relationship with the subject of intervention (and their entire community); and (5) teamwork. In addition, they have a great responsibility throughout the entire project for its continuity.

This means that, with all these dimensions, the professional does not need to assume the “double role,” since “the role of the professional is more about ‘mobilizing resources’ (P3) and ‘dynamizing the process’ (P3), that is, they will mediate situations and be an ‘agitator of the action’ (P3), collaborating with the artists and their competencies, for the benefit of the intervention and the work with the community and its people (P3)” (Silva, 2022:36).

However, it is important that teaching establishments create a solid study plan and include curricular units on art to ensure that knowledge about this area continues to be transmitted to future professionals.

Conclusions

The main objective of this investigation was to understand the relationship between art and Community Social Work to propose a methodological basis that employs the arts as a tool for emancipation and empowerment for the subjects of intervention. The results show that the arts, when used from a social perspective, allow for the promotion of individual and community training and empowerment and stimulate social justice. They are especially useful when used in issues such as human rights, poverty, inequality, and oppression (Heinonen et al, 2018).

Furthermore, the investigation managed to identify the main elements that constitute the intervention when using the arts in Social Work. We speak about the subject of intervention/community, the professionals, and artistic practice.

When speaking about the subject of intervention/community, it must be taken into account that the intervention must be focused on their realities and needs to ensure good results; the professionals, highlighting the social workers and artists, must do a multidisciplinary work, each with their specificities and ensuring that the information is shared; the artistic practice is employed by these professionals taking into account the personal context of the subject of intervention/community.

Beyond its practical implications, these results provide a substantive theoretical contribution to Community Social Work. The methodological proposal of diagnosis, planning, action, and closure not only operationalizes the “artistic practice in Community Social Work” described by Riggs & Pulla (2014) but also provides it

with a systematic and replicable structure that until now represented a gap in the field. Likewise, the research empirically validates the centrality of the “person-in-context” paradigm (Huss & Sela-Amit, 2018), by demonstrating that the success of artistic interventions depends intrinsically on the active participation and respect for the sociocultural context of the individuals. In this way, the study argues that the integration of art in Social Work is not only an instrumental innovation, but a theoretical deepening that enriches the concepts of empowerment and social justice.

Furthermore, based on the analysis carried out on the professionals and their projects, a final method/ methodology proposal was reached on the arts in community social intervention. This methodology will be divided into four phases/stages: diagnosis, planning, action, and closure. This methodological proposal can be a valuable instrument to be used by the professionals of the area to achieve involvement and develop more social interventions and continue collaborating, with an active participation, for a more just and egalitarian society (APSS, 2000).

For the future, we recommend new studies that continue to deepen this field of investigation. This is a path that can follow three ways: 1) application of the methodological proposal to verify its effectiveness; 2) explore other fields that were not worked on and that present concrete specificities, such as teaching establishments, social services, and health; and, 3) studies focused on the creation of didactic resources for a cohesive basis aimed at knowledge.

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