

AIEMS: Italian Association for Systemic Epistemology and Methodology

Ecology of Health Laboratory

The **Ecology of Health Laboratory (L.E.S**, in English **H.E.L**) originates in the context of AIEMS's activities. It is constituted by an Interdisciplinary Co-ordination Group, operating in Rome, and by a number of Scientific Consultants all over the country. Its purpose is to encourage processes of health promotion in the frame of systemic, also considering the scientific and political aspects of such commitment.

MANIFESTO 2018

Health is not simply a lack of illness, nor the opposite of illness, and as a subject matter of research and intervention does not belong solely to biomedical sciences. Health is first of all an experience, and has to do with the body, but not only with it. Furthermore, it has to do with the internal coherence of a system (a person, a society, an environment), and with the construction of meaning: the system has to be sufficiently flexible to hold on such coherence and meaning in time.

Health is always located and defined in a cultural and social context. It develops, besides, in situations where people can express their capacities and potentialities, and where it is possible to perceive a sense of equity, both in terms of rights and of possible and actually accessible opportunities.

Health is engendered by learning, creativity, projects design, transformation and beauty, and, round in a circle, engenders them.

The experience of health, moreover, is fostered if uncertainty and limits are acknowledged and accepted as constitutive and inescapable aspects of human life, so as illness and death.

Health is a special rhythm between inside and outside, between the individual and the environment. This implies taking care of oneself and, at the same time, of one's affiliations, of interpersonal relationships and of the connections with the wider environment in all its different forms. .

A human being experiences health when feeling her/himself as a living organism in a lively world.

Health, however, cannot arise if hindering contextual conditions are not overcome.

1 - Unemployment and bad quality jobs, social inequalities and poverty, social fragmentation and isolation, increasing recurrent conflicts and resentment at micro and macro level.

2 - Unregulated globalization, cynicism of financial markets, widespread corruption and poor concern towards common goods, progressive erosion of individual and collective sense of responsibility.

3 - Cultural poverty (lacking tools to understand one's life context and to operate in it), alienation from one's needs, commodification of life, communication ruled and 'polluted' by commercial purposes, unbridled consumerism.

4 - Disconnected from nature, unsustainable energy policies, global warming and environmental pollution, abandoning of rural areas with loss of traditions, progressive suppression of biodiversity, animals' suffering.

5 - Production of unhealthy food obtained from intensive farming and breeding, causing big environmental impact. Too poor or excessive or unbalanced nourishing.

6 - Technological drift and changes in communication, with overload of messages and over-stimulation (being connected is not the same as communicating). Alienation from the bodily experience, from the contact with one's emotions "*here and now*".

7 - Progressive demolition of welfare sanitary and assistance systems, while a socio-cultural trend towards medicalisation of life prevails, fostered by strong economic interests. Crisis of educational institutions and practices, where the conceptual is overestimated to detriment of the emotional education and of the intuitive, emotional and collaborative dimensions which encourage a not standardize approach to learning.

In a systemic perspective these 7 points are interlaced, and even actions of apparently small moment can produce meaningful and wide changes, engendering health. This is possible starting from different contexts (working, learning, family's, diet, productive contexts etc.)

Besides, in a systemic perspective, everybody's health is linked to other's health, and viceversa.

The Laboratory's life.

The Ecology of Health Laboratory meets in Rome at least fortnightly, to develop a series of activities led by the members of the Co-ordination Group and by its Scientific Consultants.

Values

Here follow some of the values upon which E.H. L.' s activities hinge: systemic thinking, inter- disciplinary, critical thinking, pragmatism, voluntary work, conviviality, care, participation, independence, patience, curiosity, as well as the detection, acknowledgement and turning to account differences (biologic, psychological, cultural, etc.).

This very same Manifesto has been constructed through a practice of sharing, transparent participation, co-construction and reflectiveness, striving to constantly maintain the above mentioned values.

Method

Among the devices and methodological aspects adopted in the E. H. L. as far as now there are:

1. Promoting 'in presence' interpersonal relationships (vis à vis group meetings)
2. Study of the many specific disciplinary areas related to health
3. Sharing knowledge to help develop an interdisciplinary sight and to identify connections *Condividere conoscenze che aiutano a sviluppare uno sguardo interdisciplinare e a riconoscere le connessioni*
4. Giving value to subjectivity (exploring our own biographies looking for health experiences and detecting recurrent-redundant elements)
5. Enhancing our body as a mean of knowledge
6. Integration of (implicit) subjective knowledge with disciplinary (explicit) knowledge related to health
7. Identifying and promoting practices oriented to health
8. Building knowledge in a shared and participated style
9. Setting up and taking care of a network of professionals, scholars, consultants and amateurs, enabling to foster a complex approach to health

As regards the above mentioned devices and methodological elements , we already began to experience that, out of acting in such a way, a relational well-being can develop in time, rich of reciprocal trust, familiarity, conviviality and friendship.

Perspectives

The Ecology of Health Laboratory intends to study and to promote health according to the systemic, and therefore inter-disciplinary approach, that informs and inspires this Manifesto 2018. In the description the Manifesto proposes health turns out to be a positive experience depending on complex, not completely foreseeable nor controllable dynamics, which also are still partially unknown. What the Manifesto wishes to highlight, however, is the concept that health comes into being as propriety of an interactive network of processes which take place at many different levels (biologic, psychological, social, cultural, economic, environmental).The stated theoretical underpinning has obvious consequences at a practical level.

In the bio-medical area, for instance, this means re-thinking the knowledge and the practices of medical prevention in a systemic perspective, integrating them with autogenesis ones, and connecting them to the many other disciplines and methods of intervention implicated in health. The point, therefore, is to construct a new, more effective and not only medicine- centered model of health promotion

Finally the Laboratory intends to set up in time a list of Health Systemic Indicators.

Our activities are addressed both to specific groups and to citizenry, opening dialogues aimed at activating paths towards an ecology of health. Such dialogues are going to take the forms the Laboratory will progressively develop. Besides the

practical activities already experienced within the Coordination Group (i.e. est auto-biographic and philosophical practices, meditation as awareness of one's own actions and contribution to personal development -, visiting agri-ecological farms, naturalistic promenades, thematic seminars, curating the section *Towards an ecology of health* based in the webradio RADIO32, etc.) other activities will possibly be the followings: research projects, setting up itineraries of health promotion, support, in a systemic perspective, to already active projects aimed at well-being, constructing guidance documents and reports, study- holiday, publications, meetings and conferences, and the establishment of a Documentation Center.

Moreover, the E.H.L is going to start an Ecology of Health Popular School (S.P.E.S.) aimed at dialoguing with citizenry through participated actions of training and sensitization.

This Manifesto must be considered as an *in progress* document, to be annually revised and developed according to the EHL's evolution.

Wayfarer, there is no way./

A path is made by walking it.

Antonio Machado

“*Campos de Castilla, Extracto de Proverbios y Cantares*”, 1912

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