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DPU WORKING PAPER NO. 178

Special Issue on The Capability Approach  
in Development Planning and Urban Design

## ‘Participatory Capabilities’ in Development Practice

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Graphics and layout: Luz Navarro, Paola Fuentes and Francisco Vergara.



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# ‘Participatory Capabilities’ in Development Practice

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May 2015

ISSN 1474-3280

**Abstract.** Participatory methods have been strongly criticised by being too context specific and localised; by being instrumental to predetermined objectives, rather than an end in themselves; by addressing the manifestation of poverty rather than the underlying causes of deprivation; by reproducing local power relations, rather than critically deconstructing discriminatory practices; by being a “tyranny” rather than transformative (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The critiques call for a theoretical framework that can safeguard the original radical roots of participatory methods (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). This article ar-

gues that the capability approach can complement participatory methods by providing the theoretical underpinnings needed to assess participation as an end in itself. With the objective to assess the complementary aspects of the capability approach and participatory methods, this paper expands on the concept of “participatory capabilities” to unfold local residents’ choice, ability and opportunity to engage in participatory processes. The paper proposes a framework for the application of participatory methods through a capability approach in a way that unfolds its limitations as well as opportunities for transformative change.



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## 1. Introduction

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The role and concept of participation is at the crux of current development thinking and practice. Participation has been advocated through various discourses and by a diverse spectrum of interests and intentions. Some articulate participation from an apolitical and pragmatic perspective: better involvement of ‘beneficiaries’ in development projects and initiatives would lead to responsive solutions, addressing people’s diverse needs and aspirations. Others have used cost-benefit analysis to argue that participation is operational as a mechanism to reduce the expenditure of programmes by engaging local communities in the implementation and maintenance of interventions. Such perspective follows by arguing that a sense of ownership over interventions would logically motivate the continued maintenance and cultivation of project outputs.

As already explored in existent literature, this apolitical and instrumental approach to participation has led to a series of problematic applications of participatory methodologies, often reproducing processes of exploitation and perpetuating the causes of injustices. However, rather than focusing on such instrumental role of participation for project effectiveness, the original motivations for bringing participation to the heart of the development process have been to enable individual, collective and structural processes of empowerment.

Such perspective on participation resonates with the underlying values associated with concepts of freedom put forward by Amartya Sen and further developed through the capability approach. On the one hand, the capability approach is concerned with personal and societal transformation. Freedom is defined as the choice, ability and opportunity people have to pursue their aspirations (Sen, 1999). Therefore, the capability approach is precisely interested in revealing both the processes that shape what people value and the enabling/constraining environments that influence the freedom to pursue such values. At the core of such a concept of freedom is the notion of agency comprising the ability of individuals and collectives to act upon what is valued.

This article argues that the capability approach is a comprehensive theoretical framework that can contribute to

the elaboration of methodologies and approaches seated in line with the original Freirian tradition of participation thus focusing on how people “gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures” (Freire, 1997).

Meanwhile, this article argues in parallel that the capability approach can also enhance its information space by incorporating participatory methodologies. While often it is stated that the capability approach puts “people at the centre of development” to see “people as agents of change”, people’s capabilities are pursued, studied and reported frequently without such participation from the poor. Therefore this article argues that there are complementary aspects between the capability approach and participatory methods. On one hand participatory tools can democratise the application of the capability approach, meanwhile Amartya Sen’s concepts of freedom can provide a comprehensive framework to guide and safeguard the transformative roots of participatory approach.

With the objective to assess these complementary aspect between the capability approach and participatory methods, this paper expands on the concept of “participatory capabilities” to propose a framework for the application of participatory methods through a capability approach perspective in a way that unfolds both the limitations and opportunities for transformative change of the participatory initiative. After the introduction, the paper compares the participatory literature with that of the capability approach, revealing similarities, limitations and points of symbiosis between both approaches. Afterward, the article will focus on how participation has been addressed with further depth in the capability approach literature. In the fourth chapter of the paper, the participatory capabilities framework is introduced. The framework is further elaborated by an analysis of mechanisms to identify dimensions of participation building on Drèze and Sen’s (2002) notions of democratic ideals, institutions and practice. Finally, procedural recommendations on the application of the framework are examined by focusing on participation as a collaborative learning process and an explicit incorporation of debates on guiding principles on deliberation.

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## 2. Participation and the capability approach: a comparison

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Since the 1970s, many different participatory approaches to research, policy-making and planning have been proposed. However it has only been since the 1990s that participatory methods have entered the development mainstream (Brock and McGee, 2002). Participation became a buzzword from studies on poor people's perspectives on policy making implemented through development projects.

According to Leal (2007), the radical roots of participatory methods based on Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy did not aim for encouraging development or alleviating poverty, "but the transformation of the cultural, political, and economic structures which reproduce poverty and marginalisation". It has been through the work of Chambers (1997) that participatory methods have taken a more operational form and become subsumed into the mainstream of NGO and international development agency practices. A series of methodological packages have been elaborated, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). According to Chambers (1997) "PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate" (1997, p.102).

While being developed through different academic streams, the capability approach and participatory methods share much common ground, resembling each other theoretically while also remaining the target of joint criticism.

### 2.1 The Similarities

Both the capability approach and participatory methods literature share a common critique of the utilitarian and income-led perception of poverty. Chambers (1997) argues that "deprivation as poor people perceive it has many dimensions, including not only lack of income and wealth, but also social inferiority, physical weakness, disability and sickness, vulnerability, physical and social isolation, powerlessness, and humiliation" (Chambers, 1997, p.45). Shaffer (2002) argues that analysis of poverty through participatory approaches contributes to quantitative studies by capturing the complexities and underlying dynamics of poverty. Meanwhile Sen's (1999a) main argument for the expansion of the concept of development has been to break away from the utilitarian and

income-led definition of poverty, thereby capturing the inherent complexity and multidimensionality of poverty. Reflection on the process of the production of knowledge is also presented in both bodies of literature. The Enlightenment epistemology that defends objectivity and the superiority of technocrats is criticised, as both literatures relate to Aristotle's perception of the poor as active members in the process of change. Freire (1997), a much quoted author by capability approach academics as well as practitioners of participatory approaches, argues that people who are the focus of research have a universal right to participate in the knowledge produced by that research. "In this process, people rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures. This is an authentic power for liberation that ultimately destroys a passive awaiting of fate" (Freire, 1997, p.xi).

Both types of literature emphasise the need to contextualise the concept of poverty, thus unfolding the local dynamics embedded in the social reality of each particular case-study. Sen (1999) argues for the fundamental importance of public debate, public scrutiny, and deliberate participation in the process of selecting the dimensions of poverty. Meanwhile, Brock (2002) argues that participatory approaches can capture the "diverse ways of knowing poverty" and "that understanding these better can contribute to improvements both in content and process of poverty reduction policy" (2002, p.2).

### 2.2 The Limitations

While sharing common theoretical underpinnings, participatory methods and the capability approach have received similar criticisms. Neither body of literature has reached a consensus on the targeted participants of their analysis: are evaluations based on the perspectives of individuals, groups or both? While the capability approach literature has been criticised as being too individualistic (Deneulin, 2005), recent applications of participatory methods have also been criticised by focusing on the 'empowerment' of individuals while moving away from their collective traditions. "As 'empowerment' has become a buzzword in development, as essential objective of projects, its [participatory approach to development] radical, challenging and transformational edge has been lost. The concept of action has become individualized, empowerment depoliticized" (Cleaver, 2001, p.37).

Another critique made of both approaches is that they propose local solutions to global problems, thus not tackling structural inequalities. Gore (2000) refers to the capability approach process as the partial globalisation of development policy, providing local solutions to global problems. Furthermore Sen's writings have been criticised for focusing mostly on the immediate causes of poverty and neglecting its underlying social processes (Patanaiik, 1998). Meanwhile, critiques of participatory methods have argued that their localised and problem solving application captures merely the manifestation of poverty and "ignores the structural and material constraints of globalized capitalism" (Mohan, 2001, p.156). As Cooke and Kothari (2001) highlight, participatory methods' "emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro level inequalities and injustices" (2001, p.14).

Meanwhile both approaches have been criticised as being ahistorical, and not providing a sufficient analysis of the complexities of power and power relations. The criticisms of Gore (2000) on the capability approach argue that the focus on local knowledge overshadows a deeper analysis based in long-term sequences and patterns of economic and social change. Meanwhile, according to Mohan (2001), participatory approaches perceive local knowledge to be undermined by the societal relation of power, which is bifurcated between the holders of power and the subjects of power, the macro/micro, central/marginal, powerful/powerless. Mohan (2001) argues that this dichotomy of participatory approaches limits the understanding of power as a social and political process by encouraging a perception based on materialistic realities. "Thus participatory approaches can unearth who gets what, when and where, but not necessarily the processes by which this happens or the ways in which knowledge produced through participatory techniques is a normalized one that reflects and articulates wider power relations in society" (2001, p.141).

The critiques of participatory methods have analysed the many ways that power relations influence development analysis based on participation. Cooke (2001) uses social psychology to analyse the subtle ways in which groups make decisions to demonstrate the less visible ways that participation is used as an instrument of control and maintenance of the status quo or even further polarisation through the production of consensus. According to Mohan (2001), "the danger from a policy point of view is that the actions based on consensus may in fact further empower the powerful vested interests that manipulated the research in the first place" (2001, p.160). Finally, Mosse (2001) also argues that the main limitation of participatory methods is their potential to be used as a means of restricting and controlling the analysis of development policies: "Far from being continually challenged, prevailing preconceptions are confirmed, options narrowed, information flows into a project restricted, in a system that is increasingly controllable and closed" (Mosse, 2001, p.25).

## 2.3 Complementarities

Due to the limitations reviewed above, Cornwall (2000) and Cleaver (2001) argue that some recent applications of participatory approaches in the development mainstream fall short of their original intention. Participation is sometimes used merely as a tool for achieving pre-set objectives and not as a process to empower groups and individuals to take leadership, envision their futures, and improve their lives (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Therefore Cleaver (2001) argues that participatory methods need to be complemented by a theory that explores the nature of people's lives and the relations between the multiple dimensions of well-being: "there is a need to conceptualize participatory approaches more broadly, for more complex analyses of the linkages between intervention, participation and empowerment" (2001, p.38). The capability approach contributes to participatory literature by providing this comprehensive and flexible theory focusing on what a good life should comprise while capturing multiple, complex and dynamic aspects of poverty.

While Hickey and Mohan (2004) also argue that "participation must be ideologically explicit and tied to a coherent theory of development" (2004, p.12), they propose radical citizenship as the theoretical framework that can safeguard participation from its potential populist application. Their recommendation also stresses the need to focus on agency and structure, thus revealing relations of power locally and underlying processes reproducing social injustices. The focus on citizenship takes a political perspective in participation to highlight the importance of political rights on the process of development. On one hand this is the strength of this approach, contributing for political change in the thinking and practice of development. On the other hand, it falls short on the proposition of an operational approach to development that can generate practices and policies beyond the political arena.

Therefore, by focusing on quality of life, the capability approach can potentially contribute to the limitation of the radical citizenship perspective in safeguarding participation. The capability approach focuses on agency and, as does the radical citizenship approach, questions the universalistic conceptualisation of development. As in other rights-based approaches, participation is seen as instrumental and intrinsic to the process of development. Participation is a means to the identification of functionings and understanding the processes in the capability space (see Frediani, 2010), and at the same time, it is an aspiration in itself. The success of participation is therefore not merely measured in relation to the efficiency to the implementation of a project or research, but most importantly, to the impact on agency of individuals and groups.

### 3. Participation within the capability approach literature

The concept of participation has been linked to the concept of capabilities from various angles (UNDP, 2002; Sen, 1999b; Dreze and Sen, 2002; Deneulin, 2009; and Crocker, 2008). To a lesser extent participatory methods have been linked to Amartya Sen's concepts, apart from Alkire (2002) and Crocker (2008). Therefore, there has been limited work on participation as a tool to the implementation of the capability approach for evaluative or planning purposes. This third section of the paper reviews discussion on the following issues related to participation in the capability approach literature that will be relevant to the elaboration of the participatory capabilities framework: participation when researching capabilities; and participation and adaptive preferences.

#### 3.1 Participation and researching capabilities

Crocker (2006, 2008) and Alkire (2002) argue that Sen acknowledges participatory approaches as a principal process by which many evaluative issues may be resolved. As Sen (1999a) states:

*"Political and civil rights, especially those related to the guaranteeing of open discussion, debate, criticism, and dissent, are central to the process*

*of generating informed and considered choices. These processes are crucial to the formation of values and priorities, and we cannot, in general, take preferences as given independently of public discussion, that is, irrespective of whether open interchange and debate are permitted or not"* (1999, p.253).

Crocker (2006) develops the links between participation and the capability approach by arguing that the theory of deliberative democracy offers "a principled account of the processes groups employ to decide certain questions and form their values" (2006, p.4). Alkire (2007) proposes five mechanisms to identify capabilities and poverty dimensions and among them the role of participation is acknowledged (see Table 3.1).

Furthermore, Alkire (2002) argues that participatory approaches and Sen's capability approach have four major issues in common: they aim at obtaining outcomes that people value while empowering participants; they perceive the issue of 'who decides' as equally important to 'what is decided'; they recognise that the process might not lead to the best choice, but that discussion is an effective means of separating the 'better' from 'worse' choices; and reasoned deliberation is supported for consideration of advantage and interpersonal comparisons. Alkire (2002) also lists the benefits of applying

**Table 3.1.** Identifying Capabilities and Dimensions of Poverty. Source: Alkire, 2007, p.7

1- Existing data or convention	based on data or conventions that are taken to be authoritative, such as the Human Development Index
2- Normative Assumptions	based on informed guesses of researchers or transparent and justified use of normative assumptions such as Maslow or Nussbaum's
3- Public 'consensus'	based on a legitimate consensus-building processes and subject to participatory evaluations
4- On-going deliberative participatory processes	based on people's values captured through group discussions and participatory analysis
5- Empirical evidence regarding people's values	based on expert analysis of people's values from empirica

the capability approach through participatory methods: it lowers implementation costs; it generates greater technical success due to access to local information; it supports sustainability as communities continue improvements after the cessation of external funding; it encourages empowerment and self-determination as participants set their own objectives; and it is sensitive to local cultural values because people influence the initiatives in all stages.

### 3.2 Capability: participation and adaptive preferences

Alkire (2002) argues that Sen does not directly support participatory methods because he would have to incorporate a whole body of literature on the decision making process, therefore moving away from the economic discipline. Nevertheless, Comim and Teschl (2004) have contributed to Sen's capability approach by exploring the psychological aspects of the decision making process. As participatory approaches would involve the use of subjective information, people's ability to choose could be compromised by their adverse situations. Sen (1999a) has identified such a process as adaptive preference. This process would be especially relevant when studying communities under high levels of deprivation. Such argument of adaptive preference could be used to discredit qualitative information and justify the use of merely objective information, thus keeping the capability approach within the field of development economics to develop indicators of agency or quality of life. Nevertheless, Sen (2005) does mention a process to overcome adaptive preference based on the writings of Adam Smith ([1759] 1976) on moral reasoning:

*We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgement concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural situation, and endeavour to view them as at a certain distance from us* ([1759] 1976, p.110).

While Sen does not elaborate further on such process, Biggeri et al. (2006) apply a similar argument to overcome the process of adaptive preferences. According to Biggeri et al. (2006), evidence from his research on children shows that when asking them about their personal quality of life, children expanded upon issues that were immediate to their reality. However, when asked about the quality of life of children in general, respondents provided much broader comments, expanding upon all dimensions of quality of life identified by existent conventions on this, but also revealing new ones, such as "love and care".

Meanwhile Comim and Teschl (2004), when exploring different perspectives on adaptation, identify that in the subjective well-being literature the process of adaptation is always taking place, as people are always changing their perception of their own well-being. Comim and Teschl then argue that what constrains people's ability to evaluate their well-being is not the process of adaptation, but resignation. Furthermore, Comim and Teschl (2004) argue that the process of resignation takes place when there is a feeling of passivity, which leads to the sense of 'putting up with fate' and acceptance of the given order. Thus, communities that are under high levels of deprivation but where individuals are actively involved and engaged at the struggle for better living conditions would not be going through a process of resignation.

Furthermore, Clark (2009) recently questioned the existing evidence linking adaptation and lowering of aspirations. According to Clark (2009), people and communities do not systematically adapt to grinding poverty and deprivation. He continues by arguing that further research is still needed to understand processes of adaptation. Moreover, when adaptation occurs, it is normally raising aspirations, reflecting new possibilities. Therefore Clark concludes: "Crucially, raising aspirations to reflect previous achievements or meaningful social comparisons strengthens the case for listening to the poor. This is good news for development studies and those striving to develop a participatory version of the [capability approach]" (2009, p.33).

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## 4. Participatory capabilities: the framework

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Sen's writings show that on one hand he identifies public deliberation as a fundamental process to identify and evaluate capabilities, however, it also identifies limitations and challenges that such a process presents. As Alkire (2002) identifies, Sen does not propose a set of procedures or norms by which deliberation should take place to address the limitations articulated. Therefore, the motivation of this section of the article is to build on the work from Crocker (2008) and Alkire (2002) to contribute in building a framework that can facilitate the application and examination of participatory methods through a capability approach perspective.

By applying the capability approach conceptual framework to the examination of participation one would be able to assess individuals' and/or groups' choice, ability and opportunity to achieve a set of participatory goals associated to a certain deliberative exercise. Participatory capability is therefore the freedom of individuals/groups to achieve such dimensions of participation. This article will turn now to further elaboration of this framework for the evaluation of deliberation by: reviewing the background to the framework and past uses of the term; the explanation of its basic elements; and procedural considerations when applying the framework.

### 4.1 Background to the framework

In *Commodities and Capabilities*, Sen (1999c) analyses the use of commodities, arguing that they should be evaluated not merely according to what they *are*, but in terms of what they *do*. Therefore, the example of a bicycle is presented and Sen argues that by owning a bicycle one will not necessarily use it and transform it into an achieved functioning. There will be factors related to the environment, society, and one's personal capacity that will be shaping one's ability and opportunity to use such a commodity. Robeyns (2003) calls such elements "*conversion factors*", which affect the process of realising the things one values. Frediani (2010) articulates how such framework can be used in the field of development planning. On one hand it could be used for the investigation of a certain commodity and its functions to the achievement of dimensions of a

good life, however the same framework has also been applied to the investigation of a specific dimension of well-being, such as housing (Frediani, 2007). In this latter approach, one would first focus on the identification of dimensions of housing in a given context, and then evaluate how commodities (such as ones implemented by a housing programme) would be used for the achievement of identified housing aspirations. In such a case, "housing capabilities" are constituted by the combination of the choice, ability and opportunity of residents to achieve a certain set of prioritised housing aspirations. For example in a newly built housing estate programme where residents were relocated from nearby stilts, one could ask: what have been the different housing choices offered to residents? How are residents appropriating the space in the new estate in relation to the realisation of their housing aspirations? How are different conversion factors influencing the achievement of such aspirations in the new estate?

Using a similar process, the capability approach conceptual framework can be used in the assessment of a less tangible resource, such as one or a set of deliberation exercises. It is in such a context that the term "participatory capabilities" is used in this article. Such term has already been used by Sen (1999a) and expanded by Hodgett (2009) when investigating capabilities in Northern Ireland. Hodgett uses the term of "participatory capabilities" to examine the role of the voluntary sector in policy-making, in a context dominated by violence and distrust. Hodgett unpacks in detail the role of culture in the implementation of a European Union Community Infrastructure programme. This article aims to continue the exploration of such concept, by focusing on the process of applying the capability approach to the analysis of the type of participation implemented by a given programme. While being a mechanism for monitoring and evaluation, the framework also hopes to support the planning and elaboration of participatory initiatives. Thus, participatory capabilities are understood as people's choices, abilities and opportunities to engage in a process of participation that is driven by a goal of deepening democratic practices as well as individual/collective critical awareness. Participation through such perspective is recognised as both a means and an end.

## 5. Participatory capabilities: the dimensions of participation

As many authors have already argued, one of the major limitations of the application of participatory methods has been that participation has been considered merely an instrument in the acquisition of predetermined objectives. Participation has been often justified as a means to reduce costs of development programmes; once participation became too expensive, it is ruled out from the programme on financial grounds. Sen argues that participation not only has an instrumental value, but it is also intrinsic to a process of development:

*“Democracy is a demanding system, and not just a mechanical condition (like majority rule) taken in isolation”* (Sen, 1999b, :pp. 9-10).

In similar lines, Friedmann (1992) also argues that participation needs to be taken as an end in itself, contributing to a plan of realising human rights, civic rights and human flourishing. Therefore participation is embedded in

a plan of empowerment that needs to go beyond one's back yard, and instead contribute to a process of institutional change. Participation as an end needs to move away from the trap of localism and punctual change by being part of a strategic plan towards a process of democratising democracy, as argued by Santos (2005).

Friedmann (1992), Santos (2005) and other authors from the deliberative democracy literature argue that to be transformative, the process of participation needs to account for a certain set of normative procedural characteristics. If participation is understood as an end in itself, then dimensions of participation would have to be uncovered to distinguish a transformative process of deliberation from one that perpetuates tyrannies. By applying the capability approach to the examination of participation, one is faced with a similar challenge to the application of the capability approach in the examination of quality of life: should such dimensions be identified

**Table 5.1.** Defining dimensions of participation. Duraiappah et al. (2005: 4)

Dimension	Definition
Inclusion	Inclusion of all people, or representatives of all groups who will be affected by the results of a decision or a process, such as a development project.
Equal Partnership	Equal partnership means recognizing that every person has skill, ability and initiative and has equal right to participate in the process regardless of their status.
Transparency	All participants must help to create a climate conducive to open communication and building dialogue.
Sharing Power	Authority and power must be balanced evenly between all stakeholders to avoid the domination of one party.
Sharing Responsibility	Similarly, all stakeholders have equal responsibility for decisions that are made, and each should have clear responsibilities within each process.
Empowerment	Participants with special skills should be encouraged to take responsibility for tasks within their specialty, but should also encourage others to also be involved to promote mutual learning and empowerment.
Cooperation	Cooperation is very important; sharing everybody's strength reduces everybody's weaknesses.

in the specific context where the participatory exercises are taking place, or should it be based on international consensus on what it should be obtaining?

Duraiappah et al. (2005) propose a useful list of principles of participation which can guide the deliberative process (see Figure 5.1 for definitions). Figure 5.2 illustrates how the capability approach framework could use such dimensions to assess a deliberative process. However, in Duraiappah et al. (2005) there is no discussion on how these principles came about. Meanwhile Crocker (2008) does engage in such discussion by making the links between deliberative democracy and Sen's work to generate a "deliberative ideal of local and participatory development". Crocker identifies that Dreze and Sen (2002) argue that the processes of public reasoning need to be guided by democratic ideals, institutions and practice. While such elements are examining the democratic process as a whole, it is possible to apply them in the context of local and participatory development. This article argues that it is possible to clarify the three elements of deliberation, leaving room for them to be further elaborated and rooted in the specific context where the deliberation process is being implemented.

freedom of expression, accountability and equitable distribution of power. Therefore, democratic ideals are mostly examining relations of **power within** the processes of participation. Crocker (2008) proposes three deliberative principles that should regulate collectively reasoned agreements: reciprocity, publicity and accountability. Reciprocity calls for a process that allows participants to understand and engage critically with each others' point of views. Publicity is related to the transparency of the process, and arguing that every member should be free to engage. Furthermore, such freedom should also be supported by the provision of rich information contributing to rational choices. Accountability reinforces the idea that all participants should be accountable for all, those present in the meeting of deliberation and those that might have elected them.

Alkire (2002) also identifies the importance of revealing the relations of power within the participatory exercise, and argues for an active engagement of the facilitator in addressing such issues with a series of procedural recommendations (i.e. being aware of the location of the meeting and encouraging quieter persons to speak more and dominant persons to speak less).

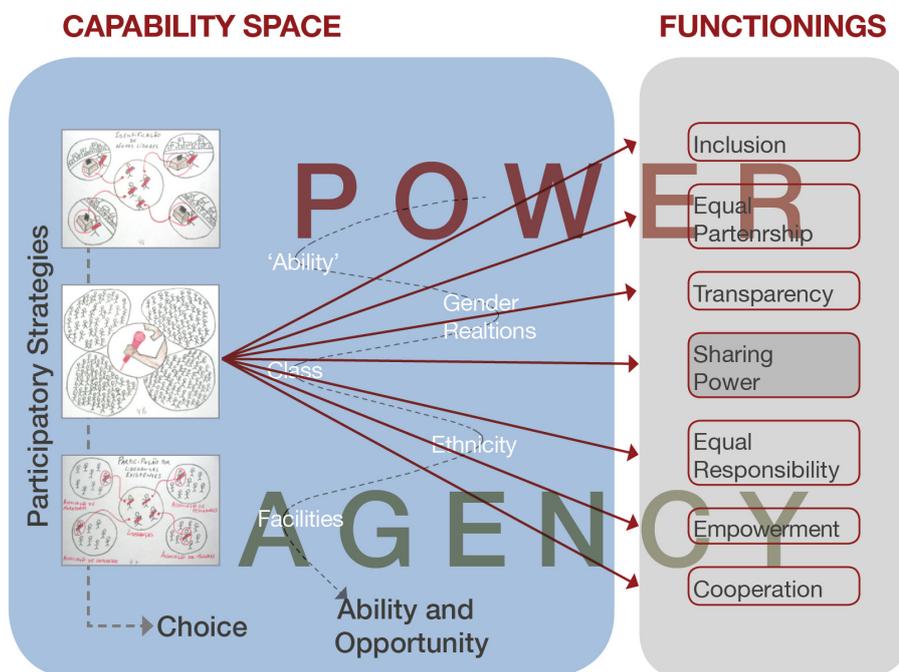
### 5.1 Democratic ideals

The democratic ideals elaborated by Dreze and Sen (2002) are mostly concerned with internal procedures of a deliberative process. They call for elements such as

### 5.2 Democratic institutions

As argued by Friedmann (1992) and Santos (2005), Dreze and Sen (2002) also argue the importance of deliberation to be embedded in institutional change.

Figure 5.1. Applying the capability approach to assess participation. Source: Compiled by author



Democratic institutions are related to a longer term project of deepening democracy, and locally based participatory projects need to be linked to such a plan if it is to have sustained and wider impact. If benefits of a certain participatory initiative are to be scaled up, it needs to be working towards institutional change. Therefore, such element of participation is mostly related to deliberation's **power to** mainstream and institutionalise change.

With such objective, Levy (1996) provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the processes involved in mainstreaming change through a framework called "the web of institutionalization". Levy's web is exploring precisely the mechanisms to "institutionalize or sustain change related to new perspectives in the practices of governments and other organisations involved in the development process" (1996, p.1). By clarifying the opportunities and threats for generating sustained change, Levy also aims to clarify the "room for manoeuvre" of agents, individuals and organisations in such processes of change.

This type of institutional analysis would be crucial in contributing to the assessment of the participatory capabilities of individuals and groups engaging in a deliberative process.

### 5.3 Democratic practice

The third democratic element identified by Dreze and Sen (2002) is related to the practice of deliberation. Through the exercise of participation, citizens would not only benefit from a plan of democratisation, but also by their continuous engagement in creating democratic

opportunities. The practice of democracy is about individuals' and groups' **power with** each other generated by a process of deliberation. As Crocker (2008) argues, such "power with" could lead to the evaluation of freedoms, collective action and the collective construction of common values.

The element of democratic practice brings to light the importance of enhancing, through the participatory exercise, the network among grassroots organisations. Through the expansion of horizontal networks and solidarity among grassroots organisations, experiences can be shared, knowledge transferred and alliances to challenge structural causes of poverty strengthened. Within such project, there is a need to continuously address the elements of diversity within the unity. As Friedmann argues: "the unity of civil society is to be found in its diversity" (1992, p.161). It is exactly in such tension between togetherness and difference within social movements that Escobar (2008) has been making fundamental contributions in the field of development. Escobar (2008) illustrates how the network among different social movements in the Colombian Pacific region has led to the formation of concepts that can explain their commonalities and differences while generating collective intent to challenge structural causes of inequality.

The democratic ideals, institutions and practice as expanded here are proposed as a broader set of principles to elicit specific dimensions of participation applied in deliberation exercises. While not being overly specific, this paper supports the idea that participatory exercises, in order to contribute to a wider plan of expansion of capabilities, need to engage in the three dimensions of power identified: power within, power to, and power with.

## 6. Participatory capabilities: procedural considerations

This paper will now turn to the examination of some procedural considerations when applying participatory methods through the capability approach. The objective is to identify a certain set of procedures that can facilitate the application of the participatory capabilities framework. This chapter highlights the links between participatory and action learning exercises and how such links can contribute to the investigation of participatory capabilities. Then it will further complement the procedural recommendations with considerations from Alkire (2002) and Crocker (2008) on the relation between values and participation.

### 6.1 Action learning and participation: an agency oriented approach

Following the Freirian tradition, participation from a capability perspective must focus on the process of sharing understandings and exerting agency. Participation is about questioning the nature of knowledge, facilitating collaborative learning and encouraging action. Therefore, participation is a means to enhance the ability of individuals and groups to constructively act and achieve change. Action learning<sup>1</sup> and participatory action research literature precisely examines how the process of collaborative learning can be transformed into a process of change.

Four basic stages are proposed in McGill and Beaty (1992) to facilitate the process of action learning<sup>1</sup>:

1. Experience: a catalyst practical activity is recommended to start the process of *observing* and *reflecting* on a certain topic;
2. Understanding: the catalyst activity encourages people to *learn with* and *from* each other with the objective to *form* and *reform* participants' understanding of reality;
3. Planning: from diagnosing, participants are encouraged to *formulate strategies* to influence the situation examined;
4. Action: *trying out* the plan and starting again the process of action learning becomes the link to generate the spiral learning and action curve which aims to facilitate conscious awareness and enhance individuals' and collective agency.

Fals Borda (1987) also emphasises the importance of reflection as a precursor for effective action by emphasising

the role of re-forming understandings to break from structural conditions of inequalities:

*"The elimination of exploitative patterns at the material or infrastructural level of a society does not assure, by itself, that the general system of exploitation has been destroyed...it becomes necessary to eliminate also the relationship governing the production of knowledge, production which tends to give ideological support to injustice, oppression and the destructive forces which characterize the modern world"*(Fals Borda, 1987, p.337).

Therefore, Fals Borda (1985) proposes an emancipatory process which includes: *i) collective research*: where data is collected and systematised not only individually but also collectively in forms of meetings or in a group basis. Such process would allow data and findings to be corrected, shared and verified in a group basis; *ii) critical recovery of history*: through exercises to unpack collective memory, the timeline of a certain locality can be recovered with the objective of increasing awareness to the causes of injustices being perpetuated; *iii) valuing and applying folk culture*: through activities rooted in local practices (such as drama, music, sports, storytelling, etc.), multiple values frequently ignored can be expressed and captured to guide the participatory process; and *iv) production and diffusion of new knowledge*: the findings and experiences can then be disseminated by all participants based on their ability and opportunity to do so.

Participation as a means is understood here as the overlapping space between *learning* and *action* in locally based initiatives. The procedural considerations outlined above by Fals Borda (1985, 1987) and McGill and Beaty (1992) aim at clarifying how such process can take place in a manner that can address adaptive preference, while supporting democratic ideals, institutions and practices.

### 6.2 Including values in participatory exercises

Alkire (2002) and Crocker (2008) recognise the importance of facilitating action from participatory exercises. For action to take place, they argue that a collective intent should be reached in a form of an agreement on a concrete set of policies. They also argue that discussions

need to be revealing values. In other words, public reasoning is not only about agreeing on a set of recommendations, but it is about sharing and deconstructing people's motivations and values related to the topic discussed.

Through participatory exercises values can be examined in many ways. Alkire (2002) suggests a mechanism where facilitators do not prescribe, but also do not start the deliberation process with a clean slate. Alkire (2002) proposes a list of dimensions that can serve as stimulus for discussions, eliciting reflection on the "basic reasons for acting": life/health/security; knowledge; work/play; beauty/environment; self-integration/inner peace; religion; empowerment. Such dimensions are seen as the primary colours of values, as further values could emerge out of different combinations of these "basic reasons for acting".

Importantly, Crocker (2008) argues that while revealing values, collective intent does not need to be based on these values, but on policies. People might agree on a

specific policy recommendation, but they might have different reasons to value them. "The aim is to agree on, or fashion together, not beliefs about the world or convictions about ultimate values but a plan or policy (end plus means) about which all (or most) can agree and on which all can act in order to realize it" (2008, pp.321-322).

This article recommends a procedure based on Alkire (2002) and Crocker's (2008) reflections, by arguing that the process of participation needs a preliminary stage on the discussion of values, afterwards proceeding towards the elaboration of specific collective intent in relation to concrete actions/policies. The stage of unpacking values would be crucial to generate the collaborative learning process, and re-framing the diagnosis of established problematic. By explicitly addressing values, the link between the specific and the structural can be explored. Finally, such collective discussion can also facilitate the resolution of conflicts, as understanding about the nature of disagreements can be a starting point in finding spaces of agreement.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

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1. Such procedural considerations are also existent in other participatory literature, such as action planning, participatory action learning, and participatory research methods.

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## 7. Conclusion

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As mentioned in the introduction of this article, the notion and practice of participation is at the crux of development debates. The exploration of the linkages between the capability approach and participatory methods raises and addresses important debates on collective action, diversity and agency, as well as mechanisms to institutionalise change. This article elaborates on the concept of participatory capabilities, as a process to contribute to the planning, monitoring and evaluation of participatory exercises. The objective of the paper is to contribute to the discussions on the procedures to implement the concepts of capability approach through deliberative mechanisms.

Participation, if understood not merely as a means, but also as an end in itself, will need to be addressed in relation to a certain set of principles, in other words, dimensions of participation. In this sense, deliberation exercises can be planned and evaluated according to individuals' and groups' choice, ability and opportunity to pursue such dimensions of participation. This article argues that from Dreze and Sen (2002) it is possible to draw three elements from which the dimensions of participation can be elicited: democratic ideals, institutions and practices. This article also recommends some procedural considerations:

1. participation needs to be applied in the context of collaborative learning;
2. focused on the generation of collective intent and action;

3. which follows an explicit discussion on values and underlying motivations.

This application incorporates an analysis of power relations to the capability approach and application of participatory methods to stress the importance of revealing the underlying processes of exclusion. Therefore, development practitioners, when applying such approaches, are led to use participatory methods to contribute to the understanding of local but also structural patterns impacting policies and projects.

The approach based on a set of participatory dimensions ensures that the various stakeholders are engaging with participatory methods reflexively, linking local patterns as causes but also manifestations of wider processes of inequalities. In this sense, the capability approach hopes to provide a framework that safeguards participation through a multidimensional concept of development, adapting to local contexts, unfolding power relations, addressing local patterns and challenging structural processes.

The application of the participatory capabilities framework in processes of research or policy and planning opens up new sources of information as well as contributing toward collective action, strengthening social networks and encouraging individual and collective agency. If one's freedom is also shaped by one's awareness of what is possible to do and achieve, the application of the capability approach through participatory approaches is about truly understanding and practicing *development as freedom*.

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