Tools for Civic Participation
Foundations, Methods, and Techniques

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Presentation

"The task of building new social processes that make life in society sustainable is therefore urgent and, if truth be told, this is absolutely not possible without the participation of the people; whether in finding a better distribution of resources, or guaranteeing that those non-renewable resources do not run out. Although, it is clear that we do not refer to any kind of civic participation. We refer to participatory processes that have a political and methodological basis that is committed to meeting this goal."

With this paragraph the authors finish the introduction to this new dossier from the collection "Essays on Civic Participation" that presents the principle ruling factors of participatory processes in an organised way, and describes a series of techniques that we can use to carry out these practices.

Clearly avoiding presenting a recipe of uniform participatory methodologies and techniques, and thinking of the necessary adaptation of participatory processes of every kind from the territorial reality, from participating actors and from their interests, the authors agree completely with the principal objectives of the present collection: to facilitate practical resources to those in charge of local management and to promote knowledge and the dispersal of a new form of governance and maintaining relations between citizens and governors.

I would like to thank the professors Joel Martí and Óscar Rebollo for the work that they did and their contribution to the spreading of these participatory practices that enable the previous planning and methodological design adapted to each reality, which are, absolutely the key to its prior validity.

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Introduction to the Contents

All societies that we know maintain inequalities between their members. Throughout history, these inequalities are and have been of different types. They are obviously reflected in the economic field; for example, we always encounter people and groups who dispose of much greater economic resources than others. The same happens in the cultural field, with people and groups that have had, in comparison with others, greater guaranteed access to information, education, and dominant cultural contents: whatever they may be.

All these inequalities have had, then, as could not possibly be otherwise, a change in the political territory. This has been seen in the management of public affairs, in the taking of decisions about the aspects that affect the whole of the community or that have to do with general interests. In these cases, while some individuals or groups have and historically

have had an enormous capacity to intervene, others in contrast have remained at the margins of these decisions.

Inequality, whether it is economic, cultural, or political, is and always has been present in human societies. Although it is also certain that the characteristics and conditions of this inequality have not always been the same. For some, however only for some, the capitalist societies of our age have opened new possibilities of equality throughout the 20th century.

If we focus on political inequalities, those relative to the opportunities that diverse social groups have to intervene in the management of public affairs, the 20th century can be seen as a really exceptional period in which, for the first time in history, political rights are quite generalised to all citizens. There are exceptions, like those that have to do with age, that make it so that only those that are older than a certain age can participate completely in political life, or those that have to do with gender, e.g. the recognition of the political rights between men and women hasn't been equal until very recently. But at the end of the 20th century, we can say that it has been an exceptional period from the point of view of overcoming certain levels of inequality, as much on the formal and legal level. This political equality is recognised, although the economic inequalities continue to exist and continue to condition the social map where the rest of the inequalities are drawn. In other words, in the legal and formal policy, two very different people from an economic point of view have the same political territory and the same rights and duties. Some authors, for example, have referred to the 20th century as the century of political inclusion, of political participation of the working class. On the other hand, we are dealing historically with a collective that has had to sum up the economic and cultural inequalities that come together with political inequality that meant that it was not possible to intervene in the management of public affairs, for example, by not having a right to vote, nor the right to present themselves as political candidates, nor the right to meet and associate, etc.

It is certainly true that the 20th century has been the century of politics for many citizens, in various countries. Broadly speaking, without making nuances between countries and historical circumstances, the main civic rights, and more concretely political rights like freedom of expression, etc. have been consolidated in this century. Certainly we are talking about formal rights, and afterwards we can ask whether they are more or less effective or whether they bring other kinds of inequalities, but we cannot deny to history the evidence that workers in these countries have led a process of transformations and have established a workers' movement together with their trade unions and political organisations.

Though the 20th century can be considered as the political century, during the last quarter century from the 70s onwards, many authors have begun to notice a break, even a retreat, in the equalising tendencies in comparison with previous decades, and this is also evident in the political territory.

The century that has seen political parties be born and grow, especially on the left of the political spectrum, which have helped bring about the near generalisation of suffrage or

the rights to meet and associate, now sees how in the last years, certain tendencies start to change pattern and become disrupted. In this way, since the 70s, it is possible to talk about a political crisis, or the crisis of old politics with relation to the way that these political parties have been institutionalized during the last century, although this cannot be generalised in all countries. Spain, for example, got on this bandwagon very late, and therefore, when some speak of a crisis of old democratic politics, here we are still fighting to get a political system which can be guaranteed.

Old Politics

When we refer to old politics we usually mean the political system of representative democracy, that is to say, a system based on the rights of the citizens, above a certain age, to chose representatives to execute the tasks of the government of the state. We refer as well, in the second place, to the organisations, principally the political parties, that are responsible for preparing the electoral programmes and putting forward candidates to run for election. Finally, we refer to other social organisations, like trade unions, social or citizen movements, interest groups, etc. that try, sometimes, to put pressure on these authorities, and others, who make agreements with governments and political parties to influence decisions of the state. Now we will try, on continuation, to see until what point this political situation is in crisis.

We think that currently it is possible to identify two kinds of symptoms that, in some way, speak of a crisis of the old politics, or if you like, representative democracy. One kind of symptom has to do with the capacity of the state to govern crucial aspects of life in society, like the control and distribution of resources, public health, or the preservation of the environment, for example. The other symptom, has to do with the capacity of citizens to govern the state, and this does act as a power at the service of determined private or corporate interests.

From the first point of view, symptoms marking the weakness of the state for taking certain kinds of decisions are becoming more and more evident. Among the analyses and studies that have looked for explanations, we can look at internal aspects, of organisation, bureaucracy or fights for power. Externally, we can say that we live in a world that is more and more interdependent and globalized. We say "externally", because it is the market, the economic power that is more and more concentrated in just a few hands, that dictates decisions to the states while the opposite almost never occurs. The case is that limitations appear that are not only evident, but explicit, for states to govern all of society, and especially, those aspects that affect the ruling economic model. All this does not refer only to big decisions of the political economy on the state or European level, but it also changes the local area. Eager to attract resources and investments to its territory, many local leaders show themselves to be absolutely submissive in front of the conditions that investors can demand, whether they are physical, urban, or any other kind.

We can also talk about a certain incapacity of the state to govern society when it has to face new goals and contradictions that are currently established and that, principally, are

related to the environment, immigration, and with the tendencies toward the dichotomy of social structures.

As far as every task of the government, every task that involves more than mere administration, implicitly brings with it a dimension of leadership, we can point out precisely this shortage of leadership, clearly together with the scarcity of resources, as one of the most evident obstacles when confronting these new contradictions; at least from position of what we will call an egalitarian tendency, to make ourselves understood.

Lastly, internal affairs also have their importance. What we referred to as battles for power, bureaucratic resistance, *technocratic ranks* and *bad companies*, imply a strong limitation to the capacity for leadership and management which is demanded by the task of governing.

The second type of symptoms which have to do with the capacity of society to govern the state, become evident in the form of political parties that are more and more corporate and professionalized, in addition to becoming increasingly hierarchical. These symptoms also become evident in the form of corrupt practices that, independent of their real volume, clearly delegitimize political action and distance politicians from society and citizens. We also encounter symptoms that reflect the absence of solid social bases and the poor internal life of the majority of political parties. But from all the symptoms, perhaps the most clear evidence of the weakness of rights of political citizenship is found in the scarce or absent capacity of many citizens to get the state to take their situation and their demands into account when it makes decisions.

Once the symptoms are visible, we think that it is possible to talk about a certain crisis in what we call old politics, a crisis that empowers big economic interests and weakens the capacity of the majority of citizens to take part in the management of affairs that affect them. For its part, the states is delegitimized as a arbitrator of interests and its own autonomy in governing is weakened.

Local Issues and Old Politics

Local government, local development and local arrangements can be the three pillars on which to form the basis for one kind of answers to this crisis of the 70s, a crisis which we have identified as breaking or retreating in the equalization of opportunities: economic, cultural and political ones.

In light of the evidence of the great decisions escaping the control of the large majority of the population - as those that take and benefit from those decisions are really few, although very powerful –, there remain, for those that can take advantage, what we can call micro-opportunities, whether they are government (local Government), economic development (local development), or collective regulation (local pacts).

Local government, with the scarcity of resources, but very close to the citizens and their problems, has been vindicated by some as a level of government of the State best suited

to apply the public policies in certain areas of welfare, or the management of territory, for example.

Together with the protagonism of local government and its leadership, local development on a micro-scale has also been seen as a solution. Local development on a micro-scale is seen as a result of a certain reorganisation of internal resources to take advantage of the best opportunities that a given territory, its agents, its demands and needs, provides, as well as the resources of different social groups that make up the local community.

For this kind of development to be possible, it is necessary for local social agents to commit themselves. Certain micro-corporate practices are promoted in this way, combining socio-economic agreements on a local scale.

It should be stated that as much in the political realm as in the socioeconomic realm, we are referring in good measure to a simple reduction of scale. Where before there were strong state governments with leadership capacity that organized to a certain degree the conditions of production and distribution of resources (through economic, fiscal and welfare policies) and tried to form social agreements with trade unions and business organisations, during the last years the necessity is seen for local governments to take on more or less the same role with the resources, the opportunities and social agents on a local scale.

It is worth saying that in the last few years, the new local strategies, whether they are governmental, organizational, or economic development strategies, have effectively produced good practices that are examples to be continued, but ones that have been theorized more than practised, and that, to a certain extent, this comes given by the incapacity of those that had to have lead, as much administrations as organisations. Therefore, both administrations and organizations reclaim the participation of the citizenship in order to strengthen their position. Together, one and the other, have to protagonize new ways of making new policies.

New Politics and Civic Participation

It is possible for things to continue as they have until now. Even, it is calculated that they can get worse during the next years. And obviously, those that are well-situated in the current situation will do little for things to change. But the model is unsustainable. It is unsustainable socio-economically, because it is brutally unequal and condemns masses of people to poverty, insecurity and the total absence of opportunity. It is politically unsustainable, because the market has impoverished the state, taken away the sovereignty that corresponds to civil society, and for the incapacity that the state has shown in managing social conflict that is derived from the unsustainable socio-economy. Lastly, it is unsustainable from the point of view of the environment, as resources that are the basis for human life are consumed at a rate that does not allow for their natural regeneration. The task of building new social processes that make life in society sustainable is therefore urgent and, truth be told, it wouldn't even occur to us to try to accomplish this without the participation of the people; whether in finding a better distribution of resources, or

guaranteeing that those non-renewable resources do not run out. Although, it is clear that we do not refer to any kind of civic participation. We refer to participatory processes that have a political and methodological basis that is committed to facing this goal.

<div align="center">**First Part**</div>

<div align="center">**The Politico-Methodological Foundations**</div>

The Project

During the last year, the world of business as well as the public administration and associations have demonstrated a growing interest in giving incentives to participatory practices. The former, the business sector, got started earlier, and surely some concepts are already familiar to us, such as *working groups*, *quality circles* or other similar phrases that refer to new managerial practices that place emphasis on the possibility that workers can participate in decisions which affect quality or expenses, for example the goods or services that are produced.

Also during the last years some public administrations, normally municipal governments, have put participatory practices for the local citizenry in place; whether they are forums or conferences about different projects, local Agenda 21s, participatory processes, citizen workshops, sector or territorial councils, or other kinds of practices.

Lastly, there are many associations that show an interest in giving incentive to this kind of practice and have reached, through participation of its social base and its members, a greater degree of activity, or the possibility of building and motivating new associative projects, or a stronger public presence, with more resources and more social and political legitimacy.

Our interest in this document is to focus on the practices of civic participation, whether in spaces built and put forward by the administration or in those that associations and entities that try to defend general interests can protagonize. We are not dealing, therefore, with other kinds of participatory practices like those, for example, related to the economic or business world.

Civic Participation Is Not Improvised

But, like the business world, a theoretical-ideological and methodological body has developed during these years to put experiences of direct participation of the workers into practice and the necessary resources have been provided to do it (businesses that have had an interest to do so, that is clear), managing even to create specialised departments within the organisation: the new human resource departments; in the case of public administration and associations the same has not happened. This process has started later and the accumulated experience is still very minimal. It is for this reason that, for some time, the idea that civic participation cannot be improvised has started to take root and we speak of the need to develop methodological bodies and technical instruments to orient the new citizen participatory practices.

But along this path - the path of the construction of methods and techniques to put civic participation into practice - the first steps are neither technical nor methodological, but

political. The participatory methodologies always have a political foundation. If we facilitate or promote a more or less open or restricted participation; if it concerns informing, consulting or debating or deciding together with citizens, it is not a methodological nor technical decision, but a political one.

Therefore, we need to stop a moment to reflect on a crucial, inevitable question, one that precedes all others: why participate? This is the political question.

Participate in Order to Legitimize or Participate to Transform

At the root, two kinds of political strategies based on civic participation exist: we call these strategies "participate to legitimize" or "participate to transform".

In the first case, participation as legitimation seeks to strengthen our positions, objectives, and interest through the use of participatory practices, but does not try to change them. In the second case, what is sought is not to preserve the status quo, and not only to strengthen, consolidate or legitimate, but also promote change, or transformation, in which the participation of citizens is considered fundamental.

Administrations as well as associations can adopt one or another strategy, and in fact are in the process of doing so. The administration can look to legitimise themselves, as can the associations. In the same way, one as much as the other can look to civic participation for the drive and the resources necessary to change things, to construct new projects: in other words, transform.

On continuation, we point out some methodological reflections, and also some instruments, thinking of the potential available in civic participation as a strategy to promote social change, that is understood in the direction of some cities and some communities with a view towards the future, or in other words, sustainable as much socially as environmentally and politically.

An Educational Process .. To Be Transformative

Practice shows us every day that the principle instrument for change is people. We can change or adapt ourselves, and in doing so, we manage to change things around us. This type of change we call educational, and as such, by making things change, we have to educate, because we are talking about changing people.

Education, on the other hand, lies in the values, attitudes, ways of relating (as much during cooperation as in conflict) and only is possible from practice: it is the daily practice that, whether we like it or not, educates us. It is in this direction that we have to start to build anew, by which the collective is transformed. It is not possible to start building a house at the roof.

Understanding the participatory processes as an educational processes is a great transcendancy for us, that already forces us to pay attention to the aspects that so often

we do not take into account. We refer to more daily aspects. For example, learning is required in order to work collectively. One of the points of departure has to be learning how to listen to the other, and this is constructed and is organised every time that we have meetings, in the turns of words, in the use of time, in the opportunities we take, when everyone is allowed to speak, etc. We have to take care and organize all these aspects.

Basically, opting for civic participation does not consist in making rules or creating organs that have citizens at the head, neither does it consist of holding more assemblies, at least not at first. There is a need to choose earlier for new ways of doing things and relating with citizens that allow politicians, experts, and citizens to work together in a climate of collaboration. As this is not what usually happens, we have to learn how to do this, we have to educate ourselves, and as we have said, this learning only is possible through practice.

Although it may be self-evident, it is important to remember at this point that we should not experience the educational process as a sacrifice, a punishment. This maybe would be valid for indoctrination, but not for education. An educational process has to provide some kind of directly relational compensation. Hence, we say that participation also has to be fun; it has to include feeling well and enjoying the moments of relation.

We Need a Project .. So Let's Make One

Change is then an attitude, a predisposition, ways of relating and the will of the people – as well as instruments, that are usually organisations – but, where do we direct this change? We need a project, our project, the project to work towards collectively, the project of all those that are in the project (or at least all of *us* and all of *ours*); for this we have to build the project, because it is needed.

When this collective project doesn't exist and it is not started to be built, then one of the parts of the collective will impose their own particular project.

Normally, the administration sets the pace, as it has resources and power at its disposal, more than citizens and their associations. In the case that it is an administration governed by politics that opt for civic participation, it is possible that mechanisms to discuss its program of actions with the citizens are established. At the same time, even when the contributions of the citizens are taken into consideration, the administration is the one that controls the agenda: the one who decides what is discussed and what or who is to be participated with.

The same can happen to civil society when it is an association or a group of leaders, for example, that imposes the agenda.

Of course, if there is not a collective project, it is not possible to blame anyone, neither an association nor an administration, for offering others the possibility to discuss their own interests. This is always better than nothing.

But if you want to progress with the participatory process, if it is desired that more people are implicated, you have to build a project that involves everyone, the collective. This is clear that this is not a autonomic task, but one that requires method.

Building a collective project requires working collectively in three dimensions: the dimension of values (code of ethics), the dimension of problems or symptoms (diagnostics), and the dimension of proposals (programming).

In the dimension of values, we refer to building collectively those values that inspire our *tranformative* practice, the values that make up our code of ethics. We work with values like respect for others and a sense of solidarity, but also values like cooperation, sustainability, integration, etc. We are not dealing with doing spiritual exercises, we are talking about why we are working, and with respect to what we have to evaluate in the last instance. We are dealing with, above all, knowing what inspires us and will not change although concrete instruments, the organisational forms, and projects that we use may change. We are ultimately dealing with the foundations of educational practice.

In the dimension of problems, we have to identify those that are shared, that interest or concern the collective or are a threat for the whole of the community. This requires listening to more people. Behind each problem, agents and collectives have to be identified. By doing this we can know which are the problems that generate the most consensus by the fact of being more general, and differentiating problems which affect the whole versus problems that are more personal or individual. It can happen that among the more general problems, there is one that has an important cohesive character, representing all the interests and wills implied. If this happens, it opens an enormous potential of possibilities to collectively build around this problem and look for solutions. But this closes or makes others difficult, like working on problems further away from the more principal problem. In short, the goal here is to construct shared diagnostics of the situation that we have to confront.

Finally, over that base of values and shared problems which are agreed upon, proposals of action have to come forward with the objective of overcoming problems. We are talking about programs, strategies of change, and projects of action that give us, everyone of us, different amounts of protagonism and possibilities of implication; understanding that this is the way that allows us to overcome problems.

Process and Participatory Moments

Certainly, when we invoke civic participation as a strategy for achieving social transformations, we think of a better future for more people, never thinking of putting any time limitations. We can think of cities that are more open and democratic, in the fact that citizens participate actively in political life, but how is this organized? How many citizens, how many times, and in which way do you do this?

Until now we have used the concept of participatory practices, but there are different kinds. Here it interests us to establish the difference between participatory practices that are moments and practices which are processes.

A participatory process has a continuity, it is built day by day and is the result of the interaction of its protagonists. It is permanently open to changes, threats, and opportunities and is prolonged in time as long as the implicated parties so desire, at least those that are actively engaged in it.

In principal, all the participatory process needs some moments or phases that are more open or expansive, in which the objective is to sum up: opinions, proposals, people, etc. and other moments that can be called moments of synthesis, in which the goal is to form the consensus that is being sought: those opinions and proposals that are more shared, and as such, more mobilising. In any case, it is not always necessary to look for the widest consensus, but there does have to be a certain level of agreement and compromise with the others, is so far as we are talking about participatory processes.

Working in participatory processes, we see that the actors which participate can be changing, whether it is because the initial actors are changing, or whether it is because new actors are incorporated. Actually, this has to be like this for the process to be transformative. As we have mentioned earlier, changes rests with the people, it is the people that change and make things change.

In the participatory process, organizations and associations are indispensable. It is not possible to build processes without organizational forms which are more or less stable that give the process continuity. This kind of form is that we call an association.

As with anything, it is also possible to build only moments, that are usually clearly of synthesis. It is not that the methods and the techniques used are different. The difference is if this moment has precedents and future perspectives or if we are dealing only with a temporary act. Here we can give some examples.

One or more associations that lead a community plan are engaging in a process. A municipal government that holds one or more citizen workshops to gather opinions, criteria, or proposals of different kinds, is organising a moment. A neighborhood association that holds a special assembly open for the neighborhood to decide on a proposal or an action is hosting a moment; while when they hold their ordinary session meetings or assemblies they are organising a process. Also the municipal governments set processes in motion. The participatory proposals of many Brazilian cities, for example, are putting forward such processes.

The Actors

All the participatory process demands setting relations in motion between different kinds of social actors, and anyone that decides to start a participatory practice will have the task to mobilise these actors. At this point key aspects arise, and one needs to make decisions

being aware of the consequences they may have, as well as knowing which aspects one has to work on and cannot be left to improvisation or to gratuitous decisions. It is for this reason that we thought it appropriate to devote a chapter to reflect on the social actors that take part in the process; normally these are:

a. Citizens and civic associations
b. Politicians and Governors
c. Civil Servants or Experts working in different sectors
d. Interest groups, principally economic

Questions to Design Strategies

Any of the actors mentioned above puts strategies into practice when he relates with the others. Sometimes, these strategies are conscientious and premeditated. Other times they are simply reproductions of established patterns that correspond to the political culture of the protagonists, repeating what has always been done or has been seen done without stopping to think much about it.

But also, many times, setting new participatory practices in motion requires modifying these strategies. A possible way to think about the new is to ask questions with relation to three necessary dimensions of our collective action, that always exist. This we will call the dimension of *us*, the dimension of *ours*, and in third place, the dimension of *the others*. Here we take a look at the difference:

We (the dimension of us) are those that are organising: it can be those that are leading; possibly people that we know, even if only vaguely, and we know of each other's existence. The questions about this dimension is usually: how do we organise ourselves? How do we make decisions?, etc.

Ours are those that we want to be part of the participatory practice, the ones for which we have organized ourselves, the social bases of *ours*, and for rethinking the strategy with relation to *ours*, we have to ask: how are they?/what are they like? What interests them? What problems do they have? Are they equal amongst themselves, or are the very different although they are still *ours*? Are they the same as *us*?

The others are not *ours,* but they can be allies. They can also be indifferent and even opposed to our interests and our strategies. We have to look for allies. Perhaps we can motivate the indifferent. It can be that they are indifferent to us or it can be that we are indifferent to them. We will have to then clarify the panorama and situate ourselves in the scenario, especially taking into account how difficult it is in these times to be able to do things alone, as big as one may be, or believe that one is. Here is where it will be necessary to raise some questions that serve us to work in conflict and in consensus with the others. It only needs to be clear that neither the conflict can be like a permanent confrontation, nor the consensus like an *oath* that demands faithfulness and loyalty above all.

Leadership

Every process of social change demands leadership. Actually, leadership is always there, because there are always people, collectives, organisations, administrations, or interest groups that, at a minimum, lead the current situation: in this way others can be leading the changes. Therefore, it is not important who is leading, but how.

The same work methodology can give different results according to who leads the process. Determined processes require leadership to be shared by administrations and associations, and anyone who tries to do that task alone will fail.

Lastly, it is essential for the process to be politically organized, with each role clearly defined. This is important when it comes to distinguishing the technical work of politicians, for example; and it is also important that those who hold the political leadership, whether they are representatives of institutions or associations, understand that not because they are at the *top* of the political leadership of the process, can they play the same role in technical aspects.

Leadership, as opposed to personal preferences, can be collective, and this is a great advantage in the participatory processes. Additionally, different leaders -political, technical and social- have to respect each other if one wants the process of participation to advance. The contrary would be that some leaders suppressed or neutralized the others; then the process could not advance.

Everyone Has Their Own Role: Against Populism

In the participatory process, when politicians, experts, and citizens come together, sometimes it seems like everyone wants to change their role, or maybe they get confused. The governing politicians want to appear just as average citizens. Some citizens think they are mayors. Some mayors and town councilmen think they are great experts, and some experts constantly move from being citizens or politicians without managing to be experts. This leads us to disorganised processes where it is difficult to advance, as it could be that some end up giving their opinions about things which they don't understand and others talking about things that do not pertain to them.

But the main risk caused by the confusion of roles among politicians, technicians, and citizens becomes evident in the difficulties that appear at the time of isolating the debates that are fundamentally technical: putting on the table and confronting alternative solutions to a problem, of political content, drawing the boundary where the technical debates have to proceed, and taking decisions that allow progress towards the solution of problems once the technical debate bears fruit.

This does not mean that the same person cannot have technical and political decisions at the same time. This is not an issue. The point is to always be clear whether the debates are technical or political, and not mix up the two.

Usually, we identify *populism* as the public action that tries to disguise inequality under a supposedly *egalitarian* smoke screen. *Populism* intends to convey that we are all equal while in reality we are not; this is to say that I am equal to you, I am on your side, whilst I am not. It is like thinking that we are all in the same ship without saying that the ship is mine. For this reason it is important that everybody is aware of his or her own situation and position with regard to the others and to the issues that are being dealt with.

Who Is an Expert? Against the Technocratic Ideology

For a long time they have been selling us the idea that the daily problems a community faces have a superior technical solution. In other words, that the best solution will always be given by the best technician; as if purely *technical* solutions existed or, rather, technically *pure*. Or as if within the same profession or discipline, different approaches to problems and its solutions did not exist. We have previously said that we are interested in arranging debates that might take place between different social actors by separating the more technical moments from those of political content. Now we should determine who has the right to participate in technical debates and under what conditions.

The experts - those that are prepared to assume this position - usually start – not all, that is clear – by performing their most important social, relational, and prestigious role rather than their strictly technical one; or in other words, like the owners of a privileged knowledge and know-how about arising problems. This makes the average citizen often refrain from offering their ideas when they have to work together with them. For this reason, we insist so much on the fact that the participatory process has to be above all an educational process, because it has to allow all the participants to participate in the maximum conditions of equality and legitimacy possible, and this often means modifying certain attitudes that people have towards each other. Pretentious, so-called experts, who despise common knowledge, are of no use when working in participatory processes, even though they may be very good technicians.

But the crucial aspect, as we were saying, is not if the technician has to deal with the public, facilitating things for them. The decision come before and is based on knowing whether the public has the right to attend and participate in the technical debates contributing their own proposals.

Our opinion is that citizens not only have the right to be there, but also, if they are not there, an enormous amount of valid ideas and good intentions are wasted. In fact, the members of any community, those affected by any situation or worried about any problem, even without being technicians, are actually experts. Expert means someone with experience, and we all have experience in living in our community or in handling a certain situation or problem, and from the condition of being an expert that experience gives us, we surely have ideas and proposals to make. This task should not be left only to technicians. We should not forget that there also technicians who are not experts.

Quantity and *Representativity* of the Participants: about Knowledge, Discourses, Interests and Minorities

When promoting the participation of citizens in public affairs, we need to within reach the answer to the recurrent question: to which extent are the citizens who are participating representing the whole community?

This question is usually more important for outsiders rather than for those who take part in the process, because it is usually used as an argument to doubt about it or discredit it.

As a general rule, it needs to be pointed out in the first place that what processes of participation seek, or should seek according to us, is to build projects of transformation, of change, towards more egalitarian and more sustainable societies and, in this way, it cannot be pretended that those who back this view, and in whatever extent they get involved in it, have to be a *representative sample* of the whole society. Nevertheless, it is convenient in some cases to make sure that processes have a certain degree of *representativity*. But, *representativity* of what, of who, of what kind?

First of all, the quantity of participants needs not be indicative of something. It is more correct to talk about *representativity* before talking about quantity of participants. Because *representativity* can or cannot be quantitative. Ten thousand members of a football club, for example, can be less representative than only ten who belong to different clubs. It depends on who we want to *represent*.

Secondly, *representativity* does not need to be general, of the whole community, as it can happen that part of its members are not interested, for whichever reasons, neither in being there nor in being represented. In the same way that representative democracy is based on the election of those who vote, but those who for different reasons do not vote, also exist.

Thirdly, we know that political non-participation does not respond as a general rule to gratuitous attitudes and attitudes without foundations, nor are those who do not vote a random collective changing from election to election. What happens is rather that in politics, when voting, associating, giving proposals or protesting, certain social groups are always absent: minorities, excluded and vulnerable groups, immigrants, interest groups and groups with alternative discourses, etc.

Fourthly, in processes of participation, *representativity* is more of a challenge than a starting point, as in general it needs to be created by adding people to the process.

It is for all this that we are in favor of processes that incorporate the maximum amount of discourses, both major and minor. Processes that are in balance with the existing population –according to age, sex, social class, ethnicity- and that include different knowledge and accumulated experiences about a certain subject.

Individual Participation Versus Associative Participation

One of the dilemmas raised while organizing experiences of citizen participation appears when making a call to the public. Who is called to participate and how?

In the social processes we are referring to, social actors tend to be collective, as we can hardly think of a single person, not acting either from within an organization, or *with* somebody else or *for* others.

Taking these arguments to their extreme we could say that individual participation does not exist. Those that exist are participants more or less related to and organized in collectivities, or experiences of participation that call people through means which are not associations; even though this does not mean there are not *organized* means: radio, press, institutional actions or publicity, etc.

Both the participant who represents an organization, and the one who has been attracted in a random way are brought there, to the experience of participation, by somebody who has prepared himself to do so, and who moreover tends to be an institutional actor. In the same way, both represent somebody else: the former, his organization and the latter, *non-organized* citizens; because this was the aim to be reached when they were called.

Nevertheless, even though the participation of associations and organizations is an essential condition for processes to have continuity, it needs to be recognized that the situation most of them are in does not make this job particularly easier. The associative movement is accused of lacking representatives, of lacking internal democracy, of weakness of its social bases, of lacking projects, of being too corporate and of having many personal preferences etc. According to us, this criticism is very often justified, and we cannot ignore it.

It is said that many citizens consciously keep away from the associative world, but they might have an interest in getting involved in processes of participation. It is also said that participation of individual citizens comes as an alternative to the weaknesses that might be shown by the associative movement. This might be true as well.

But the key aspect, as we were saying, is whether it is possible for a process to have continuity without associations, without organizing structures that lead and cohere projects, promote changes, organize and call, etc. and the answer is no, it is not possible. It is from this evidence that we are in favor of both the presence of organized citizens, and the organization of citizens who were not organized. We are also in favor of the incorporation of other citizens, who are not part of associations who can, therefore, bring other perspectives and opinions built outside the area of decision and influence of associations. In short, it seems to us that the most interesting processes are the ones that combine both types of participation and, in this way, contribute from its educative perspective –once again this is the key, both to the opening of associations to non-associated citizens, and to a conscience-raising among citizens about the need of them. In other words, we are interested in processes of participation that promote associations. Sometimes it will mean to expand the social bases of associations and others to adopt new ways of working and relating, this is to say, to reorganize them. And we are interested in it in order to give an important role to the people, through different ways of

associating, in the leadership of the process. Groups of non-organized citizens do not lead.

THE PROCESS

The process is the result of the relationships between the social actors that take part in it. This result has a side we could call substantive, referred to contents -urbanism, housing, work, education, health, assistance, etc.- and another we could call relational, referred to ways of doing and relating.

Obviously, if there are no changes within the substantive dimension, we can hardly talk about a transformation project and for this to happen we have to work on the relational dimension.

We seek the process to be effective -with results- and efficient -optimizing resources. But, as they are educative processes, we are not interested in immediate, short term effectiveness. We are also not interested in effectiveness in its substantive side, if this means forgetting its relational one.

Consensus and Conflict

In social relationships, consensus and conflict are two faces of the same coin. We are hardly in permanent conflict. Even in disagreeing we need to agree, but also we should not totally agree about everything.

One needs to accept, from the start, the existence of conflicts during the process, not to *resign oneself*, but to manage them in such a way that the process can advance.

Conflict can be open, spontaneous, unexpected and unforeseeable, and very often uncontrollable. It is not the case with consensus, that needs to be reached, and it needs to be done from the only possible place: from within the conflict. Therefore, reaching a consensus will depend on how we deal with the conflict.

If we face the conflict from a so-called *competitive* culture, the important thing is *to win*. If, on the other hand, we face the conflict from what we could call a *collaborative* culture, then what is important is not to win, but to move forward.

In order to win, everything - or almost everything - is valid; it is allowed to lie and to hide information, it is valid to despise the other, the opposed other, and, of course, it is possible *not* to collaborate with him or her. In order to *move forward*, it is the other way around. In *winning* there is a need to defeat someone, while it is possible to *move forward* together with the others, without defeating them.

Is to Participate to Decide?

A pollster arrives at the house of a family in order to make a survey about family habits. He is welcomed by the wife and the pollster asks her who makes the important decisions at home. The wife immediately replies that it is her husband. Then the pollster asks her to give him an example of the kind of decisions she normally makes, and the woman answers that she had decided to move house and had arranged the mortgage, as well as deciding to change the car. The pollster, now curious, inquired immediately about the important *family decisions* her husband usually takes. And the woman gave a couple of examples: 'it is my husband who decides what should be done with Afghanistan or how should unemployment and corruption be solved in our country'.

The classic distinction between representative democracy and participatory democracy lies precisely in decision-making. While in the former, the representative one, decisions are made by *representatives* of citizens. In the latter, participatory democracy, citizens are the ones who make decisions directly. Because of that, citizen participation has very often been identified with the different kinds of machinery, means or processes that allow citizens to participate in public decision-making.

According to us this political approach requires previous thought about the meaning of decision-making . Not being very accustomed to making decisions in public fields as we are, we often distort its real sense. Normally, in order to advance in any activity, project, enterprise, and as long as working in a process, decision-making is not a specific, isolated act that happened one day and will not happen again. It is a constant necessity. Decisions need to be reached constantly. Some are more important than others, but we will hardly find any projects and/or activities that for its realization need a single universal decision.

Let us think, for example, about an experience of participation in which people are called to decide on what kind of institution should be built in a municipal building site. Let us say that during the discussion of proposals three different options are put forward, the building of a kindergarten, an immigrants center and a local cultural center. Well, when the moment to make the final decision comes, if this moment is understood as being isolated, it is possible that one of the three options is chosen; but it will hardly be possible to go further than that.

Whichever decision is reached by the citizens, being the kindergarten, the immigrants center or the local center, there will still be many things left to decide: What budget will be assigned for the construction of the building? Who will have the right to enjoy it? According to what point of view as regards energy will the building be erected? What model -public, market, mixed or social- will be chosen to manage it? What kind of activities will be held in it? And, like these, many more decisions.

If we would like the citizens to decide over these and many other issues that surely will be raised, then we cannot think of a single moment, but of a process of construction of a collective project, and it needs to be organized in a way for this to be possible.

From this point of view the transcendence that a certain decision-making can have, fades away and, instead, more importance falls on the ways of organizing the more or less daily

relationships between all parties involved in the project: making sure that they are more or less transparent, that there is enough information, clear enough and given in the right moment, and that the final result is a consequence of a shared, collective work, of construction of the project.

To sum up, decision-making can be seen from two different points of view, as a concrete/isolated moment or as a continuous process. However, in either case, it needs to be organized.
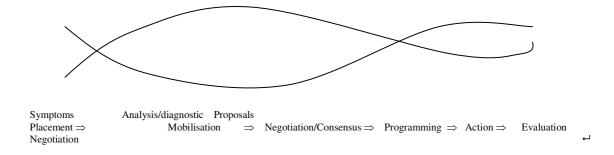
Second Part

Methods and Techniques for Participation

The Major Phases

At this point, we can move towards a methodological plan, designing an organised strategy that allows us to reach all actors and that encourages processes of reflection and action in the community, and that, at the same time, continues to be flexible enough to adapt to constant changes and unforeseen issues that emerge throughout the process. Actually, this methodological strategy has to allow, as we have said earlier, the possibility to put the most appropriate instruments in place that are required for each moment.

In participatory processes, we can distinguish major phases that commonly repeat, and we can represent them graphically as cycles of *opening* and *closing*. These first cycles refer to the phases that are basically expansive: we are looking to mobilise, involve more actors, introduce more points of view to the debate, encourage reflection and collective creativity, when we want to analyse problems and look for possible solutions, beyond coming up with the same solutions that we always do and offering the same technocratic recipes that we are already familiar with. In contrast, by *closing* cycles we refer to specifying issues and points of discussion, making decisions and compromises (which often require processes of negotiation and consensus); for which, as we have been saying until now, it seems clear that neither set of cycles can be understood without the other.

Cycles of Opening and Closing in the Participatory Process

Symptoms   Analysis/diagnostic   Proposals
Placement ⇒   Mobilisation   ⇒   Negotiation/Consensus ⇒   Programming ⇒   Action ⇒   Evaluation   ↵
Negotiation

The first phase is basically the detection of symptoms (what is the problem that we want to deal with?). From there, we want to question ourselves *why* we want to start this participatory process and how we can put it in place as an organisation. Evidently, this placement will be different if the process is initiated by an administration, or by an association or organized group. In the first case, it would be necessary to make clear to the public what the process implies and which are the commitments to be adopted in relation to the methodology and the results. But the same logic can be applied to other organizations: what is the goal to be pursued and what is demanded of the different actors which are involved? This means that this is also a phase of negotiation and definition of objectives and compromises not only with ourselves – as an organisation – but also with "*ours*" (those we immediately identify with) and with other actors that are allied with us to promote the same goals.

This opening cycle usually brings with it different elements and dimensions: it is a process of social mobilization for involving actors in the process and causing them to make the problem or issue their own. But this is difficult to achieve if the instigating groups debate about what they consider relevant or pertinent; this cycle is, above all, a creative collective process, on two levels:

-   in the realization of a shared diagnostic. It is important, here, to find the points of agreement (the shared diagnostic), because many times these points are the ones that the actors stipulate as a problem to work on together, but the points of disagreement can be equally relevant, as they can be the ones that free up the process and make it possible to advance.
-   from the self-diagnostic base, i.e. having reflected on the issues involved, we are ready to be creative, opening new ideas and new proposals of which we feel part not only because we have contributed them ourselves, but also, especially, because the ideas have come from an implication in and appropriation of the problem. We call this a creative process because it is not so much about approaching or summarising ideas, but producing ideas: what we have to approach is the exchange and collective reflection within and among the involved groups.

In these phases of expansion our capacity to contact people, our common sense or experience working from a grassroots level can help, but that alone is not enough. Additionally, we are accustomed to coming to the wrong conclusions and restricting this creative process considerably, even while we are convinced exactly of the opposite. The participatory methods and techniques have to serve here exactly for that reason: to catalyze, provoke and organize (in the expansive sense and in no way limiting) this participation and to systematize the results, beyond our intuitions and relational capacities, giving fuel to a process that, even though flexible, is still rigorous and transparent.

The cycle of opening usually comes to a point that we call *saturation*, i.e. a point in which all the possible intentions and topics of discussion have been exhausted: it is not producing any new ideas. Usually we initiate, at that point, a cycle of closing: forming a

consensus, negotiating – if that is necessary- and of programming – tasks, actors, and time-frames, and it has to be possible to do all this within the same participatory process, combining opportunities for everyone and, at the same time, efficiently. In these processes, working group and planning techniques can be important, but on the other hand, the future roles and commitments that the actors will adopt about the decisions that they take have a fundamental dimension, and ultimately, depend on the degree that the actors have appropriated the process more than just the use of specific techniques.

The closing cycle ends with an agreement and programming, and the action that results from this initiates a new phase of opening that requires an evaluation – also participatory in nature – and the generation of new territorial realities. Seen from this point of view, a participatory process doesn't ever begin or end, because it is more of a culture, a way of being, that doesn't pass a project from beginning to end: it is a way of being where opening and closing, expansion and synthesis, come together constantly to confront new proposed aims from the same community in the same process of knowledge-action.
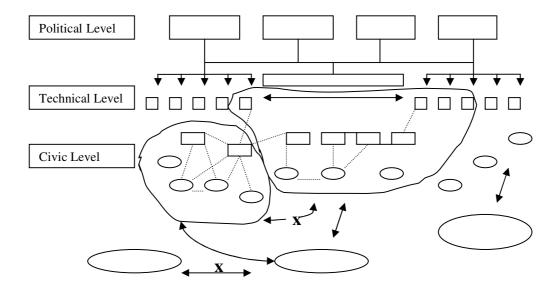
Actors and Relations. The Social Map as a Tool to Recreate Existing Networks

Participation includes actors and relations between actors for promoting shared projects. As such, in the latter, participation implies the transformation of existing relations for building local networks that are more citizen-oriented, where horizontal relations and the base for power opposes hierarchical relations.

From this perspective, a participatory process consists of defining strategies and forming alliances that favour the strengthening of weak relationships that usually link actors with common or converging interests, and that isolate those alliances that reproduce situations of closing and block citizen-based processes.

Apart from this theoretical base that is transversal to the whole process and lays down a working logic that seems fundamental to us, there is an instrument that can be useful for projecting this map of actors and relations: the social map. The social map is a operative description (not only metaphorical) of the social structure (in our case, social, and more specifically local), that consists of a combination of nodes (actors at various levels: political-institutional, service and technical, business, associative, informal groups, etc.) and relations among them (stronger or weaker, positive or conflictive). But, in addition, from the viewpoint of social intervention, this perspective acquires all its potential, as far as it starts with the assumption that it is easier to introduce changes to existing relations than institutional, social, or personal identities, under the hypothesis that, in modifying the position that people and groups occupy within the social networks, you are also modifying its identity, its strategies and its practices.

Social Map

The social map can have different functions throughout these processes:

In principle, *identifying* and *locating* the different environments present within a community has a very important diagnostic value in showing the existing resources in a synthetic way and grouping them according their degree of connection or position in the environment of a particular problem. This is already converted into a catalysing element that makes it possible to demonstrate *who* is in a process, *who is not, who could be*, and *who is keeping us from moving ahead*: it helps us to generalize and think collectively. This collective process allows us to find consensus among different groups, different layers of a community that need to be sought out and involved, beyond partial perceptions that we have from each sector, or the general feeling that *always the same people* are providing.

But beyond this static reading, the social map does not stop at being only a description – it is also a instrument for group mobilization: it allows us to define who we are (the ones in the organization), who "ours" are (the social base for the project), who we can count on and cooperate with (the allies), who we need to persuade (the indifferent), and who we have to isolate (the opponents) – although it is not necessary to defeat the opponents, but it *is* necessary to make agreements with the others.

And, following the last point, the study of relations allows us to identify which are those relations we want to make stronger in order to bring about a transforming dynamic: looking for points in common between the involved actors and these relations, promoting complicity and mutual trust, opening space for dialogue where it is possible to develop self-analysis and shared projects, and different incidental strategies.

Methods and Techniques at the Service of the Community

In addition to the social map as a transversal element throughout the participatory process, a deepening of participatory democracy that enriches the representative one (in the most modest sense) or that overtakes it (in the most transformative sense) needs methods and techniques that give support and catalyse, encouraging social creativity and opening spaces for debate which are visible from every point of view.

In participatory processes it is often possible to distinguish between *co-habitational experts* (actors from the territory who possess the same knowledge about what affects them and the capacity to act to intervene in it) and *methodological experts* (experts that unfold a combination of methods and techniques to give support, incentives, and energy to participatory processes).

These methods encompass, among other things, instruments of social research that are already considered traditional and which we do not treat here, such as quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. statistical data to measure the rate of a particular phenomena or the evaluation of the degree of success of an initiative, using individual and group interviews to know the different discourses and existing positions, etc.). But here these methods are not conceived as a classical social study or investigation, in which a supposed expert on a subject observes the situation from outside and makes some surveys and/or interviews about *what is happening* or *what people think* and runs to make his/her conclusions, which are usually presented as a *scientific truth*; but on the contrary, these are tools that are visible for everyone and serve as an instrument because we can define what is interesting for us to know among all of us, with the aim that we want to do something, and we determine how we want to do it and what the results should be, and why, and we will know better and become aware of our own capacity to take action concerning what affects us.

Apart from quantitative and qualitative techniques, which can act to support participatory processes but are not in themselves *participatory techniques*, in the last years new instruments have been introduced that are especially suitable for what we used to call participatory moments and that, usually, were encompassed under the generic term *participation workshops* or simply *workshops*. We focus on this combination of techniques in the following sections.

Participation Workshops: Moments in the Process

Very generically, a participation workshop can be defined as a meeting of a group guided by monitors-coordinators which has the aim of defining and analyzing problems, that can produce consensual solutions, and ultimately, mobilize and co-responsibilize the implicated social actors. For its development, techniques can be applied that, using different contexts and with multiple adaptations and variants, aim to promote, in the local setting, moments of direct participation by the different sectors that are involved in the territory or problem that is being dealt with.

The method and the techniques that guide the design of these workshops stem from sources as varied as popular education in Latin America, social-cultural animation[*], organizational psychology or strategic planning. Throughout the different experiences of participatory investigation-action developed around the world, a flexible and open tool has been taking shape which has a wide range of uses. But these uses must be defined and, in this sense, we want to make three important comments about what is and what isn't a civic participation workshop.

- a workshop promotes the exchange of ideas, group creativity and the decision-making of a limited number of people (in order to guarantee that all have the opportunity to make their contributions) in a reduced/limited space of time (feasible for the participants). The collective that is participating can be a group that existed before the workshop (for example, members of a council of an association, a government team, a expert group) or created *ad hoc* for the purpose of the workshop (a sample of political/technical/associative representatives, a random selection of citizens, etc.) But in any case, *the civic participation workshop has a transforming dimension "toward the outside" beyond the time/space occupied by the workshop and with implications beyond the people participating.* For that reason, it should not be confused with other participatory techniques used in other areas, like in business, or socio-cultural animation, whose main aims are cohesion, production and internal dynamics of the group and for the group.
- A workshop helps the techniques of dynamization that optimizes individual and group creativity and helps to systematize results, in a relaxed, pleasant, and entertaining atmosphere. But *you should remember that a workshop is not a game, it is a political action*: the participants have to be aware in every moment what topic is being debated, which is the commitment that is being demanded, and which are the effects of the decisions that the workshop will have. Using workshops to give a participatory appearance with the idea to legitimize is not only a cheap practice but also a way to generate false expectations and mistrust, and finally abusing a tool that has potential of democratic innovation.
- The programming of workshops only makes sense when it introduces and articulates a process of expansion/synthesis that opens the promotion of self-diagnosis and creative ideas and is closed, provisionally in order to open again, assuming decisions and co-responsibilities on the part of the sectors involved. As such, *a civic participation workshop is a tool for participation that does not guarantee, in itself, this participation,* but as such that it aims to transform the existing social relations.
- The workshops imply a conception of knowledge that goes beyond the technocratic and elitist knowledge, as such generating new knowledge and social action from practical experience. Therefore, *a workshop is not a discussion group where an analyst studies and discovers a discourse of a collective, nor a conference because some experts make the audiences reflect on some issue, nor is it a seminar where a tutor supervises group self-study, but it is a moment of self-*

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[*] animation is a term used in Spain, France, Italy and Portugal to refer to an activity which aims to get people involved in a civic action or cause.

investigation/action led by the participants (social experts) where the monitors-coordinators (methodological experts) promote contributions, mediate differing points of view, and help to systematize the results, promoting the participation of each and every one of the attendants.

Opening and Closing: Techniques for Diagnosing, Proposing, Deciding, Programming or Evaluating?

At this point, it is not necessary to repeat that any activity needs objectives to guide it, but here it is important to determine these objectives in relation to the participatory process: which is the problem that we are intervening in? what is our final destination? which role does each person have to take? and, according to this, which answers do the techniques have to give? how do we feed the rest of the process?

There is a first level of objectives that refers to the role of the participants. After this, we can speak further. And there is another level that refers to which dimension of the participatory process you want to approach. There are many possible scenarios. A classic one, and a common one, is the logic of problem-solving. Looking at this scenario from a participatory perspective, a workshop can serve to:

- Analyze/diagnose. Identify symptoms and needs, and their causes (it is important to identify the needs – in depth- beyond the manifest symptoms: it is the first that opens space for creative ideas and which must be approached). Even though this self-diagnosis does not add to the truths or the real causes of the phenomena, but the perception that the actors have about them, it is valuable to:
    o Construct a theoretical framework of the territory and actors involved. Provide a hypothesis that later can be contrasted empirically. In this sense, it is fundamental to have dialogue with quantitative and qualitative techniques that can and have to give support to participatory techniques.
    o Define positions and mobilise: Constructing and showing how the problem is perceived by different actors (showing, with this the shared diagnostics and the key points that can block or move a processes of change forward) and, in externalizing it and systematizing it, helps to appropriate this knowledge and the definition of objectives and action strategies.
- Propose. Generate alternatives and creative proposals. By creative we also mean imaginative and original, but this is difficult to construct out of nothing. It is important, as has been said, to use a previous diagnostic (or an *in situ* self-diagnostic), and plural knowledge of other experiences that can provide elements of reflection. In addition, making a proposal based on a need that has been identified collectively promotes the commitment with its realization and application.
- Decide. Selecting proposals (choosing some and eliminating others) o prioritizing them, in a way that puts forward those that are more important or more urgent. The decision can be made by vote or by consensus, but neither of these will be participatory if the options are closed and if it was not possible for the participants to have discussed them; in other words, as the taking of decisions follows one of

the principals indicators of participation, it is not participatory if there hasn't been a previous self-diagnosis and generation of alternatives where everyone has very clear what they are deciding (this, for example, is a referendum where proposals are being voted for that emerged from the diagnosis that is not from the same community, does not form part of the participatory process – as much as it can legitimize it – but is an example of electoral marketing, because the voters vote from a de-contextualized and marginalized position.)

- Program. Planning tasks for the development of objectives and the application of decisions, taking into account the implicated sectors, the time and resources necessary for their execution. These work spaces are usually more complex, generally share more sessions and expert support/ management can be necessary.
- Evaluate. Analyzing the degree of adequacy of the current situation with relation to foreseen objectives is, in part, a specific and systematized way to diagnose, but with some very clear particularities: the objectives to isolate and the criteria to evaluate them (quantitative and qualitative) are established, for which it is even more indispensable to compliment the participatory work with the production of qualitative and quantitative facts/data (whenever possible, you have to count on quantitative indicators that allow you to measure the impact of an intervention and its evolution in time). In the framework of a participatory process the evaluations have to serve to reinitiate the cycle.

A civic participation workshop can approach one or more of these goals and, accordingly, compliment group work techniques that continue to be pertinent to these goals. As we have seen, not all objectives are at the same level: a workshop can be just a diagnostic, a evaluation programme, but it is not likely that it will be from an outside decision that the participants themselves have previously taken part in the discussion of the proposals in debate. Experience has shown good results in workshops of three sessions (of no more than three hours each one), where a self-diagnosis is made and proposals are made, and then they are prioritized.

This five-step plan corresponds at the same time to different moments that we have identified before in the participatory process: the opening and expansion (defining problems, diagnosing them, and proposing solutions), and closing (deciding, programming) and the reopening of the process (evaluating, re-diagnosing). In any case, these objectives can be given in multiples phases throughout concrete processes.

Techniques to Reinforce Positions or for Stimulating Consensus?

On the other hand, and in accordance with the previous objectives, it should be seen in each context and moment if the interest is to stimulate consensus (putting inter-group cooperation and universal compromise above all, to join forces against the risk of miscommunication, confrontation or fracture), stimulate conflict (against the risk of stagnation or blocking the process, as such encouraging new relation dynamics), or working on two levels in different phases of the process. This way some strategies lead to conflict (reinforcing the discourses and positions between groups, motivating the participants), and others, consensus (promoting plural working

groups/commissions where it is possible to find points of agreement and clarifying the disagreement, as such overcoming the lack of communication, the prejudices, the shortage of facts and the diversity of fields of reference, and creating an atmosphere that is pleasant and stress-free in order to face the antipathy towards the opposition and hostility woken by aggressive reactions to the polarized discussion).

If what you want is to stimulate mobilization between groups with an aim to face a problem (defining objectives and strategies, distributing tasks, etc.), then it is possible to suggest to the organization that you should have a workshop for each of the implicated groups. In contrast, if you are trying to encourage the exchange of ideas and dialogue between the different positions and points of view, it would be more useful to organize a single or common workshop; or a good methodological strategy could be to work separately in the first step, and together in the second, this way everyone can make their points of view clear, and differences of opinions will emerge, and from each of the different positions, ways for making consensus can be found (instead of creating a consensus on solutions directly coming from the basis that everyone agrees, which is usually a bad way to start a process.)
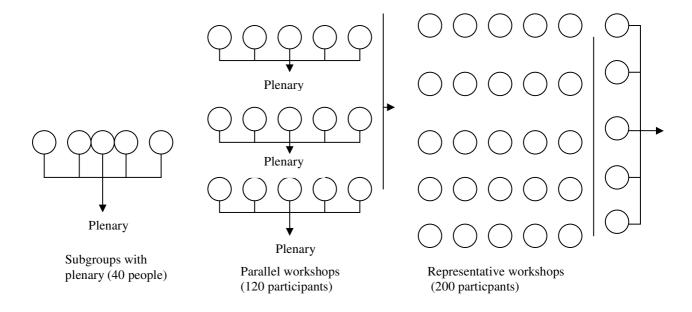
Who Participates in a Workshop?

All actors and points of view that are implied (or affected) in the (or by the) participatory process are potential participants in a workshop. In other words, the spaces for participation have to guarantee that all the possible positions are represented under equal conditions (independent of their degree of collective organization).

Once the groups have been defined that are to form part of the workshop, the people – how many and which ones – still remain to be selected. In the case of participatory techniques, the maximum size of the group has a practical limitation: the formation of groups where everyone can express their ideas implies working groups that, in general terms, are between 8 and 12 people (the establishment of this limit depends ultimately on the possibilities and complexities of the technique used). However, a workshop can be formed by diverse operative working groups of the mentioned size, and later can put their common ideas forward in a plenary session, which makes it possible for a much larger number of participants to attend the workshop.

Moreover, it is possible to program more complicated workshop structures that make it possible to increase even further the number of participants. One possible strategy is to organize parallel workshops where the results are presented in the form of conferences, platforms or assemblies, or organize representative workshops where there are spokespersons of the previous workshops (it is possible to organize successive levels of representation, but, obviously, each higher level gets further away from direct participation). The alternatives in each case would have to be evaluated. It is important to remember, however, the number of participants in a workshop might not be representative of the whole population in statistical terms. It will not be, nor does it pretend to be, as our quantitative sample seeks its

representation above the universe of the population, the qualitative and participatory samples seek beyond the realm of the discourse, that is to say, the representation of each and every one of the existing positions surrounding the studied problem.

Examples of Possible Workshop Participant Structures

Plenary

Subgroups with
plenary (40 people)

Plenary

Plenary

Plenary

Parallel workshops
(120 participants)

Representative workshops
(200 particpants)

Lastly, the concrete selection of participants can be done by a snowball effect (through existing contacts – one leading to another, leading to another), by voluntary registration, or random selection, according to the targeted objectives. It is important, in any case, to incorporate the diverse collectives of the population present among the existing positions (according to age, sex, social class, ethnicity, etc.)

Some Rules for Organizing and Monitoring Participation Workshops

In this section, we present some rules and elements to take into account during the organization of the workshops, such as:
a. The presentation and preparation of the participants
b. The division of the participants into subgroups.
c. Rules for monitoring the groups
d. Rules for systematizing the contributions of the groups.

    a. The presentation and preparation of the participants

It is not necessary to have any kind of previous education or preparation in order to participate in a workshop, but, on the other hand, there is a series of methodological and practical thematic information that should be explained at the beginning,

including the mode of contact between the participants, organization and promoting group, as well as the preparation of the participants. This information can be provided in a plenary session and should include the following elements:

- Which people will conduct the workshop (municipal authorities, external experts, etc.) and which institutions/organizations will promote it.
- Which objectives will be sought in the workshop and which process will be used; and with this, what are the participants asking for and what will be the practical effects of their contributions. The success or failure of the workshop depends in great measure on the clarity of this definition.
- Why these participants and not other ones have been gathered (sample criteria), and in quality of what (as institutional representatives, as representative members – but not formally representing the group to which he/she belongs, but to a personal title). Concretely we are answering the question of what role each person has to play and what they should speak about.
- Which will be the function of the workshop, the techniques that will be used (although they may not be explained in detail) and the timetable limits (preferably there will be a written programme of the session). It is important to ask the attendees that they respect the rules of the game established by the organizers, so that it is possible to guarantee that everyone can express his or her ideas and can arrive to some conclusions that provide an answer to the established objectives.
- Elements to be debated: it is important, as we have said, to set the parameters for the debate, offering elements that encourage those present to reflect, but at the same time not limiting the reflection of, all the existing positions. Depending on the objectives, and the technique used and the kinds of participants, this information, can be provided by the experts that are working in the process or external experts, actors that play certain stereotyped roles and provoke the participants, or the representatives of the community themselves (if their points of view are already well-developed). Different kinds of information can be provided:
    o Establish various ideal scenarios about the proposed topics, where the virtues and defects of each one is demonstrated.
    o Establish the results of a diagnostic that has been put into effect (taking into account the fact that its presentation does not close or inhibit the possibility to discuss it, complete it or materialize it, but to the contrary, it can be illustrated with provocative titles in order to cause a reaction).
    o Knowledge of experiences or similar problems in other territorial contexts (taking this resource into account in the first phases of the process, as it may limit creativity).
    o Establish concrete cases that illustrate a problem, and that avoid the risk of excessive abstraction and generalization about determined topics.
    o Make a presentation with completely contrary arguments to the position of the majority. This is a resource that can be very useful in the case of groups/organizations that are stuck or blocked by latent conflicts; this technique will help to make those conflicts emerge and generate dynamics for change.

At the end of this presentation it is possible to have a session of questions and answers, as long as they are de organizational, methodological or concrete questions that some of the speakers have presented. It is important in this case not to start a debate, as this is the task of the working groups and not the plenary session.

b. The division of participants into groups

In the workshop where different collectives are present and where the work will be carried out in subgroups, the criteria for dividing the participants is always established: homogeneous subgroups, where all the topics with be dealt with transversally, or subgroups divided by topic with heterogeneous participants:

- Division into homogeneous groups: It is recommended to construct each of the groups and reinforce their position and by this, the inter-group oppositions and disagreements are shown. The benefits of working only with this division criteria are limited, as similar results can be obtained with workshops organized independently with each of the groups (the only advantage here is the ability to show these contrasts in a plenary session, in front of other groups).
- Division into groups by topic: Inter-group dialogue is stimulated (whether this is with the aim to make conflict emerge or to come to a consensus about alternatives). Problems: the group will not be very dynamic if the participants do not already have a position; additionally, sometimes some participants can be inhibited in front of others that exercise their symbolic power (for example adult women in front of adult men, citizens in front of authorities, etc.) One important observation: in the case of subdivisions according to topic, the participants can point out their preferences for determined topics, but ultimately the organization has to guarantee that the groups are equal (for example, avoiding that the participants in a group where the subject of youth is the focus are only young people, or a group discussing economic development is only followed by businesspeople).

A good strategy is usually a combination of both criteria of division in different sessions of the same workshop: a first session dedicated to work with homogeneous subgroups to generate a collective discourse among a group of equals and integrating the participants of the workshop better; and a second session where there is interaction between different collectives, divided into sub-themes.

c. Rules for monitoring working groups

The role of the monitor of the working groups is a classic of this kind of animation; the moderator is not completely outside of the group, in the leadership position of an authority, nor is he or she totally fused with the group, because this would reinforce this dialogue uncritically, but the moderator enters (helping to advance the discussion methodologically) and leaves (taking a critical distance) the discussions (López de Ceballos, 1989, pg. 51). The way to define this general model to practice will depend, ultimately, on the characteristics of the group: the people who attend the workshop

with certain skills (knowing or not knowing how to participate) and some attitudes and motivations (willing or unwilling). If the group deficit – or of some members of the group- is one of skill, the monitor will have to offer technical and emotional advice for the participants to gain some trust, and positively channel the contributions toward a group synergy (for example, if in a group of proposals for economic promotion, someone shows he/she is especially concerned with the solitude of elderly people, the monitor could lead this concern towards the subject that the group is working on, and ask the person in question and the rest of the group if this implies the need to promote new areas of employment directed toward paying attention to these groups). However, if the deficit is one of attitude, the monitor will have to basically take on the task of motivation. But if the participants are prepared and motivated, then it is not necessary to delegate the set of determined objectives to the representative group in agreement with the rules of the game, offering advice when it is required and mirroring the group when it is time to systematise the results:

Situation of the Participants and Rules of Monitoring

	Want	**Do not want**
Know	Delegate	Motivate
Do not know	Assess	Motivate and Asses

Source: Adapted from Sánchez Alonso (1991, pg. 78-83) who, at the time, adopted a classic theory of situational leadership from Hersey and Blanchard.

    d.   Rules to systematize the contribution in the groups

The objective of the working groups is to find different ideas in common about a concrete topic taking advantage of the group synergy and guaranteeing that all the members make a contribution, independent of their skills and attitudes, the collective to which the belong, and their capacity for expression. Depending on the complexity of the topic and the kinds of groups one or another technique will be better: on continuation we show the three most common: a shower of ideas, contributions by cards and Phillips 6 –6. These tools are, in themselves, working group techniques like those shown in the annexes. However, we have preferred to include here an introduction to them for their transversality and because usually they are the basis for which to apply nearly all others.

Shower of ideas

Objectives:
- Generate original and creative ideas taking advantage of group synergy

Applications:
- When there are few ideas this helps people to build upon the ideas of others.
- When there is trust between the participants
- When there is not a risk of someone in the group taking over control.

How it works
- the topic/question is established for the group and an expert explains it.
- The participants contribute their ideas freely about the established topic (symptoms or causes if they are making a diagnostic, proposals if they are generating alternatives, etc.) without the need to justify themselves (any idea is valid) and the monitor notes them down so that every one can see them (only intervening in the debate if it is necessary to equalise the level of participation of the participants). It is important not to judge the ideas nor enter into the debate in this phase, so as not to inhibit creativity and originality.
- In a second phase, the noted ideas are debated, systematised and grouped according to similarity (according to the group criteria and not the criteria of the monitor; the monitor can make proposals in case the group needs help). Now we are dealing with considering, from a critical attitude, the feasibility of the ideas that have been gathered.
- If necessary, decisional techniques can be used to make a hierarchy of the different contributions according to importance or urgency.
- The conclusions are recorded in agreement with the group. If these need to be presented in the plenary session with the aim to relate them to other groups, a spokesperson can be chosen to do this.

Contributions by cards

Objectives
- Generate ideas guaranteeing the individual contribution of each of the members of the group

Applications
- When the participants do not know each other or if it is necessary to introduce dynamics that promote integration in the group
- When there is a risk of leadership that can inhibit or excessively convey the participation of one part of the group.
- When it is considered a priority that each of the members contributes first his or her experience and individual knowledge without being influenced by the others.

How it works
- A group is established to debate a topic or question and an expert explains it.
- In a limited time (between 5 and 10 minutes, according to the complexity of the topic) the participants individually note their ideas on cards (in the case of more complex topics or ones that require previous work, it is possible to ask the participants to bring a prepared work to the workshop).
- Each participant, in turns, presents his ideas and hangs the cards on a wall for everyone to see.
- The ideas on the wall are debated and grouped by similarity (it is possible to ask the group to do this): some ideas will be identical, some similar, and others will be placed on different levels, in a way that they can place as concrete action from

one wider proposal (for example, "putting access ramps in the town market" can be a concrete action that forms part of a broader proposal that follows "the adjustment of public space to groups with reduced mobility"). On continuation, titles (synthetic names) can be placed on the groups which reflect the meaning of the different groups of cards.
- If necessary, decisional techniques can be used to make a hierarchy of the different contributions according to importance or urgency (see the nominal group technique in the following section as a form of systematically structuring all this process).
- The conclusions are recorded in agreement with the group. If these need to be presented to a plenary session and placed in relation with other groups, a spokesperson can be chosen.

Phillips 6 – 6

Objectives
- Facilitate the individual contribution in groups larger than 20 people.

Applications
- Useful in facilitating individual contributions in plenary sessions and in a very brief period of time, without the need to have to divide up and initiate a dynamic in subgroups (in detriment to going deeper into a topic)
- To help large groups to self-organise themselves.

How it works
- The group establishes a topic or question to be debated and an expert explains it and asks the participants that they divide into subgroups (originally 6 people, but it is adaptable to more or less participants, up to a maximum of 8 people, not more, because in that case the individual contributions will be very limited).
- Each subgroup chooses a coordinator/spokesperson, that will lead the debate.
- The subgroup has to arrive to a consensual conclusion, originally in a maximum of 6 minutes – from which comes the name of the technique.
- The coordinator/spokesperson informs the plenary of the results.
- The conclusions are recorded in agreement with the group.