

Document downloaded from:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10251/199372>

This paper must be cited as:

Martinez-Vargas, C.; Walker, M.; Cin, FM.; Boni Aristizábal, A. (2022). A Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm: Methods, Methodologies and Cosmological Issues and Possibilities. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. 23(1):8-29.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.2013173>



The final publication is available at

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.2013173>

Copyright Taylor & Francis

Additional Information

This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of an article published in Carmen Martinez-Vargas, Melanie Walker, F. Melis Cin & Alejandra Boni (2022) A Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm: Methods, Methodologies and Cosmological Issues and Possibilities, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 23:1, 8-29, DOI: 10.1080/19452829.2021.2013173, available online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2021.2013173>

A Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm: Methods, Methodologies and Cosmological Issues and Possibilities

Carmen Martinez-Vargas, Melanie Walkera, F. Melis Cin & Alejandra Boni

ABSTRACT

Meaningful participation of people as agents in development practice has been a central concern in capabilitarian scholarship and of Amartya Sen's own work, as a valuable freedom and functioning in itself. Yet, there has been limited attention until now about knowledge generation processes and who is fully included, despite a growing body of literature arguing for pluriversality and decolonial approaches against historical and geographical inequalities at many levels. The paper proposes that capabilitarian scholarship could be enriched by considering a pluriverse of methodological perspectives, building on the work already undertaken but taking it further to create multi-epistemic conversations. This paper explores why the methodological and cosmological – onto-epistemological – unexplored areas of participatory research in capabilitarian scholarship should be embedded in our research culture and practice for more inclusive, decolonial, methodologically challenging empirical strategies (beyond methods and methodologies) that will place those situated at the margins of epistemic divisions and conflicts in the centre of knowledge production and debates. To this end and adding to the debates, the paper first considers participatory projects reported on in the journal before presenting an original framing of a capabilitarian participatory paradigm. The paper further proposes some principles that underpin its operationalisation.

KEYWORDS

Capabilitarian; participatory; Research; Decoloniality; Community voices; Pluriverse; Paradigm

Introduction

Participation of people as agents in development has been a central concern in capability scholarship and of Amartya Sen's (1999, 2009) work. Meaningful participation as citizens is not only necessary to shape our democratic and social structures, but it stands out as a valuable freedom and functioning in itself (Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011). However, when we shift our attention to research processes and the generation of knowledge as capability scholars, we face the puzzle of traditions of research practices within development studies which have for years maintained methodological boundaries and fixed' empirical research in which communities are the repositories of data and researchers do research, interpret the data and share the knowledge. Notwithstanding the reach of these widely used paradigmatic and methodological traditions, we now have a body of knowledge and literature questioning existing methodological hierarchies from a participatory and pluriversal viewpoint (for example, Rowell et al. 2017; Chilisa 2012). Although participatory approaches and pluriversality align with current capability claims in terms of listening to marginalised voices and leaving the ontological ground of the Capability Approach open, we believe current participatory methods and even participatory methodologies in the capabilities literature presented in this journal are insufficient to advance and diversify capability participatory practices from a pluriverse of methodological perspectives (Mignolo 2011).

Therefore, we argue that our aim should not only be to listen to those who have been historically, geographically, economically or culturally silenced, but to build solidarity alliances with communities against epistemic injustices, engaging with subjectivities of communities and researchers. In this way we might fulfil our political (Medina 2013) and epistemic responsibilities (Code 2017). The focus on participatory approaches would not only problematise the outcomes of research projects, but also the process of knowledge generation as a space for capabilities expansion and empowerment, the centrality of epistemic freedoms, and building epistemic communities as the ultimate goal from a pluriversal perspective (Boni & Fedriani, 2020; Mignolo 2012; Clark, Biggeri & Fedriani 2019). More than this, we need to advance the value of different methodological approaches, knowledge systems and the communities that possess them to create multi-epistemic conversations, what we refer to as a pluriverse in this paper. This means acknowledging different positional objectivities to recognise individuals-in-community as full

epistemic agents and credible knowers in order to build responsible alliances (Sen 2004; Fricker 2015; Smith 1999).

Therefore, in this paper, as a contribution to the special issue on an epistemological break for capabilitarian participatory research, we want to explore and argue why the methodological and cosmological—onto-epistemological—unexplored areas of participatory research in capabilitarian scholarship should be embedded in our research culture and practice. In doing, so we move towards more inclusive, decolonial, methodologically challenging empirical strategies (beyond methods and methodologies) that will place those situated at the margins of epistemic divisions and conflicts in the centre of knowledge production and debates (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

We first draw on different empirical participatory projects from the South and the North from literature in this journal, and our own experiences as authors based in both Global South and North contexts undertaking participatory research projects. We explore the limitations that we and others experience. We highlight how epistemic gaps and ontological silences are produced and ask questions such as: ‘what does reality and knowledge mean for our co-researchers and allies? And for us as capabilitarian researchers?’; ‘how are epistemic relations understood with and between other individuals and researchers?’ We go beyond methods and methodological participatory applications and debates, even if we still experience compromises and reproduction of structures of power in academia due to challenging conditions when adopting participatory research practices in our institutions.

The point of our paper is to highlight that, although the enhancement of epistemic freedoms is substantial for these practices, there is an invisible cosmological (onto-epistemological) dimension in our methodological operationalisation of participatory research in capabilitarian empirical scholarship. We work to unearth forms of 'being and doing research otherwise' when researching with communities with divergent knowledge systems. We argue for the importance of different conceptual, methodological, theoretical and cosmological reference points from which to develop and shape capabilitarian scholarship. To do so, firstly, we propose a three-tier structure to analyse participatory research in the empirical literature: Method level, Methodology level, and Cosmological level in order to develop our ‘capabilitarian participatory paradigm’ that could assist us to adopt a more empirically plural and inclusive research positionality. In the next section, we

first map the paradigmatic positions in international development literature to argue where our participatory paradigm lies in relation to conventional research philosophies.

Human Development and its paradigm positionalities

When we talk about human development and capabilities, we refer to a fairly new theoretical framework although much of the foundational ideas draw on traditions going back to other civilisations and times in history, such as Aristotelian thought or Indian philosophy among other classical and contemporaneous thinkers (Nussbaum 2011; Sen 1999, 2009; Robeyns 2017). Our theorisation of the world is rooted in specific traditions that not only shape how we see the world (ontology) and what we consider knowledge (epistemology), but also the approaches, methodologies and methods we are able to draw on to acquire knowledge. History, and the dominant historical figures therefore, matter when we generate knowledge, as struggles around decolonisation and Eurocentric knowledge demonstrate (Escobar & Escobar 1998). But, it matters even more when we want to understand epistemological, ontological and methodological constraints that might go unnoticed due to unequal power structures and unequal geopolitical spheres (Soldatenko 2015; Derrida 2016).

That is why as researchers we rely on different paradigms to validate empirical data; however, they are equally based on different assumptions as part of the interdisciplinary of science. Hence, research practices situated within these paradigmatic lines are thought to be scientific and validated by our communities of scholarly inquiry practices and disciplines. Certainly, scientific paradigms have started to change and accommodate critical lines of thinking influenced by global social movements such as feminist epistemology or indigenous/decolonial knowledge. Over the past three decades, this rebellious shift has expanded its boundaries to include decolonial and local epistememes as complementary to traditional views and not as rivals or discredited arguments. For instance, Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) added the *Participatory Paradigm*, drawing on the work developed by Heron and Reason (1997). Further, transformative (Mertens 2007), critical realist (Harvey 2002), feminist (Thompson 1992), indigenous (Walker 2015; Wilson 2003) and Africa-centred paradigms (Asante 2003; Mazama 2001; Okeke & Van Wyk 2016) proposed

around the globe are now possible categories. This opens the way to recognise that there is not only one way of understanding, investigating and interacting in the empirical world through research practices, but rather more than one. However, although, we do not discuss all of them in this paper; it suffices to note that these alternative paradigms generate new insights into renovated visions that ascend as power categories accommodating the changing realities in which we live. Further, this (slow) shift in accommodating different epistemological and ontological standpoints is an outcome of collective and systematic epistemic resistance, diversifying and accommodating different comsovisions towards what we refer to as a pluriversal paradigm landscape (Medina 2013; Mignolo 2018). However, before deeply exploring these concepts and ideas, we focus on capabilitarian theoretical and empirical positionalities.

Capabilitarian scholarship has certainly been subject to the scientific traditions noted above, as part of slow transformations, paradigmatic shifts and constantly changing realities. In empirical research practices, central to the Capability Approach has been a critique of quantification and measurement of human wellbeing through uni-dimensional indicators such as GDP (Sen 1999). However, and despite these critiques the Approach has resorted to quantifications to generate empirical knowledge. Hence, even if positivist and post-positivist paradigms have been central for macro-empirical studies in the development and capabilities field (e.g. Human Development Index, poverty measurement, capabilities operationalisations, policy evaluations, and so on), we see how the journal has contributed immensely to the paradigmatic and methodological diversification of the field. We see this in the increasing relevance of empirical qualitative studies and alternative theoretical contributions, such as feminist (Unterhalter 2007; Cin 2017), indigenous studies (Watene 2016), or philosophical contributions which expand the ontological grounds of the capabilities approach (D'Amato 2020; Nussbaum 2017 among many others).

These contributions have grown, too, with the introduction of participatory research projects and theoretical transgression seeking to breach the ontological and epistemological boundaries that were previously possible. However, we believe this theoretical advancement might be further pushed and explored so that we argue for a wider use of empirical practices aligned with other paradigmatic stands that allow us to foster and advance a capabilitarian pluriverse of methodological approaches.

The paradigmatic borders: Epistemic and Methodological turns in Capabilitarian scholarship

Situating Capabilitarian Scholarship

Since the initial conceptualisation of the Capability Approach, many scholars have contributed to enhancing and theorising the framework (Robeyns 2017; Nussbaum 2011) yet perhaps less in its empirical methodological approaches and underlying epistemological assumptions. In this section, we therefore focus on the methodological and epistemological debates of capabilitarian scholarship drawing on the research published in the journal. We have chosen papers from the journal to illustrate our argument and the direction of capabilitarian thinking for this special issue, while recognising that there are many relevant studies published elsewhere which we have left out.

When Sen (1999) wrote *Development as Freedom*, he had a clear understanding that the Capability Approach would form a normative and evaluative framework in terms of not defining what human development is, but rather what epistemological grounds we could use to assess it (Sen 1999). This alignment continued as part of his work in the *Idea of Justice*, leaving the theoretical ground open-ended and challenging transcendental theories as a way to justify the centrality of individual agents determining their own lives (Sen 2009). Sen's thinking is far-reaching when aligned with decolonial thinkers and current debates within capabilitarian scholarship. Several postcolonial and decolonial scholars have been trying to expose the hegemony of Eurocentric views and its invisible objectivism (Soldatenko 2015) not only in the way that valued capabilities are selected but to leave the Capability Approach open-ended in order to accommodate other worldviews. As De Sousa Santos (2006) claims, we need epistemological platforms to build intelligible tools between different subjectivities to build a 'translation' theory. Hence, knowledge understood as an incomplete theoretical ground, makes the Capability Approach an epistemic tool, such as by providing capabilities as a conceptual element that allows us to translate different cultural values and ways of living, not as complete but rather connected into democratic networks of partial understandings of knowing.

Further, it is not only the centrality of capabilities as epistemic translation elements, but the possibility to revise and re-conceptualise any aspect of the Capability Approach as an incomplete and open-ended epistemological ground, having optional modules as defended by Robeyns (2017).

Scholars have not only been able to debate about different capabilities but also about the particular importance of some capabilities in different context and situations (Walker 2019).

Equally, vigorous debates have been going on into the reconsideration of other substantial aspects of the Capability Approach, especially concerning personhood but not limited to it thanks to its generative epistemological incompleteness. There are substantial contributions from scholars who have expanded this area of expertise, for instance the work of Ibrahim (2006) on collective capabilities, Deneulin (2008) on structures of living together, or the more recent work by D'Amato (2020) proposing a collectivist capabilitarianism. Further, other critiques have recently proposed the need to address (and value) capabilities of other species (Nussbaum 2017), or the need to consider natural entities such as rivers as holders of rights and capabilities (Kramm 2020).

Certainly, the advancement of this knowledge has contributed to further our thinking, especially reconsidering the incomplete ontological and epistemological grounds of the Capability Approach. However, although we have clear contributions at the theoretical level (besides its Northern over-representation), methodologically speaking our conceptualisations and operationalisations are still rather thin. We are still not sufficiently reshaping the methodological lines, questioning enough what research relations are, how we operationalise empirical research and which knowledges are valid and necessary as part of this empirical research processes (Heron & Reason 1997).

Our publications particularly in this journal as capabilitarian knowledge, show that participatory practices are still quite limited (Action Research, Participatory Action Research, Participatory Research, Community-based Research among many others). Even this limited participatory literature tends to situate practices mostly within the polarised debate between quantitative and qualitative data, and also in the methodological dilemma of methods and methodologies rather than accounting for full alliances between facilitators and co-researchers throughout the research process. Ferrero et al. (2014) claim that development studies are strongly linked to traditional methodological assumptions and project management orientations; this is equally applicable to research practices and the influence of post positivist methodological traditions in empirical research. Our methodological participatory practices, despite the participatory terminology used (AR, PAR, PALAR, AL...), are worth exploring given that they tend to be framed mainly as participatory methods. Hence, in this section we divide all these participatory practices published

in the journal into three analytical levels as a continuum in which one level merges with the following, creating blended approaches that represent and underline ontological and epistemological assumptions about empirical operationalisations and paradigm positions. Hence, we make use of the *Method level*, *Methodology level* and *Cosmological level*. This classification allows us to identify unexplored areas and open up to many methodological opportunities that have not been explored yet in capability scholarship. Thus, with this analysis, we do not reject the knowledge and practices generated and operationalised so far, but for us it is a way forward to diversify our empirical work, finally proposing a capability participatory paradigm.

Participatory Method Level

The participatory method level is the most widely used in capability literature; we find how development practitioners have been using participatory methods for many years as a way to bring in direct insights from populations on development. As Hayward, Simpson and Wood (2004) remind us, there has been an interest in bottom-up approaches that could enable the insights of communities, moving away from a technocratic analysis, however, this has prioritised the accommodation of participatory methods to post-positivist logics leaving other areas unexplored until now. Mostly, we can see researchers preserving the primacy of their role as knowers, collecting data through these participatory methods and using mixed-methods approaches that will produce data sets that they can analyse and disseminate within academic networks.

For example, Biggeri et al. (2006) provide an example of how participatory methods are often used in capability scholarship. They adopt a participatory approach to identify children's valued capabilities bottom-up, claiming that,

‘To [their] knowledge, few participatory studies have been carried out in which the subjects of the research themselves are asked what their capabilities are and how relevant these are for them as individuals and as a group of human beings. Therefore, in this research we propose a survey-based method that employs a questionnaire as a means of stimulating the process of thinking and participation’. (Biggeri et al. 2006, 60).

They confirm that, ‘with this study we try to move a step forward by applying a participatory method through public reasoning and scrutiny’ (2006, 66), given that at that stage capability

scholarship did not have much to say about participation in empirical participatory research. Hence, to address the audience they attest that,

‘The participatory approach to the definition of a set of capabilities must therefore be a process that should be conducive to the reflective reasoning around individual preferences and that should ideally detach them from the constraints of the adaptation to personal experience. (Biggeri et al. 2006, 68).

And that,

‘As we will see, in the course of the process the participant passes through a process of reflection that should help him/her to be able to separate himself/herself from their specific life experience’. (Biggeri et al. 2006, 62).

Generally, the participatory paradigm and data collection tools associated with it do not separate epistemic agents from their experiences, but rather acknowledge and recognise their positionality as a valid worldview. This assumption is important at least in two main aspects. First, we are not trying to extract objective perspectives or objectify our research participants. Rather, following decolonial scholars and a participatory paradigm, what we aim is to uphold subjectivities of intersubjectivities (Dussel 2007), or what Amartya Sen refers to as ‘objective positionalities’ (2004). This is not about abstracting ourselves from our circumstances and positions, but rather recognising and connecting with others from diverse reference points in epistemic networks.

Although Biggeri et al. (2006) refer to using a participatory method, they then explain how ‘both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the research. Along with survey, a Focus Group Discussion, case studies and in-depth interviews [...] as well a Survey ‘ad hoc’ that was based on a core questionnaire designed by the research group’ (2006, 67). We believe Biggeri’s work was indeed substantial in 2006 for advancing towards more critical participatory approaches and it demonstrates the introduction of more engaging participatory methods into conventional capabilitarian empirical research. However, the literature and debates nowadays tells us that much more is possible, and we need to advance and diversify our empirical and methodological strategies, together with our paradigmatic stands.

Participatory Methodology Level

In a 2018 article in this journal, Walker (2018) clarifies the differentiation between Method and Methodology in the area of participatory research within capability scholarship. She justifies that the use of participatory methodologies, rather than methods, are more grounded in collective agency. However, the representation of these cases are scarce and need further advancement, even if they pose many challenges for researchers and institutional constraints they might face (Ninomiya & Pollock 2016). At the methodology level we find that is not only about implementing one particular participatory method, but rather the whole reconsideration of the methodological approach. In this area we find at least, five relevant examples in the journal, even if their methodological applications are divergent.

First, Biggeri and Ferrannini (2014) published a study using a participatory methodology. One of their central aims is,

‘to present an innovative participatory methodological procedure, which can complement traditional methods to provide systematised assessments of capabilities (opportunity freedoms) within communities to inform policy actions, if not even constitute an alternative methodology when dealing with development projects regarding immaterial dimensions of well-being’ (2014, 61).

Regarding their own methodological positionality, they first present an O-Gap Analysis based on innovative concepts within the Capability Approach, such as ‘potential valuable capabilities’ and the ‘impartial spectator’, while their methodological procedure derives from a re-arrangement of participatory methods ‘such as structured focus groups discussions (FGD’s) and role games’ (2014, 61). They claim that ‘the section introduces a rather innovative participatory methodology to analyse capabilities expansion processes within development initiatives’ (2014, 65). And they finally clarify that the methodology is based on the use of Focus Group Discussions and an O-Gap Walk (Power Walk as conceptualised by UNICEF) in a 10 day-long research implementation process.

In our view, the authors were correct in calling their operationalisation ‘methodology’. They articulate a compendium of methods to form an orientation to gather data for their research and generate a useful tool for other scholars. However, we believe this is not the only possibility that

a participatory methodology offers us as researchers mixing qualitative methods and participatory methods. The methodological level, in our view and considering literature on different participatory methodologies (Heron & Reason 1997; Borda 2006) attempts to go beyond participatory methods and beyond qualitative/participatory mixed methods methodological applications. It tries to challenge assumptions regarding knowledge generation and the role of community in the process that we have not seen yet in our capabilities research field (Rowel et al. 2017).

On the other hand, at the methodological level we often find *qualitative case study strategies* that represent the researcher gathering evaluative material about the participatory methodology. In these cases, the researchers present or explore a *participatory case study*, creating methodological and empirical reflections about the participatory process. However, in these cases, even if they produce really significant methodological insights, the knowledge generated is still not coming from the communities' own analysis but rather from scholars reflecting and exploring their particular participatory practices.

For instance, Mazigo (2017) focuses on a case study evaluation of an action research project in Tanzania, reporting how practices promoting social innovation have enhanced communities' opportunities. The author used the Actin Research tradition rooted in Lewin's cycles of reflection and action (Adelman 1993) and carried out 16 discussion focus groups in a heterogeneous and homogenous form. Thus, he relied on qualitative data that was analysed post-data collection by the researcher. Similarly, Ferrero and Zepeda (2014, 33) state that their research,

‘takes stock of the results of an action research process (1995-2010), following a qualitative and triangulated research strategy combining long-term participant and non-participant observation, in-depth interviews with participants and professional staff of development projects and document research’.

They generate a case study of their Action Research process using qualitative tools to investigate their participatory intervention.

Equally, in the case of Walker (2018) she recounts a participatory action research practice with university students in the South African context, exploring the impact of this project on capabilities

dimensions among the participants. Crosbie's (2018) contribution follows the line of Walker (2018) in terms of a Freirean approach to Participatory Action Research. In this case, Crosbie focuses on the exploration of youth involved in a local community initiative in Ireland using participatory action. She clarifies that,

'he [CEO from this initiative] has been engaged with me in a small-scale PAR project for the past three years. In this article, I focus on a reflection phase of the research, using a capabilities prism, of a mid-way stage in the Action Research cycle. This entails, specifically, an investigation of the process of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, which I call critical conversations (CCs), in an attempt to ultimately improve intercultural practice in an urban social space' (2018, 199).

In this paper, as Crosbie herself states, her focus was to understand the ways in which capability expansion took place, using a case study approach to understand capabilities expansion in certain practices. However, as she continues, her PAR approach is mostly focused on qualitative techniques, in which she herself explores the event,

'I have drawn on the following methods over the course of the past three years: participant observation, CCs, and supervision of a festival impact survey. As mentioned earlier, other methods such as Photovoice lend themselves to this type of action research in an intercultural setting. My choice of methods is based on following the action already cast by BlueFire. In the case of the participant observation, on each occasion I circulated around the festival space with a camera and notebook in hand, observing and recording while at the same time participating in a range of activities, including community wall, salsa dancing, youth talks and main festival stage concerns' (2008, 206).

Crosbie's (2018) and Walker's (2018) contributions are overarching for the journal, bringing critical Participatory Action Research approaches as case studies to explore the expansion of capabilities.

The examples we discussed above orient the use of qualitative methods to explore locally valued capabilities or to explore the way in which the intervention enhanced the capabilities of the participants involved in a participatory project based on the participants' own reflections and voices. Thus, the focus on capabilities expansion of participants (evaluations), participation, voice,

epistemic, and so on, pushes us to explore the capabilities and functioning enhancement. However we still have many other options to explore.

While all these studies set the path for new possibilities and, by building on them, a more plural empirical ground, we seek to take the argument further by unearthing the episteme and the knowledge rooted in communities and cases. Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020) stress the importance of feminist knowledge (the episteme in participatory research) produced by the women in their research project as an epistemological positioning that could include them as legitimate actors contributing to gender equality debates in Turkey. They highlight this as the ultimate ethical responsibility of being a feminist researcher, whilst recognising the evaluative nature of their intervention in creating democratic spaces that expand feminist capabilities. Therefore, along with the assessment of capabilities, recognising and working with communities' epistemological and ontological contributions should be our political responsibility as the researchers.

In this, we are not minimising the relevance of case explorations but rather pushing towards a combination that respects and conserves communities' ontologies and epistemologies, their own cosmologies, besides our empirical and qualitative corroborations. As participatory researchers we need to open epistemic spaces for participants/co-researchers to co-produce a research agenda, which addresses contextual challenges they have reason to value. This should include co-analysis to explore the relationality between the communities and their surrounding environment, values and belief and attributes so as not to impose our cosmological assumptions as capabilitarian researchers.

Nevertheless, having said this, we have to accept that as researchers, we are (often) not members of the community, we may not be sharing the same cosmovisions; however, we can create space and opportunities for advancing towards more participatory approaches and ecologies of knowledges, building bridges between our knowledge and other knowledge systems (De Sousa Santos, 2015). We should aim for Sen's (2009) comparative justice in research where our real-world processes are imperfect, but always aspirational in seeking research practices that are more inclusive and plural.

Cosmological Level

This takes us to the third level, an open-ended cosmological dimension that is in our view the direction we should be trying to advance as distinctively capabilitarian participatory researchers. However, we do not claim this cosmological dimension has methodological superiority or claim that this is the unique way to operationalise participatory research. On the contrary, we have tried to present past and present literature in this journal as a way to highlight what is still possible in our practices and which we have good reasons to pursue as justice-facing empirical researchers under imperfect (and often unjust) conditions of possibility.

When we talk about the cosmological dimension, we refer to a highly critical positionality within the participatory paradigm that at times can connect with claims of indigenous empirical research and operationalisations (Chilisa 2012). Here we draw from the assumption that any knowledge generation process is political (direct, indirect, hidden), and therefore immersed in power structures and global epistemic imbalances, including our academic knowledge (Walker & Martinez-Vargas 2020). That is why our ontological worldview, as capabilitarian researchers, should embrace the role of being facilitators of a genuinely collaborative research process (Heron & Reason 1997). This will open the much-needed space and opportunity to work as allies with communities with limited freedoms and agency and bring their own contributions and analysis into the research process. Hence, the research process is co-owned from the proposal stage to the end in dissemination strategies, referring to what is commonly called the *collegiate participation* level in the participatory literature. Here researchers and local people ‘work together as colleagues with different skills to offer in a process of mutual learning where local people have control over the process’ (Cornwall & Jewkes 2015, 1669). Or what Duraiapaah, Rody and Parry (2005) call *partnership* in which,

‘Through negotiation, power is redistributed between local people and power holders in an equitable manner. Decision-making takes place through an exchange between equally respected participants who are working towards a common goal and seeking to optimise the well-being of all concerned. There is mutual responsibility and risk-sharing in the planning and decision-making process’ (2005, 6).

Having said this, we acknowledge that reality is messy and full of complexities and contradictions. Hence, although the participatory literature might present these relations between researchers and communities as ideal, we believe this rather happens through complex negotiations, constant group reflections, investments of time and emotions, and imperfect participatory practices which can nonetheless be more just.

That is why we refer to this open-ended cosmological level not as operationalising a perfect participatory research practice, but rather a more collaborative and equitable collaboration in which communities are more than data collectors, or data generators but are also recognised as epistemic agents able to theorise and contribute with their knowledge to scientific and non-scientific spheres. As Vaughn et al. (2017) clearly explain,

‘[Participatory Research] is an approach built upon equitable collaboration among all research partners, including researchers and community members, in all aspects of the research process [...] It is not a specific research method but is an orientation to research that seeks to create an environment of shared authority among community and stakeholders that encompasses the entire research process, from the idea generation and data collection to dissemination and implementation of research findings [...] involving the target community in all phases of research so that the work is informed by their lived experience; building the capacity of the local community to address issues that affect them and the capacity of researchers to conduct culturally relevant research. (Vaughn et al. 2017, 1457).

Therefore, this cosmological level is not only a way to breach methodological walls but also epistemic and ontological gaps, what we call the cosmological gap, in the literature as a consequence of visualising power structures and transforming relationalities among researchers and local communities. This requires recognising the need to create strong and political alliances with communities who may not have social power to create a more legitimate ground in society. That is why De Sousa Santos (2018) refers to ‘epistemologies of the South’, or what we prefer to refer to here as ‘decolonial research practices’ which,

‘focus on cognitive processes concerning meaning, justification, and orientation in the struggle provided by those resisting and rebelling against oppression. The question of validity emerges from this strong presence. The recognition of the struggle and of its protagonists is an act of pre-

knowledge, an intellectual and political pragmatic impulse implying the need to scrutinise the validity of the knowledge circulating in the struggle and generated by the struggle itself. Paradoxically, in this sense, recognition precedes cognition' (De Sousa Santos 2018, 3).

However, although this level of classification and theoretical explanation can be useful, we do not find any examples of this particular cosmological level in this journal till now. Moreover, we understand that our academic conditions are much more convoluted, and the specificities of our participatory projects are much more complex. They do not only depend on the project itself, but on our individual agency as researchers and the structures in which we are immersed and in which we operate, limiting or expanding our opportunities, choices and research practices. Further, we cannot ignore that development research agendas are not detached from interwoven global, national and local power structures, nor the cosmological perceptions that they and we impose.

Nonetheless, considering an open-ended cosmological level, when possible (besides our current operationalisations in the application of participatory approaches) is a pre-condition to transgress static paradigmatic lines and advance towards more plural ways of using participatory research in capabilitarian scholarship. Hence, we propose an alternative capabilitarian participatory paradigm that can help us to advance our participatory practices.

Advancing our operational margins: Our Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm (CPP)

The participatory paradigm, the one of our interest in this paper, is not only an alternative paradigm addition, but a paradigm that might be able better to overcome cosmological barriers and binaries between qualitative and quantitative operationalisations (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba 2011; Heron & Reason 1997). What we mean by overcoming this cosmological barrier is that the participatory paradigm opens up the onto-epistemological ground for communities being able to situate and place their axiological (ethical) dimension under their own worldviews, beyond our academic and scientific positionalities and understanding of research. Communities and individuals play a substantial role under this paradigm, becoming central for the generation of knowledge, but this cosmological level of operationalisation is still missing in our published capabilitarian literature.

Hence, after highlighting the paradigmatic tensions that stem from research practices and philosophies underestimating different (e.g. indigenous, feminist) cosmologies and showcasing empirical methodological gaps in the literature so far, we propose how we can expand existing participatory practices and take them forward to continue transgressing ontological assumptions and methodological barriers because, communities rarely get to know what is written about them and their contribution to the literature (Mkwanzani and Cin 2021).

That is why we want to use this paradigm proposal to emphasise that operationalisations take into consideration co-analysis, co-creation of the research process and outcomes with communities, and to co-author with them to amplify the credibility of their knowledge. It is rather important to acknowledge communities' significant contributions to theorisation when we undertake participatory projects under the umbrella of capabilitarian scholarship and to position them as credible knowledge-producers of legitimate knowledge. This process is mutually reinforcing and enriching for us where we as researchers act with political responsibility to create spaces and opportunities to build political and social networks and platforms, which can enable all voices (subaltern voices) in the research process to be heard. For their part, communities can develop their own epistemic responsibility and act as responsible subjects who will speak their substantive concerns and share them widely to inform contextual solutions to their own development challenges through a decolonial knowledge-making process and outcome. Medina (2013) makes this distinction very clear by highlighting that epistemic responsibility is the responsibility one holds as a knower, whereas political responsibility is more about being agents who challenge ignorance (including our own) and are fully and responsibly attentive to realities and cosmovisions of communities. These two features (against ignorance and for community cosmovisions) are mutually constitutive, given that for real epistemic responsibility we need to work,

‘to understand, assessing, and (often hermeneutically) engaging with issues about the place of subjectivity in knowledge- making, constructing, and evaluating practices. It is about the ethics and politics of knowledge, and indeed about epistemic subjectivity in its multiple instantiations’. (Code 2017, 90).

This is, as Boni and Fedriani (2020) highlight, not only exercising critical doubt regarding the knowledge that comes from communities, as Gaventa and Cornwall (2008) caution us, but rather

a double suspicion including our own knowledge as researchers. Any knowledge system represents limitations in itself and need to be connected in networks of knowing (De Sousa Santos, 2015).

Hence, the participatory paradigm sits at the nexus of these two responsibilities that assign complementary responsibilities to us as researchers and to the communities as co-researchers. We should adopt a decolonial praxis but beyond that, the concern should be the production of decolonial or local knowledge informed by communities' cosmovisions that have been long ignored.

Hence, we propose our capabilitarian participatory paradigm as a framework where questions are asked for the research team in order to spot critical elements of their participatory practices. Below, we have developed some key questions to question and guide our research practices.

Table 1. (Here) The proposed principles of our capabilitarian participatory paradigm

Concluding Thoughts

This paper is a collective tribute to the participatory studies in this special issue and the emerging body of participatory research in capabilitarian literature in this journal and elsewhere, contributing to the methodological practices developed so far and the epistemological debates. Expanding these cosmological margins enables us to include other equally valid cosmovisions and relationalities with communities as epistemic agents and contributors. This takes us well beyond (and challenges) methodologies which might hold unequal and unsuitable power firmly in place. We consider our proposals neither as unique nor the only valid ones but as necessary and complementary to our traditional approaches to research and theorising about the Capability Approach. This does not negate the complexities of the structures in which we operate, nor do we advocate a blind validation of only a few methodological approaches. We believe that the point is to uncover levels that we need to consider, in order to reframe our participatory practices to expand capabilitarian participatory grounds beyond researchers' worldviews for empirical explorations. As Pellissery and Bergh (2007, 288) attest 'participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space, but also the right to define and to shape that space',

including what is of value to researching together and participating in decision making throughout the project. De Sousa Santos (2010) further builds on this by arguing:

‘[It] does not only call for a different form of knowledge, but also a different process of knowledge creation. It requires that the production of knowledge be collective, interactive, intersubjective and in networks’ (De Sousa Santos 2010, 81).

Hence, we have explored what we see as the missing open-ended cosmological ground in the literature and presented as a pre-condition for those practices that want to transgress methodological margins. This implies recognising communities as holders of knowledges and ontologies and epistemologies possibly (although not always) different from the ones that we hold.

The point of creating pluri-epistemic conversations using the Capability Approach calls for alliances against injustices but this is done here in the research space through knowledge generation and research processes that are inclusive of other objectivities and relationalities between local communities and academic communities. Sen himself differentiates that there is a distinction between the opportunity aspect and the process aspect of freedom,

‘he introduces the concept of process freedoms alongside the notion of opportunity freedoms (capabilities) to emphasise the importance of “how” are people involved in shaping their own future: Freedom is valuable for at least two distinct reasons. First, more freedom gives us more opportunity to achieve these things we value, and have reason to value [...] Second, the process through which things happen may also be of fundamental importance in assessing freedom... There is, thus, an important distinction between the “opportunity aspect” and the “process aspect” of freedom’. (cited in Ferrero et al. 2014, 29)

How people are involved in empirical research is a substantial element when we talk about research and knowledge generation in the Capability Approach. However, the point is not only to enhance academic knowledge which can challenge deprivations but also to engage and build epistemic communities able to determine their own ontological positionalities and points of reference to generate knowledge. It is not only about identifying and expanding communities valuable’ capabilities (important though this is), but understanding what wellbeing means for this community and what research can do to support their own human development aims, respecting

their cosmovisions and knowledge systems. That is why we propose a capabilitarian participatory paradigm (CPP) as a tool to embrace further participatory operationalitions.

To conclude, our paper does not aim to act as a directive but more as a personal reflection about our experiences using the Capability Approach and participatory approaches in order to be able to understand our own methodological gaps and also the structural constraints that are in the way when we try to apply a more open-ended research process with communities. We hope this helps us all to start drawing alternative paths and research avenues that are still not possible yet, but that might yet be possible in our capabilitarian scholarship, what Soudien (2011, 64) following South African theorist Neville Alexander calls ‘the ontological possibility of the future’. But not as only one possibility but rather as many possibilities. That is why Waldmuller (2020) eloquently clarifies, that ‘conceptualising and understanding human development requires intercultural dialogue and engagement with other traditions and ways of seeing the world [...]. If there is a pluralistic, global version of human development, that would be human developments’. We hope this paper, in the spirit and values of the Capability Approach, can set the empirical and methodological path to solidify these developments (plural), rather than development (singular).

References

- Adelman, C. 1993. Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research. *Educational action research*, 1(1), 7-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965079930010102>
- Asante, M. K. 2003. Afrocentricity, the theory of social change. Chicago, IL. African American Images.
- Biggeri, M., Libanora, R., Mariani, S., and Menchini, L. 2006. Children conceptualizing their capabilities: results of a survey conducted during the first children's world congress on child labour. *Journal of Human Development*, 7(1), 59-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880500501179>
- Biggeri, M., and Ferrannini, A. 2014. Opportunity gap analysis: Procedures and methods for applying the capability approach in development initiatives. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 15(1), 60-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.837036>

- Bockstael, E., and Watene, K. 2016. Indigenous peoples and the capability approach: taking stock. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 265-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1204435>
- Boni, A., and Fedriani, A.A. (2020). Expanding capabilities through Participatory Action Research. In *the Cambridge Handbook of the Capability Approach* (Ed.) Chiappero-Martinetti, Oscami and Qizilbash. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press. 479-496.
- Borda, O. F. 2006. Participatory (action) research in social theory: Origins and challenges. *Handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (Ed.) Reason, P., and Bradbury, H, 27-37.
- Clark, D.A., Biggeri, M., and Frediani, A.A. (Eds.). 2019. *The capability approach, empowerment and participation: Concepts, methods and applications*. London: Springer.
- Cornwall, A., and Jewkes, R. 1995. What is participatory research? *Social Science & Medicine*, 41(12), 1667–1676. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(95\)00127-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(95)00127-S)
- Chilisa, B. 2012. *Indigenous research methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cin, F. M. 2017. *Gender Justice, Education and Equality: Creating Capabilities for Girls' and Women's Development*. London. Palgrave.
- Cin, F. M., and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, R. 2021. Participatory Video as a Tool for Cultivating Political and Feminist Capabilities of Women in Turkey. In *Participatory Research, Capabilities and Epistemic Justice*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 165-188.
- Code, L. 2017. Epistemic Responsibility. In Kidd, I. J., Medina, J., and Pohlhaus, G. Introduction to the Routledge handbook of epistemic injustice. Albany. State University of New York Press. 89-99.
- Crosbie, V. 2018. Intercultural Dialogue in Practice: BlueFire’s Community Integration Activities Viewed through a Participatory Action Research Capability Lens. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 19(2), 198-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2018.1445704>
- D’Amato, C. 2020. Collectivist Capabilitarianism. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 21(2), 105-120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2020.1732887>

- De Sousa Santos, B. 2006. *Conocer desde el Sur: Para una cultura política emancipatoria*. [Knowing from the South: For a Emancipatory political culture] Fondo editorial de la facultad de ciencias sociales, Ciudad de Mexico: UNMSM.
- De Sousa Santos, B. 2010. *Descolonizar el saber, reinventar el poder*. [Decolonising knowledge, reinvent power] Montevideo, Uruguay: Ediciones trilce.
- De Sousa Santos, B. 2018. *The end of the cognitive empire: The coming of age of epistemologies of the South*. Duke University Press.
- Dejaeghere, J. G. 2020. Reconceptualising Educational Capabilities: A Relational Capability Theory for Redressing Inequalities. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 21(1), 17-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2019.1677576>
- Deneulin, S. 2008. Beyond individual freedom and agency: Structures of living together in Sen's capability approach to development. In *The capability approach: Concepts, measures and application* (Ed.) Comim, Qizilbash and Alkire. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 105-124
- Derrida, J. 2016. *Of grammatology*. Baltimore. Jhon Hopkins University Press.
- Duraiappah, A.K., Roddy, P., and Parry, J.E. 2005. Have participatory approaches increased capabilities? *International Institute for Sustainable Development*. Available at https://www.iisd.org/pdf/2005/economics_participatory_approaches.pdf [22.06.2021 12.53]
- Dussel, E.D. 2007. *Materiales para una política de la liberación*. [Resources for liberatory politics]. Buenos Aires: Plaza y Valdés España.
- Escobar, A., and Escobar, A. 1998. *La invención del Tercer Mundo: construcción y deconstrucción del desarrollo* [Encountering Development: The Making and unmaking of the third world]. Barcelona. Editorial Norma.
- Ferrero y de Loma-Osorio, G., and Zepeda, C. S. 2014. Rethinking development management methodology: Towards a "Process freedoms approach". *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 15(1), 28-46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2013.877425>
- Fricker, M. 2015. *Epistemic contribution as a central human capability*. *The Equal Society: Essays on Equality in theory and practice*. Ed. Hull. London. Lexington Books. 73-90.

- Harvey, D. L. (2002). Agency and community: A critical realist paradigm. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 33 (2), 0021-8308.
- Hayward, C., Simpson, L., and Wood, L. (2004). Still left out in the cold: problematising participatory research and development. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(1), 95-108. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2004.00264.x>
- Ibrahim, S. S. 2006. From individual to collective capabilities: the capability approach as a conceptual framework for self-help. *Journal of human development*, 7(3), 397-416. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880600815982>
- Goetze, T.S. 2018. Hermeneutical dissent and the species of hermeneutical injustice. *Hypatia*, 33(1), 73-90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12384>
- Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.
- Le Grange, L. 2012. Ubuntu as an architectonic capability. *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 11(2), 139-145. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC132020>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., and Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 97-128.
- Heron, J., and Reason, P. 1997. A Participatory Inquiry Paradigm. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3), 274-294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2F107780049700300302>
- Hoffmann, N., and Metz, T. 2017. What can the capabilities approach learn from an ubuntu ethic? A relational approach to development theory. *World Development*, 97, 153-164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.04.010>
- Kramm, M. 2020. When a River becomes a Person. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 21(4), 307-319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2020.1801610>
- Medina, J. 2013. *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and the social imagination*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.

- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. 2018. *Epistemic freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and decolonization*. New York: Routledge.
- Ninomiya, M. E. M., and Pollock, N. J. 2016. Reconciling community-based Indigenous research and academic practices: Knowing principles is not always enough. *Social Science & Medicine*, 172, 28-36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.11.007>
- Nussbaum, M.C. 2011. *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Cambridge. Harvard University Press.
- Nussbaum, M 2017. Human Capabilities and Animal Lives: Conflict, Wonder, Law: A Symposium. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*. 317-321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2017.1342382>
- Mazama, A. 2001. The Afrocentric paradigm: Contours and definitions. *Journal of black studies*, 31(4), 387-405.
- Mazigo, A. F. 2017. Promoting social innovation through action research: Evidence from an empirical study in the fisheries sector of Ukerewe district in Tanzania. *Journal of human development and capabilities*, 18(2), 239-257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2016.1256276>
- Mignolo, W. D. 2011. *The darker side of Western modernity*. Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. 2018. On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order: Decoloniality after Decolonization; Dewesternization after the Cold War. In *Constructing the pluriverse* Durham. Duke University Press. 90-116.
- Medina, J. 2013. *The epistemology of resistance: Gender and racial oppression, epistemic injustice, and the social imagination*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Mkwananzi, F. & Cin, F. M. 2021. *Post-Conflict Participatory Arts and Socially Engaged Development*. London. Routledge.
- Mertens, D. M. 2008. *Transformative research and evaluation*. New York. Guilford press.
- Okeke, C., and Van Wyk, M. 2016. *Educational research: an African approach*. Johannesburg. Oxford University Press Southern Africa

- Pellissery, S., and Bergh, S. I. 2007. Adapting the capability approach to explain the effects of participatory development programs: Case studies from India and Morocco. *Journal of Human Development*, 8(2), 283-302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880701371174>
- Robeyns, I. 2017. Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined. Oxford. Open Book Publishers.
- Rowell, L.L., Bruce, C.D., Shosh, J.M., and Riel, M.M. (Eds.). 2017. The Palgrave international handbook of action research. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sen, A. 1999. Development as freedom. New York: Random House.
- Sen, A. 2004. Dialogue capabilities, lists, and public reason: Continuing the conversation. *Feminist Economics*, 10(3), 77-80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570042000315163>
- Sen, A. 2009. The idea of justice. Cambridge, MA: Belknap
- Sen, A., and Muellbauer, J. 1988. The standard of living. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Soldatenko, G. 2015. A contribution toward the decolonization of philosophy: Asserting the coloniality of power in the study of non-western philosophical traditions. *Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, 7(2), 138–156. <https://doi.org/10.1179/1757063815Z.00000000059>
- Smith, L.T. 1999. Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples. London, UK: Zed Books.
- Soudien, C. 2011. The contribution of radical Western Cape intellectuals to and indigenous knowledge project. *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, 76, 44-66. <https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2011.0027>
- Thompson, L. 1992. Feminist methodology for family studies. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 3-18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353271>
- Unterhalter, E. 2007. Gender, schooling and global social justice. London. Routledge.

- Vaughn, L.M., Jacquez, F., Lindquist-Grantz, R., Parsons, A., and Melink, K. 2017. Immigrants as research partners: A review of immigrants in community-based participatory research (CBPR). *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 1-12. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-016-0474-3>
- Walker, M. 2018. Political agency and capabilities formation through participatory action research. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 19(1), 53-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2017.1392934>
- Walker, M. 2019. Defending the need for a foundational epistemic capability in education. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(2), 218-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2018.1536695>
- Walker, P. O. 2015. Indigenous paradigm research. In *Methodologies in peace psychology: Peace Research by Peaceful Means*. (Eds.) D. Bretherton and S.F. Law. Springer, Cham. 159-175.
- Walker, M., and Martinez-Vargas, C. 2020. Epistemic governance and the colonial epistemic structure: Towards epistemic humility and transformed South-North relations. *Critical Studies in Education*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2020.1778052>
- Waldmuller, J. 2020. International Science Council Interview. Retrieved from <https://council.science/human-development/latest-contributions/towards-a-global-pluralistic-view-of-human-developments-interview-with-johannes-m-waldmuller/>
- Watene, K. 2016. Valuing nature: Māori philosophy and the capability approach. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 287-296. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2015.1124077>
- Wilson, S. (2003). Progressing toward an Indigenous research paradigm in Canada and Australia. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 27(2), 161.