

**Analysing participatory video through the capability approach. A case study in  
Quart de Poblet (Valencia, Spain)**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to analyse participatory video (PV) as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method through the lenses of the capability approach. In order to do this, we used a PV experience that took place in the municipality of Quart de Poblet (Valencia, Spain) from February to March 2014. The participants were eleven young people between 16 and 24 years of age, severely affected by the economic crisis that has hit Spain in recent years. To develop our analysis, we introduced the PV as a technique and a process within the PAR methods. Then, we analysed the participatory process to verify the extent to which it had contributed to expanding the capabilities and agency of the participants. The evidence revealed a significant expansion of the awareness capability and, in some cases, of the capability for voice. In contrast, the

capability to aspire and the agency of the participants were not expanded, due to contextual factors and the limitations of the process itself.

### **Keywords**

**Participatory video, capabilities, agency, participatory action research, Spain, young people**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to analyse Participatory Video (PV) as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method through the lenses of the capability approach. In order to do this, we used a PV experience that took place in the municipality of Quart de Poblet (Valencia, Spain). As defined by Amartya Sen (1999, p.87), capabilities are the substantive freedoms to lead the kind of life that people value. Capabilities are thus freedoms or opportunities – they cannot be desires, but must be something that can be put into practice, and include both material things and people’s states. Another key concept in the approach is the idea of agency, the ability of individuals to pursue and achieve the objectives they value, to act and make change happen (Sen, 1999).

In that sense, our aim is to scrutinise to what extent the PV process contributed towards expanding the capabilities and agency of the participants. Walsh (2014) notes that the analysis of PV rarely considers political values and structural constraints. All the emphasis is on the empowerment of individuals, their participation and representation ‘as though they are free

agents and not part of a larger social structure' (Walsh, 2014, p.2). Our hypothesis is that the capability approach can provide elements for a richer analysis of PV, considering both individual and structural aspects, and can offer a normative yardstick to evaluate this type of process. It can thus help to more specifically identify what constitutes individual and collective human flourishing –one of the main goals of action-research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001), something that can be characterised by the expansion of people's capabilities and agency (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000).

The participants in the PV process were 11 young people between 16 and 24 years of age, who have been affected by the economic crisis that has severely hit Spain in recent years. For one month and a half, the group of young people engaged in the PV process in order to reflect on their aspirations and visions and, importantly, whether current youth policies enhance their capabilities to overcome (or not) issues that they regarded as relevant, such as migration, education and youth participation. This process was part of a three-year European project, named XX, which aimed at developing a broader knowledge of the situation of young people in order to foster socially innovative policy making.

All the co-authors of this paper were engaged in the design and facilitation of PV in a different manner: XXX was the main process facilitator; XX delivered training in audiovisual methods; XXX established institutional networks and conducted research on the economic and socio-political context; and XX acted as a participant observer throughout the process.

In the paper we firstly describe PV as a PAR method; then, we will explain the context, the participants, the main characteristics of the PV process conducted and the methodology we used

to collect the evidence to analyse it. Then, we will apply the capability approach to discuss whether the capabilities and agency of the participants have been expanded.

## **PV as an action research method**

### *Its origins: a communication experiment*

Current PV participatory techniques evolved from the Fogo Method spearheaded by Don Snowden during the Fogo Island Communication Experiment in the late 60s (Corneil, 2014). Snowden proposed an alternative approach to traditional documentary making. His vision reflected a wider and collective frustration by practitioners in the field of documentary making about the futile contribution of social documentary to mainstream representations of poverty and social exclusion. The new and simple model proposed consisted of giving total control of the video narrative to those usually in front of the camera (subjects), and a role of facilitator, to the one behind it (documentarian).

By giving decision-making power to the subjects, Snowden's technique lends voice to the marginalised minority and challenges the paradigm that positions the documentarian as the skilful master that builds linear stories based on personal interpretations and perceptions of subjects. As noted by Corneil (2014), traditional approaches to social documentary raise the inherent problem documentarians face when translating the reality of others into their personal work, the ethical dilemma of representation. On the contrary, in PV, participants decide how and when to communicate their realities. This makes PV a powerful tool for social transformation (Dudley, 2003).

### *PV process as a PAR method*

PV can be generally understood as ‘a tool for individual, group and community development’ (White, 2003, p. 64). However, due to the dynamic nature of the process, usually driven by cycles of reflection and action, PV has been increasingly positioned as a methodological tool within PAR (Kindon, 2003; Mitchell, de Lange and Moletsane, 2011; Plush, 2012; Shaw, 2013; Walsh, 2014).

Considering PV as a PAR strengthens the relevance of the kind of relationship nurtured between the researcher and the researched. The ‘researched’ in a PAR model of knowledge production are primarily seen as active participants who can act in order to change existing social practices affecting them (for example, youth policies), as well as their own lives and practices, in order to reach a more desirable situation. The researcher becomes a facilitator who focuses on stimulating the interaction and debate among participants (Shaw, 2007). This practice could lead to expanding the collective knowledge, in order to subsequently be able to reflect and formulate more accurate and possible solutions.

### *The PV method*

There is not just one single method of undertaking a PV process. However, there are some inherent stages defined not only by the practice and technicality of video making, but also by the way in which a PAR method process evolves. Here we present the five-step model (Fig.1) followed during the experience in Quart de Poblet, which builds on five critical stages developed by Millan and Frediani (2014).

*Diagnosis:* in this first step, participants and facilitators come together to start identifying issues of special relevance in their lives.

*Planning:* During this step, video making techniques and storyboarding – a visual outline or skeleton made up of a series of drawings or sketches, each representing one scene or camera shot (Mitchell et al., 2011) – are used. Furthermore, participants define the working groups and their individual role in the video production (e.g., camerawoman, screenwriter, director, interviewer, etc.).

Figure 1 around here

**Figure 1.** Critical stages of a PV based on Millan and Frediani (2014)

*Production:* the groups start gathering the audiovisual material as planned. A crucial part of this stage is watching the recorded scenes collectively. This allows unexpected changes in the narratives to be introduced creatively, or to improve the images and sound that may not be considered technically acceptable by the group, or not powerful enough to get the message across.

*Curation/editing:* this is probably the most technical part of the process as it involves computing skills to be able to use the editing software that allows the audiovisual narrative to be stitched together.

*Sharing:* In this phase, the final videos produced by the groups are shared, typically in public or community screenings. Key individuals who were identified by the groups as important

receptors of their message are usually invited (e.g., policymakers, council representatives, public administrators, etc.).

## **The PV process: youth voices from Quart**

### *The context*

The global financial crisis of 2008 was felt especially strongly in Spain, revealing the dimensions of the crisis beyond economic terms. The burst of the real estate bubble and the collapse of the construction sector created a quick rise in unemployment. Specifically, for young people, unemployment reached the level of 52%, and in April 2014 it was still 49.6% (García Campos, 2016). The government's long denial of the effects of the global financial crisis in Spain and its policies favouring subsidies on real estate, diminishing controls on financial transactions and the channelling of public money into private financial entities, led to daily social demonstrations which forced an early national election. In November 2011, the conservative Spanish party won the parliamentary elections with the promise of putting the economy back on track. With this economic recovery in mind and the promise of reforming the country, the conservative Spanish government has undertaken radical austerity policies and neoliberal reforms focused on cutting welfare policies and ignoring social pleas for equity, right for housing, or opportunities for young people, among others. Existing demands for protecting rights coming from social movements and social mobilisations are however still very present in political debate, and some existing and new parties (such as Podemos) have embraced them.

### *Quart de Poblet*

The case of the local policies in Quart de Poblet followed a slightly different strand. This municipality of 25,000 inhabitants (Instituto Valenciano de Estadística, 2014), located in the metropolitan area of Valencia (which has around 1,600,000 inhabitants), presents a vibrant civil society, a culture of citizen engagement, and a local government that has developed a comprehensive and participatory approach to public policies for the youth, in close collaboration with local associations (Hueso, Boni and Belda-Miquel, 2015). This uniqueness may, in part, be attributed to the fact that the municipality has had a stable and progressive party in government since the 80s and it has followed a steady and permanent strategy for the implementation of participatory policies. This continuation has created a highly skilled group of civil servants and a more accountable public administration. Increasingly, it has also raised confidence in the local ecosystem of social organisations. As a key part of youth policies, Quart de Poblet provides resources, administrative support and physical spaces to local organisations, so young people can self-organise to deliver and participate in training, workshops, leisure activities and other events. This quite exceptional case in the Valencian context is, however, interesting for our study: we were able to find a number of youths who participate in different organisations and programmes supported by the municipality, as well as a comprehensive public policy to reflect on. Moreover, the case was accessible, as the municipality showed interest and willingness to collaborate. Having participated in other projects related to media and participation, they were eager to be part of another initiative to use video as a tool to engage the youth.

### *Participants*

The PV process aimed to embrace a wide spectrum of young people, aged between 16 and 24 years. The sample included three groups of youths of different ages, balanced in terms of gender:

- Interns of *Quart Jove*; 5 participants who were at that moment undertaking an internship at the Youth Department of the municipality. The participants were 3 females and 2 males, aged between 20 and 22. Of these, 3 were studying vocational education, 1 was at university and the remaining 1 was in secondary education.

- *Cremant* is the name given to a youth group focused on the creation of audiovisual material that originated within the municipal space called '*Espai de Creació Jove*'. This is a space with facilities for producing visual content, photography and radio that the city council provides with an allocated budget, in order that young people can lead and organise social events that foster associative life and culture in the municipality. The participants were 2 females and 1 male, aged between 22 and 24, and studying at university.

- *Esplai* is an association promoted by young people that aims to be a place where children learn, participate and grow together through play and life-interactions. Esplai is led by monitors and youth volunteers whose task is to organise social and educational activities for children that usually range from 6 to 12 years of age under the methodology of leisure and play. The participants were 1 female and 2 males, aged between 16 and 18, and in secondary education.

### *How the participatory video happened in practice*

In the context of our action research, the PV process was planned as a research method to articulate the voices and aspirations of young people on issues that are relevant to them (Oliver et al., 2012). Moreover, it aimed at creating a learning space to reflect on these issues and a way to influence policymakers at local and European levels.

The first phase (*diagnosis*) was developed in a 2 days workshop. The goal was to introduce the participants to each other and to the facilitators, and to explain the potential of audiovisuals to issues relevant to the them, as well as to start imagining powerful messages.

A key moment during this phase was when participants started thinking about the story their video would tell. Using the ‘elevator pitch’ technique, each group was given 60 seconds to concisely share their ideas with other participants and facilitators. This led to a short discussion where feedback was given and ideas were reworked, both in content and visually. Afterwards, with the help of facilitators, each group drew up and shared a storyboard of four to eight scenes.

The second day, we focused on making a more detailed diagnosis in order to identify the themes and issues that would be tackled in the video. Participants produced a collective word cloud to give answers to the question ‘what are your concerns and aspirations?’ Issues such as education, employment, security, leisure, family, and inequalities were identified as the most common answers. A debate was held concerning the themes for each question and, at the end of the day, each group chose one relevant topic to further develop in the second stage of the PV process.

The *planning* stage lasted two weeks. During this period, each group worked autonomously to agree on their storyboard and clarify the roles of each member of the group. Inputs and continuous feedback from the facilitators was provided via social media and in arranged meetings with participants.

During the *production* stage, which also ran for two weeks, participants learned filming and storytelling techniques, with the support of the facilitators. The group *Cremant* had the advantage of already being literate in the use of video, while the other groups needed much more support. As in many other PAR processes, while producing the images, groups had to constantly revisit the work done in order to strengthen the messages in their scripts.

The fourth phase, *curation*, was also developed in a two-week timeframe. In the case of *Cremant*, this phase was realised independently; in the case of *Esplai*, with full assistance, and in the case of the interns of *Quart Jove* with some guidance and advice.

The final videos made as a result of the PV process are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Main characteristics of the videos produced through the PV process in Quart

The final phase in the process was *sharing* and was carried out in three different spaces:

1) In the *Espai de Creació Jove* (Youth creation space) of Quart de Poblet (29th of April 2015). Selected youth associations and civil servants from the municipality and four

specialists from different areas (education, labour, culture and youth) were invited. 30 people of different ages and profiles attended the event, which made the debate dynamic and lively.

2) At the *Fira Alternativa de Valencia* (Alternative Fair, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2015), which is an annual festival where associations from all around the city come together to show and promote their social work and projects. The videos were screened and subsequently a debate opened up among visitors.

3) At the European Parliament (9<sup>th</sup> December 2015), in Brussels, which was the final XX meeting. Parliamentarians and relevant stakeholders were invited, although in the end attendance was lower than expected. In contrast, the academic presence in the audience was strong, due to the fact that the entire XX team (more than 30 researchers across Europe) attended the conference. They were favourably impressed by the narratives of the videos.

### **Methods and approaches to analyse the PV process**

The main findings to analyse the PV process were obtained from two different sources: 1) Primary sources: the three final videos made with the participants; a video-interview made with each participant; notes taken by the group of facilitators during the discussions with participants. 2) Secondary sources: videos, documents, news, and other pieces of information shared by the research team and the participants in the form of posts on social networks and platforms set up to facilitate communication (WhatsApp, Facebook, Tumblr, etc.).

Informed consent was obtained from the participants, agreeing to be part of the participatory research and to appear in the final videos. For this reason, all the names have been anonymised. The work was conducted in Spanish and Catalan, so some of the quotes were translated.

In the analysis of both primary and secondary sources our aim was to detect to what extent the process was able to contribute to the expansion of capabilities and agency. To accomplish this, we had several group discussions in which all of us, having reviewed the primary sources, proposed potential capabilities and agency. Additionally, three of us interacted with other participants from the European Project XX. We had two face-to-face meetings with other researchers of the consortium to discuss our findings. Furthermore, we followed a peer-review process with the members of the European project to analyse and discuss the case study reports.

This iterative process inside the European consortium introduced an agreed perspective on the capability approach: Firstly, we assumed an understanding of capabilities as the real opportunities people have to do and be what one has *reason* to value, as indicated by Sen (1999, p.87). Reasoning is not always present in all the definitions of capabilities that the academic community produces (Robeyns, 2016), but in our approach it was a key element. Secondly, these people's available opportunities are affected by both initial endowments and subsequent influential contingencies. Indeed, given one's resources, diverse personal, socio-economic and even environmental conditions can affect the extent and type of real opportunities people have in different ways. The capability approach takes into account these so-called 'conversion factors' that can generate significant variations in the conversion process of resources into relevant opportunities and outcomes (Robeyns, 2005). Thirdly, we analysed the expansion of

agency, understood as the possibility to be an agent of change (Sen, 1999, p.19), and how agency is constrained or boosted by conversion factors.

### **Capability for voice and the awareness capability as results of the PV process**

Our findings showed that two capabilities appeared to be developed through the PV process: the capability for voice and the awareness capability. Following Bonvin and Farvaque (2006) we understand the capability for voice as the real opportunity people have to express their opinions, perspectives, aspirations, etc. One of the interns of *Quart Jove* highlighted the virtues of the process as a way of sharing opinions and knowledge as follows: ‘During the process (...) I think I gave my ideas and suggestions for achieving a common final product at the same time as I was hearing the arguments and ideas of the others’ (Female, Intern of Quart Jove).

Similarly, other participants remarked during the sessions that ‘(the PV process) was a good way to hear young people’s opinions’ (Female, Intern of Quart Jove) or it ‘was an opportunity to express our needs and discontent with the current situation’ (Female, Cremant).

Strongly connected with the capability for voice is the awareness capability, that includes being able to carry out self-critical investigation and analysis of one’s own reality (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). One of the participants (female, *Esplai*) states that the PV ‘helped to raise people’s awareness about many things that need to be changed and about what we (the youth) care about.’

During the final interview, all the participants were asked about the reasons for their participation as volunteers. The evidence shows a complete awareness about the relevance of

being engaged, but at the same time bitterness and even disappointment with it.

Participation is fundamental for being part of society, because if we do not do it, we will be like sheep that follow a leader and we will not have any freedom, any opinions or ways to express ourselves. We will be people that are not taking their own decisions; rather someone will be making them for us. Although sometimes we are not heard as much as the know-it-all (referring to the politicians) of the country, young people must participate, voice their ideas, criticise, present solutions and stand up for them (Female, Intern of Quart Jove).

This feeling about the limitations of participation also touches on the limitations of PV. A member of *Cremant* shares his uncertainty about the meaning and usefulness of participation:

I like to be part of things like this one, because I feel identified and I like it. I want to improve things. However, some days I do not want to be part of anything, because I think it will not make any difference (Male, *Cremant*).

The same participant, in the final interview, shared new doubts regarding the expansion of his capability to voice through the PV. He showed awareness about the limitations of this kind of processes: 'I like to do this type of thing, projects and so on, but sometimes I need something else that completes it, because we do not reach a conclusion' (Male, *Cremant*).

However, although we have observed limitations in the capability for voice (at least for some of the participants) what was unanimously agreed on by the participants is the expansion of the

awareness capability, as one of the participants summarises:

I have learnt to make a short film, to edit it (...) but mostly I have learnt to see all the problems that we face as young people (...) and it is an opportunity to express our needs and discontent with the current situation (Female, Intern of Quart Jove).

In any case, the theoretical perspective based on capability approach we have adopted and the evidences emerging from the case study points to a relevant discussion in PAR: the tensions between giving voice and awareness to participants, on the hand and generating agency, on the other. We will come back to this tension after discussing the expansion of capability to aspire and of agency.

### **Structural limitations to the capability to aspire and agency of youth participants**

Another capability we wanted to discuss is the capability to aspire; generally speaking, the capability to aspire exists 'when an individual is able to identify one or more aspirations that they hold, either revealed or concealed' (Hart, 2016, p. 327). The chances of transforming your aspirations into capabilities depends on many others factors that can allow or constrain the capability expansion.

The PV process highlighted perfectly that the participants find their aspirations limited due to the socio-economic situation of Spain. One of the participants even stated that it is impossible to aspire in Spain once you have finished your studies. 'Here in Spain, we don't have much of a future. I cannot know my aspirations, because when I finish my studies...it will be in one year, and many things may or may not change in one year, I prefer to focus on now'

(Female, *Cremant*).

Especially relevant is the aspiration related with finding a job in Spain, which they consider is neglected due to the crises:

I want to keep studying and to find a job, here or abroad, I guess it will be abroad, because here in Spain there are no jobs, there are no young people. Everyone has to leave, the only ones remaining are people who cannot run away or people who are too old

(Male, Intern of *Quart Jove*)

Moreover, the analysis of the three videos highlights the constraints that social conversion factors exert on young people's capability to aspire and draws attention to the fact that the capability to aspire is unevenly distributed in society (Appadurai, 2004). The video by *Quart Jove* focused on the difficulties of pursuing a vocation in Spain and the need to migrate, identifying the barriers encountered by the main character in fulfilling the capability for work, understood as 'the real freedom to choose the work one has reason to value' (Bonvin and Farvaque, 2006, p.126). The video revealed three barriers, and established an imbalance of power aggravated by government interventions: the low value given to a higher education degree, the impunity of the banking system, and the fallacy of entrepreneurship programmes. The drama of youth migration, represented in the first video, is also expressed during the final interview

As a young person, one needs to be valued as a person, and also as the future of a nation.

Not like now, that it seems that if we migrate it is better for the country. Not at all. The

country is investing in our education and then they are not getting anything back (Female, Cremant).

A selection of screenshots of the video 'Adiós España' highlight some of the barriers to the capability to aspire that the participants wanted to stress.

**Figure 2.** Screenshots of the video Adiós España (available at <https://vimeo.com/145614948>)

The images in Fig. 2 show a young person going for support in the job office to become an entrepreneur. The young person is given the relevant documents, but there is no financial help. The second image shows that his bank account is at 0. Therefore, he cannot continue with his plans. In Fig. 3 we observe a driver in a car listening to a programme on the radio about corruption; the next image is that the young man is at the airport checking in for his flight that will take him out of Spain. However, the young man breaks its ticket before leaving and, in the last images, we can see young people running their own small business in Quart.

**Figure 3.** Screenshots of the video Adiós España (available at <https://vimeo.com/145614948>)

In this video, which is 3 minutes and 34 seconds in length, the group of interns showed, on one hand, the aspirations of one young person studying (the first images are at the library) and

willing to become an entrepreneur; and on the other hand, the barriers against those aspirations becoming capabilities. The video blames the lack of financial help (to start a business) and the passivity and even complicity towards the waste of public money for private benefit. The impunity of the banking system together with the fallacy of entrepreneurship for those who do not have access to resources, leads to a situation of forced migration, regardless of the level of studies. However, it opens a door of hope, as alternatives exist with effort and determination.

The video produced by *Cremant* 'Educational Laws', is the shortest (2 minutes and 19 seconds) but it is extremely powerful and gives a critical and thoughtful overview of the educational laws and the changes that they have involved. Through the use of the professional programme Adobe After Effects, they produced a video with animated images (see screenshots in Fig. 5). The video shows how Spain lacks stability in the educational laws, used as political and strategic tools (screenshot in Fig. 5). Particularly, they observed how the latest educational law, supported only by the conservative party, gives preference to private and catholic schools at the expense of public and secular schools, compromising freedom of thought. During one of the public screenings, one of the members of this group commented:

People in Europe do not know what is happening here with education, they do not know about the laws that we have, nor about the last one that was approved. We believe that this latest law is a step back for the entire public education system (Female, *Cremant*).

**Figure 4.** Screenshots of the video Educational laws (available at <https://vimeo.com/128790965>)

Moreover, they decided to compare Spain with Finland (one of the countries in the world that performs best in educational test like PISA) as a way to criticise the fact that, due to the continuous changes in educational policies, Spain is unable to know their performance. With sarcasm, the video ends raising the question of who is financing it and concludes that it will be supported with money from the European Social Fund.

**Figure 5.** Screenshots of the video Educational laws (available at <https://vimeo.com/128790965>)

Finally, the video produced by *Esplai*, the youngest group, wanted to stress the positive influence that people working for the Youth Department in Quart de Poblet have on their lives. As one of the members of *Esplai* points: ‘Quart is giving me tons of new experiences thanks to the Esplai. When the moment arrives I also want to be a mentor, to pass on the values that they have given me’ (Male, *Esplai*).

**Figure 6.** Screenshots of the video Esplai (available at <https://vimeo.com/126901812>)

The images in Fig. 6 show the mentors, who are young people themselves, playing with children. Then, one of them shares answers to the question of *why did you decide to become a mentor?* She replies that she loves the project and wants to be part of it as long as she can (there is an age limit for it because the idea of the *Esplai* is that young people become mentors for even younger ones).

Finally, the first image in Fig. 7 shows another mentor talking about the values they provide there and how these allow participants to get different perspectives on things. The next screenshot in Fig. 7, is the final one and depicts a list made by participants where they say one word that encapsulates what *Esplai* means for them. The list ends up being a series of positive outcomes such as partnership, education, future, values, solidarity, etc.

**Figure 7.** Screenshots of the video *Esplai* (available at <https://vimeo.com/126901812>)

This video is the only one that encapsulates the aspirations of participants and a way of materialising them. We can argue that this is the least political of the videos because it does not take into account the social conversion factors highlighted by the other two videos. However, as we have seen in the quotes, some of its members were able to articulate critical perspectives on their aspirations and problems. Therefore, we can point out that only in the narrative of this video we may note elements of the capability to aspire and the exercise of agency. The participants of *Esplai* see themselves as agents of change through their involvement in the project proposed by the Youth Department. In the other two videos, the young people essentially decided not to depict themselves as agents of change, but as victims of an unfair situation caused by political and economic powers. However, during the public screening in Quart, participants from these groups were inspired by *Esplai's* video, recognising that a number of spaces for action and transformation do exist. During the debate with other youth attending and policy makers, the participants realized that there are unknown spaces for participation in

Quart. This was also the case of the public screening at the Fira Alternativa, where participants met other associations and experiences within the city of Valencia. Unfortunately, none of the participants were able to attend the public screening in the European Parliament (they were invited but to attend implied a disruption on their daily routines regarding studies, family, etc)., this was something that made us reflect on the importance of creating meaningful and accessible institutional spaces for participants.

As it was mentioned, all these considerations point to the key issue whether giving voice and increasing awareness using PV is positive per se for participants in PAR or if, without actually expanding agency, this can have negative implications. It can be acknowledged that the case suggests an ambivalent answer.

On the one hand, some statements indicate that participants felt frustrated after the process. They essentially focused on narratives with powerful factors beyond their control: unemployment, erratic policy, and entrepreneurship policies, etc., which are very difficult to change. Creating voice and awareness may have negative implications regarding self-esteem, and can create a sense of disempowerment. PV as a technique can not face necessarily external factors of oppression, and thus may not bridge the distance between voice and agency.

However, it can be said that giving voice and promoting awareness and critical reflection (as it was in our case) can also have positive implications regarding agency. Participants identified key powerful factors constraining them, but also framed these issues in a way that suggested ways of action, both to face these constraints and to change them. For example, “Adios España” shows the need to deal with constraints, with effort, enthusiasm, and hope. The process that

Cremant followed in the creation of “Educational laws” points ways to change these constraints, by denouncing reality and demanding new policies. Moreover, the exchange between youth and other actors during the process also created the feeling that they can join associations to affect change. To sum it up, PV may not create agency just by lending a voice or opening spaces for reflection, but it helps to identify constraints, inspire actions, and thus, create certain “pre-conditions” for agency expansion.

Probably both, negative and positive impacts regarding the creation of agency by giving voice may coexist simultaneously. This points out to the intrinsic complexities and contradictions of PV as a PAR method. In any case, it is interesting that an analysis from capability approach can help us unveiling these contradictions and putting them on the forefront. It offers clear conceptual elements to identify and analyse them as tensions between the expansion of capability for voice and awareness, and the expansion of capability to aspire and agency.

### **What can the capability approach add to PV analysis? Exploring the usefulness of a different information basis**

One key result of the study is that the capability approach may offer a different *informational basis* to analyse the process and the output of PV. As Sen points out:

Each evaluative approach can, to a great extent, be characterised by its informational basis: the information that is needed for making judgments using that approach and – no less important – the information that is ‘excluded’ from a direct evaluative role in that approach (1999, p. 56).

As Walsh (2014) reflects in her critical analysis on the ways in which PV processes are being analysed, normally the stress is on individual empowerment, conscientisation and voice of participants“ (PV) rarely tackle the fundamental political values on which it rests (...) and places the burden on individuals (...) as though they are free agents and not part of a larger social structure’ (Walsh, 2014, p. 2).

We argue that the capability approach used as an evaluative frame has the potential to balance the individualistic approach with a more socially and politically embedded analysis. As we have seen with the example of the capability to aspire, how the Spanish social and political context has limited the real opportunities of the youth. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the participatory process helped the youth to unveil aspirations, but also these contextual and structural limitations for aspiring. This introduces a deeper and more political analysis.

Another contribution that the capability approach can make is to emphasise the kind of opportunities that a PV process can open up, instead of focusing on the access to resources: having access to the equipment that a PV requires is not an end in itself, but a means of increasing people’s opportunities. In our case, the PV process brought more opportunities to the youth to present their own understanding of their lives and problems and to build their own alternative narratives on the Spanish crises.

Additionally, the agency component can add valuable information if we want to consider a PV as a real contribution to progressive agenda of social change. Our case highlights the pitfalls regarding agency expansion, which is something that Walsh (2014) also reminds us of. Quoting Bevington and Dixon (2006), Walsh argues that relevance must be a central question for work that seeks to make concrete social change. Although the youth found the process meaningful and as they noted it helped them to acquire skills at the same time that reflecting on their reality, the final interviews showed scepticism about the long-term implications. Paraphrasing the quotes displayed on the section of capability for voice, a sense of incompleteness of those processes was felt, as well as the feeling that it may not make any difference. The expansion of the agency component could be a valuable yardstick for the measurement of the relevance (for a social change agenda) of a PV process. This a complex issue and, in any case, the capability approach also provided us with elements to unveil and address the tensions between giving voice and creating change, that is, between expanding the capability for voice and awareness, and expanding the capability to aspire and the agency.

There are other elements of the capability approach that were not used that can bring more insights to PV. On a more individual basis, we did not analyse how the personal conversion factors affect the expansion of capabilities. Ethnic background, economic status and gender were not relevant for our analysis. However, age arose as a differential feature during the process, although we cannot conclude that it significantly affected the expansion of the capability for voice and the awareness capability. For the capability to aspire, as we have discussed previously, age can be one of the factors that can explain the different perspectives displayed in the video made by the younger group.

Another element is the idea of '*functionings*' which are states of 'being and doing' such as being satisfied, being engaged or undertaking collaborative learning. It means that a person can have many different capabilities and with those she/he can choose between many different *functionings* and pursue a variety of life paths (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009, p. 32). Using the same example, we could have studied the kind of life paths that the capability expansion allowed for the participants.

All these elements and many more (such the collective capabilities or the adaptive preferences or the deliberation procedures, etc.) are brought to the table by the capability approach discussion. In our view, there is huge potential in bringing them to PV and PAR analysis as we hope we have demonstrated in this contribution.

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