

# **DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITIES RESEARCH: AN UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE TO ADVANCE SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

By Carmen Martinez-Vargas

This thesis is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the

PhD in Development Studies in the Centre for Development Support,

Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of the Free State,

Bloemfontein (South Africa)

Supervisor: Prof. Melanie Walker

Co-Supervisor: Dr Nelson Nkhoma

Prof. Merridy Wilson-Strydom

Date of Submission: 27<sup>th</sup> August 2018

I declare that the study hereby submitted for the Philosophiae Doctor in Development Studies in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of the Free State, is my own independent work and I have not previously submitted this work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at another university or at another faculty at this university. I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by several loops and a long horizontal stroke.

---

Signature

27/08/2018

---

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are a multiplicity of people/entities who have enhanced my capabilities, allowing me to embark on this exciting and exhausting PhD trip, as well as help to finalise it:

- Firstly, for funding, I am grateful to NRF Grant No. 86540 which funds my PhD scholarship under the SARCHI chair in higher education and human development, without which this study would not have been possible. All the resources have been much appreciated and have helped the development of this study in so many ways, from workshop preparation to conference attendance.
- Secondly, thanks to my supervisor and all co-supervisors who have supported and helped me through this journey. They have been inspiring and have guided me in my thinking throughout the study countless times. I'm indebted to Prof. Melanie Walker not only for helping me tirelessly with this study and my professional development, but for being more than a research supervisor in my life. I'm grateful for all you have done for me. You have been an inspirational figure and I'm thankful for having such an amazing opportunity to move to South Africa and live here for three years, thanks to you. To all my co-supervisors who have contributed to this thesis in so many ways. Thanks to Dr Talita Calitz for guiding me in the challenging first year of this work, your inspiring ideas and leadership were greatly missed after your new appointment. To Dr Nelson Masanche Nkhoma for guiding and supporting me during the second and third year of this study, your support throughout this study and your friendship are much appreciated. Thank you for all your help and inspirational conversations during these two years, I feel grateful for sharing all those moments with you. To Prof. Merridy Wilson-Strydom for your support and availability; to know that your door was always open and you were willing to listen to my challenges was a privilege for me. In brief, thank you to all of you for your patience and for dedicating the time to me and this research, despite knowing that I am chatty, have no self-restraint, and would talk to you for three hours non-stop. Thank you for inspiring me in so many ways.
- To Prof. Alejandra Boni for introducing me to the Capabilities Approach as well as being the contact to become part of this amazing research programme in South Africa, without your guidance and leadership in the years prior to this study, my work would not have been possible.
- To all my colleagues from the HEHD programme. First, thank you, Ms Lucretia Smith, for all your help, despite hassling you every week for keys, cameras, recordings and so forth, you were always there willing to help me with all the bureaucratic work related to my study. Your help and support during these three years is much appreciated. Thank you to Dr Mikateko Hoppener for your support and help in addition to our friendship. Your kindness, selflessness and hard work have been a constant source of inspiration to me. Thank you for this and our long conversations. In addition, to all the members from the research group, especially those I have spent more time with and engaged in conversations about this study on multiple occasions: Dr. Faith Mkwanzani, Dr. Patience Mukwambo, Dr. Vanessa Agbedahin, Dr. Ntimi Mtawa, Dr. Philippa Kerr, Oliver Tafadzwa Gore, Precious Mseba, Sophia Matenda and Anesu Ruswa.
- To my beloved husband, Sander van Leusden for remaining supportive and caring despite my ups and downs throughout these years. The journey has not been easy, but I could not imagine undertaking it without you. You have been a central pillar of strength for my work. Thank you for endless conversations about this study and for supporting me when I needed it most.
- To my family, without whom I could not have made it this far, especially to two important women in my life that have been an example to follow; my mother Encarnacion Vargas-

Martinez, and my sister Ia Martinez Lorite, their support through my life is much appreciated and without them I would not be submitting this PhD thesis in 2018. Thank you for showing me in your own separate ways that despite being born in a deeply patriarchal society, our agency as women is central to challenging the establishment and achieving our biggest dreams. Furthermore, thanks to all the members from my family and family-in-law that have been supportive of this South African adventure and helped throughout the good times and the bad.

- To my friends in general, but especially to Dr Ellen Mwenesongole and Veronica Sanz-Martinez. Firstly, if I had not met Ellen, I would probably not have embarked on this study. Thank you for insisting and convincing me that this was a great opportunity. This thesis is partly thanks to you. To Vero, thank you for your support despite the distance, you have been always a supportive friend and have continued to be so throughout this study. Thank you for being always there.
- To Dr Marthinus Conradie, Dr Luis Escobedo D'Angles and Prince Theogene, colleagues from the University of the Free State that participated in some of the workshops as an invited guest and I met during the study. To Dr Marthinus Conradie and Dr Luis Escobedo, thank you for being openly willing to participate in the project despite your busy schedules, your contribution to the project is much appreciated. And to Prince Theogene, thank you for being such an inspirational figure, although we have not met much due to the distance between us, our conversations about this study and your work have always been sources of positive energy.
- To all the DCR participants that took part in the collaborative research. Thank you for your enthusiasm, dedication, and positivity despite your academic commitments, without you this study would not have been possible. I feel grateful for our friendships and to have shared with you all this time during and beyond the project.
- Last, but certainly not least, to all the peers I have met in conferences as well as engaged with through reading articles for this study over these past three years and who have been endless sources of inspiration. Thank you all for your commitment to these social issues, thank you for your perseverance and dedication despite the difficulties.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>ACRONYMS.....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1.    SETTING THE SCENE .....	3
1.1.1.    COLONIALITY AND DECOLONISATION.....	3
1.1.2.    THE ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES.....	4
1.1.3.    FROM A 'UNI-VERSITY' TOWARDS A 'PLURI-VERSITY' .....	5
1.2.    TURNING TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AND HIGHER EDUCATION .....	6
1.3.    THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES .....	8
1.4.    THE ACADEMIC GAP.....	8
1.5.    AIMS OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	9
1.6.    MOTIVATION FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CASE STUDY.....	9
1.7.    CHAPTER OUTLINE .....	11
1.7.1.    PART ONE .....	11
1.7.2.    PART TWO .....	12
1.8.    POSITIONALITY .....	14
1.9.    OTHER TERMINOLOGY AND RESEARCH CLARIFICATIONS .....	15
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION .....	19
2.2. INTRODUCING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES.....	19
2.3. PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES: INTERNATIONAL REVIEW.....	20
2.3.1. INDUSTRIAL FAMILY: ACTION RESEARCH .....	22
2.3.2. DEVELOPMENT FAMILY: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH .....	25
2.3.3. INDIGENOUS FAMILY: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH .....	27
2.3.4. EDUCATIONAL FAMILY: EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH .....	29
2.4. GENERAL CHALLENGES WITHIN THE USE AND PRACTICE OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES...	36
2.5. LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES .....	38

2.5. CONCLUSION .....	39
<b>CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.1. INTRODUCTION .....	41
3.2. CONVERGING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN THE 21 <sup>ST</sup> CENTURY.....	42
3.3. CONVERGING CAPABILITIES AND THE DECOLONIAL DEBATE.....	45
3.3.1. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH.....	45
3.3.2. AN INCOMPLETE THEORY TOWARDS DECOLONISATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE .....	47
3.4. EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES WITHIN THE CAPABILITIES LITERATURE .....	50
3.5. INTRODUCING A CAPABILITIES-BASED RESEARCH PROCESS .....	51
3.5.1. DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITIES RESEARCH: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	51
3.5.2. REINFORCING PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES: CONTRIBUTIONS OF A CAPABILITIES-BASED PERSPECTIVE .....	53
3.5.3. DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITIES RESEARCH: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS .....	55
3.6. DCR: BROADENING SOCIAL JUSTICE .....	57
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN.....</b>	<b>59</b>
4.1. INTRODUCTION.....	59
4.2. COMBINING RESEARCH PROJECTS: INDIVIDUAL (PROJECT B) AND COLLECTIVE ENQUIRY (PROJECT A).....	59
4.2.1. PhD AND PARTICIPATORY THESES: CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES .....	59
4.2.2. PARADIGMATIC FOUNDATIONS.....	61
4.2.3. ENQUIRY DISTINCTIVENESS .....	64
4.3. INDIVIDUAL STUDY (PROJECT B) QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY.....	64
4.3.1. QUALITATIVE STUDY .....	65
4.3.2. CASE STUDY.....	65
4.4. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT .....	65
4.4.1. POPULATION .....	66
4.4.2. RECRUITMENT.....	66
4.4.3. PARTICIPANT/RESEARCHER ROLES .....	67
4.5. RESEARCH METHODS .....	67
4.5.1. INSTRUMENTS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION .....	67
4.5.2. SCHEDULE DATA COLLECTION .....	72
4.6. DATA ANALYSIS .....	73
4.6.1. ANALYSIS PROCEDURES .....	73
4.7. PRINCIPLES FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	75

4.8. RIGOUR CRITERIA.....	78
4.9. VALIDITY.....	80
4.10. CONCLUSION.....	81
<b>CHAPTER 5: EXPLORING A DCR CASE STUDY.....</b>	<b>82</b>
5.1. INTRODUCTION.....	82
5.2. FIRST WORKSHOP: CREATING A TEAM.....	83
5.3. SECOND WORKSHOP: TRANSFERRING RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPLORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.....	85
5.4. THIRD WORKSHOP: EXPLORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES PART II.....	89
5.5. FOURTH WORKSHOP: RE-POSITIONING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE.....	91
5.6. FIFTH WORKSHOP: DEBATING OUR LEARNING.....	93
5.7. SIXTH WORKSHOP: UNDERSTANDING THEORY AND CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH PROJECT.....	95
5.8. SEVENTH WORKSHOP: PROJECT OUTCOMES.....	98
5.9. EIGHTH WORKSHOP: WORKING ON OUR VIDEOS.....	99
5.10. NINTH WORKSHOP: LOOKING FORWARDS.....	100
5.3.10. INFORMAL TEAM MEETINGS.....	101
5.11. CONCLUSION.....	101
<b>CHAPTER 6: A PARTICIPATORY CAPABILITIES PRE-DESIGN TO GUIDE OUR PRACTICES.....</b>	<b>103</b>
6.1. INTRODUCTION.....	103
6.2. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AS A PROSPECTIVE FRAME.....	103
6.3. USING A PRE-DESIGNED CAPABILITIES LIST OR CREATING A CONTEXTUAL CAPABILITIES LIST?.....	104
6.3.1. UNDERSTANDING DCR VALUABLE CAPABILITIES AS DYNAMIC AND CONTEXTUAL.....	105
6.3.2. COMPARING DCR VALUABLE CAPABILITIES WITH NUSSBAUM’S CENTRAL CAPABILITIES ...	107
6.3.3. DEFENDING A CONTEXTUAL CAPABILITIES LIST FOR PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS.....	112
6.4. DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME: THEORY IN PRACTICE.....	113
6.4.1. DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME.....	113
6.4.2. APPLICATION OF THE DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME.....	114
6.4.3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS OF A PROSPECTIVE FRAME.....	117
6.5. CONCLUSION.....	118
<b>CHAPTER 7: BROADENING OUR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS.....</b>	<b>120</b>
7.1. INTRODUCTION.....	120
7.2. BROADENING OUR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS.....	120
7.2.1. CASE ONE: MINENHLE.....	121

7.2.2. CASE TWO: SIYABONGA .....	130
7.3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF DCR TOWARDS A MORE ADEQUATE PARTICIPATORY EVALAUTIVE FRAME .....	138
7.4. CONCLUSION.....	140
<b>CHAPTER 8: DCR TOWARDS SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA .....</b>	<b>141</b>
8.1. INTRODUCTION.....	141
8.2. DCR TOWARDS SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION .....	141
8.3. REFLECTIONS ON THE DCR PRINCIPLES AFTER THE PILOT STUDY TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE	142
8.3.1. PROCESS AS CAPABILITIES EXPANSION.....	142
8.3.2. THE VOICELESS AS KNOWLEDGE CREATORS.....	143
8.3.3. INJUSTICE AS AN INTIAL ISSUE .....	144
8.3.4. UNCERTAIN HORIZON (DEMOCRATIC SPACE) .....	146
8.3.5. INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL DIVERSITY (ECOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGES) .....	146
8.3.6. FINAL REMARKS .....	148
8.4. THE DCR PROCESS BEYOND A DEMOCRARTIC PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH.....	149
8.5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM A PILOT DCR PROJECT .....	150
8.6. LESSONS FROM A PILOT DCR PROJECT .....	152
8.7. CONCLUSION.....	153
<b>CHAPTER 9: SUMMARY, CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>155</b>
9.1. INTRODUCION .....	155
9.2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS .....	155
9.2.1. RESEARCH QUESTION ONE .....	155
9.2.2. RESEARCH QUESTION TWO .....	157
9.2.3. RESEARCH QUESTION THREE .....	159
9.3. CONCEPTUAL/EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS .....	162
9.4. METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFLECTIONS .....	164
9.5. CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION POLICIES.....	167
9.6. PUBLIC ENGAGMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS.....	168
9.7. CONCLUSION.....	169
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>170</b>



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Participatory families .....	22
Figure 2: Diagram of Lewin's Action Cycle (Source: Fieldman, 2017, p.127).....	23
Figure 3: Lewin's Action Research types (Source: Adelman, 1993).....	25
Figure 4: Four dimensions for indigenous research (Source: Chilisa, 2012, p.13).....	29
Figure 5: Chapter overview linking participatory approaches, the decolonial debate and the Capabilities Approach .....	42
Figure 6: Analytical framework of the Capabilities Approach (Source: Robeyns, 2018, p.83) .....	46
Figure 7: Principles of DCR .....	56
Figure 8: Levels of ethical implications (Source: Yassi et al., 2016) .....	76
Figure 9: Workshops schedule .....	82
Figure 10: Ecology of knowledges throughout the process.....	83
Figure 11: Dynamic and contextual model of valuable capabilities .....	106
Figure 12: Process of the prospective plan.....	118
Figure 13: Minenhle's valuable capabilities.....	122
Figure 14: Siyabonga's valuable capabilities.....	131
Figure 16: Ecology of knowledges in the DCR process .....	148
Figure 17: Two main parts of the DCR process.....	149
Figure 20: Five central principles of DCR .....	156
Figure 21: A dynamic and contextual model of valuable capabilities .....	161
Figure 18: Conceptual-empirical contributions of the study .....	164

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participatory approaches, applied research and conventional research comparison (Source: Extracted from Bradbury, 2015) .....	7
Table 2: Typologies of participatory approaches.....	20
Table 3: Features of Educational Action Research (Source: Kember, 2000, p.30) .....	31
Table 4: Purposes of Pedagogical Action Research (Source: Norton, 2009, p.59–60) .....	33
Table 5: Converging the decolonial debate and the Capabilities Approach.....	50
Table 6: Participatory paradigm (Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2008).....	62
Table 7: Transformative paradigm (Source: Mertens, 2008).....	63
Table 8: Project A and Project B comparison.....	64
Table 9: Recruitment stages .....	66
Table 10: The twelve participants in the DCR project .....	67
Table 11: Instruments used for data collection and stages .....	68
Table 12: Interviews summary.....	71
Table 13: Participant observation summary.....	72
Table 14: Summary of data collection .....	72
Table 15: Summary of data collection and analysis of the study .....	75
Table 16: Validity strategies (Source: O’Leary, 2004) .....	81
Table 17: DCR group valuable capabilities.....	105
Table 18: Comparison of Nussbaum’s central capabilities list vs. the DCR group’s valuable capabilities .....	113
Table 19: DCR case study prospective frame.....	114
Table 20: Minenhle’s valuable capabilities achievements (pre- and post-project).....	129
Table 21: Siyabonga’s valuable capabilities achieved (pre- and post-project).....	138
Table 22: Minenhle and Siyabonga’s valuable capabilities (pre- and post-project).....	139
Table 23: Members’ highly valued capabilities.....	160

## ACRONYMS

AL – Action Learning

ALAR – Action Learning Action Research

AR – Action Research

AS – Action Science

CA – Capabilities Approach

CAR – Classroom Action Research

CPAR – Critical Participatory Action Research

DCR – Democratic Capabilities Research

EAR – Educational Action Research

EmAR – Emancipatory Action Research

PA – Participatory Approaches

PALAR – Participatory Action Learning Action Research

PAR – Participatory Action Research

PeAR – Pedagogical Action Research

PR – Participatory Research

UFS – University of the Free State

## ABSTRACT

Universities are complex institutions that need to be in constant questioning and iteration to improve and serve the larger society. Nevertheless, the latest protests in the South African higher education institutions are a sign of challenging times. Protests have recognised the perpetuation of inequalities and the need to decolonise institutions. Furthermore, this debate has been ongoing within academia for decades, looking for ways to confront the colonial issues, especially in the area of knowledge production, investigating how knowledge is produced and distributed within the dominant system. Many of these concerns are related to European-Western domination over other ways of producing knowledge, jeopardising the wide range of knowledge systems in the world. This highlights the substantial importance of scrutinising how we create knowledge as scholars and how we can advance towards social justice by overcoming these persistent challenges, especially within higher education institutions in the Global South.

Participatory methods, methodologies, and research processes are part of this internal intellectual project within higher education institutions trying to challenge the persistence of colonial issues. This field has developed into a fruitful and legitimate research area awash with a diversity of theoretical and practical insights, not only related to decolonisation and knowledge democratisation, but also focusing on action and participation. Nevertheless, the result has been a very diverse field that pervasively embraces various theoretical and practical perspectives, often contradictory, leading to theoretical and practical inconsistencies, incongruences and contradictions.

To take up this challenge, the Capabilities Approach proposes a theoretical space to reflect and reconsider epistemological, methodological and operational issues, providing a solid people-centred theoretical frame. Moreover, participatory methods, methodologies, and research processes, have been drawing on capabilities lenses in multiple development and educational interventions. Nonetheless, this capabilities research area is still under-researched and is far from having reached its full potential. Scholars within the capabilities sphere have not yet achieved a consensual proposal such as a participatory capabilities-based research.

Thus, the research questions that guided this study are:

How can a participatory capabilities-based research project be conceptualised and implemented in the light of the CA and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education, given the academic gap between both fields and incongruences within participatory approaches?

Which opportunities, challenges and lessons with regard to social justice and capabilities expansion emerge from a participatory capabilities-based case study with undergraduate students in South Africa towards socially-just higher education?

Which capabilities do these undergraduate students have reason to value and why? Which of these capabilities are being expanded through the involvement in a participatory capabilities-based case study experience?

This project innovatively conceptualises and applies this participatory capabilities-based research as 'Democratic Capabilities Research' (DCR). It outlines DCR as a reflexive and pedagogical space to advance more just practices, especially in the context of hierarchical knowledge practices

in universities in the South, and the marginalisation of youth voices in knowledge production. The ambition is to both generate democratic and inclusive knowledge creation and advance social justice, through the theorisation and empirical exploration of a DCR case study in South Africa.

Therefore, the methodology used for this research is a case study of a DCR participatory research project. This case study not only investigates the application of a DCR project but also its production throughout the project as a research outcome. The case study was developed and implemented at a previously historically advantaged Afrikaans-speaking research and teaching university in South Africa. A group of twelve volunteer undergraduate students worked as co-researchers with the doctoral research fellow over one academic year. In the process, they challenged persistent institutional hierarchies and their marginal position in university structures of knowledge production. Multiple data sources were collected over the year (2017), including individual interviews at three different stages of the DCR project, personal journals produced by each of the co-researchers and the researcher, and participant observation over the nine DCR workshops. In undertaking the case study, the project also confronted the dilemma around legitimate knowledge and legitimate forms of knowledge production. Thus, the study had to deal with the tensions of non-ideal research settings, and between producing a doctoral study and the actual practices of DCR, and how these 'legs' of the research both go together, yet are separate.

The study shows that a participatory capabilities-based conceptualisation of a participatory research can challenge and resolve some of the actual limitations within the broad family of participatory approaches. Thus, the study presents five foundational principles for DCR to guide participatory practices. Furthermore, the study reveals that capabilities are rich sources of information to design and evaluate participatory projects such as DCR. However, the capabilities chosen to guide us should be valued capabilities by the participants and not generic capabilities lists, such as Nussbaum's central capabilities. The findings show that valued capabilities are dynamic, latent and contextual and therefore we have good reasons to explore these specificities in order to orient our DCR participatory practice in the direction of the lives the participants have reasons to value.

Additionally, the findings highlight the impact of using individual valued capabilities as evaluative frames. Presenting two student cases from among the twelve participants, the data shows that getting to know the participants before our participatory practices, understanding the way they enjoy their capabilities before the project commences, can enhance the way we assess our DCR practice by exploring functionings among their valued capabilities. In this way, the evaluative space is expanded and avoids previous paternalist frames directing our practices towards the lives the participants want to lead. Moreover, as DCR goes beyond capabilities expansion and achievement, the theorisation of DCR is presented and revised after the empirical data has been analysed in order to review the five initial principles guiding us in our capabilities-based participatory practice.

The significance of this study is based on an unexplored research area linking capabilities with participatory research practices. Furthermore, the study intentionally uses an open-ended perspective of the CA that highlights its potential as a grassroots approach to provide an original and locally related research alternative in the form of DCR, towards a more just, decolonial and democratic way of knowledge creation within Global South higher education institutions.

# PART I

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. SETTING THE SCENE

Modern universities are complex and diverse institutions that have managed to bring together different groups of people to work and generate knowledge whilst promoting various processes that are undergoing constant iteration to improve how knowledge is produced. This shows that while old systems prevail, new and more complex processes also develop, demanding that we rethink our universities (Castells, 2001). The recent emergence of student demands for the decolonisation of universities in South Africa is one indicator of challenging times<sup>1</sup>. These protests have brought into the public debate the call to challenge the ways in which we think about colonisation and its influence on how knowledge is produced in our higher education institutions (Karodia, Soni & Soni, 2016; Bosch, 2017; Luescher, Loader & Mugume, 2016; Naicker, 2016). Furthermore, the academic debate about decolonisation has been active for a few decades, demanding that academic space be liberated from dominant structures (De Sousa Santos, 2010; Hall & Tandon, 2017; Leibowitz, 2017).

Notwithstanding, some of these ideas may be unfamiliar to some readers, or some types of scholars. Hence, the aim of this introductory chapter is to clarify what these debates are calling for, as well as some of the major arguments, in order to understand the significance and current relevance of this research, not only as a whole, but also as situated in a South African higher education institution.

#### 1.1.1. COLONIALITY AND DECOLONISATION

Decolonisation is a deeply contested word in the academic space, as it seems to be highly political, generating intense debates (Gilley, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a significant body of knowledge highlighting the social, political and epistemological transition that old colonies need to overcome in order to liberate their communities and cultures (Mbembe, 2001). Furthermore, nowadays this process seems to be central for many scholars as well as grassroots movements, as many countries in the Global South, while having overcome territorial or political domination have, however, not succeeded in some other important aspects, such as the social, economic or epistemological areas (De Sousa Santos, 2015; Dussel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007).

In brief, since the fifteenth century, colonialism and imperialism have played a major role in the Western conquest of other nations and the expansion of Western power across the world (Parra-Romero, 2016). Mignolo (2000; 2007) conceptualises this Western concept as the North Atlantic block, arguing that the Western space has been historically repositioned to the geographical point of the North Atlantic, which represents the domination of a European-American system. Furthermore, for postcolonial scholars, this phenomenon, as stated above, goes beyond the initial colonial aim of conquering territory; it is a political and intellectual invasion and exploitation of other cultures (Chilisa, 2012; Wa Tiong'o, 1994). Chilisa (2012, p. 29) states that colonialism was

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-34615004> for more information [24.08.2018 10:36]

‘a brutal process through which two-thirds of the world experienced invasion and loss of territory accompanied by the distribution of political, social, and economic systems, leading to external political control and economic dependence on the West’. For Chilisa, this power over territories accelerated not only the loss of territory but the loss of local knowledge systems, cosmovisions<sup>2</sup>, and beliefs. Furthermore, Wa Thiong’o (1994) supports a similar perspective, stating that it was a psychic and mental conquest, appropriating the wealth of other societies, their territories, and goods, thus establishing a colonised universe in which culture, institutions, languages and social and political systems are imposed as a unique and hegemonic<sup>3</sup> world paradigm.

For postcolonial scholars, the colonial question remains a present and urgent issue. Wa Thiong’o (1994; 2010) uses the term ‘neocolonies’, to refer to the current situation of domination maintaining injustices through cultural and political impositions, such as colonial language and identity formation in the Global South. On the other hand, Mbembe (1992) names it ‘postcolony’, referring to present colonial spaces which still sustain identity assimilation under a ‘regime of violence’ (1992, p.3). Appiah (1993) and Wa Thiong’o (1994) use the term ‘neocolonial territory’, where identities are constructed through the codes of the coloniser, using their languages and admiring their historical figures as tools to construct a single exceptional, valid history.

In brief, for many of these scholars, what is currently problematic is the maintenance of this system of domination, which is not colonial per se, but preserves dominant elements across the world, especially in the academic field and the ways in which scholars produce knowledge and understand reality (Smith, 1999). This claim is related to the onto-epistemological (see section below) challenges highlighting the inequalities generated in terms of recognising other cosmovisions and other knowledge systems other than the hegemonic or Eurocentric model, which dominates in current higher education institutions. Allow me to further elaborate on these terms and ideas.

### 1.1.2. THE ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

The onto-epistemological challenges can be framed under two demands: the universal ontological claim of western sciences by Castro-Gomez (cited in Soldatenko, 2015) and epistemic killing—epistemicide—by De Sousa Santos (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Both critiques are substantial to understand the decolonisation debate and the proposals towards social justice. Firstly, these two colonial challenges perpetuate colonisation, as a way to sustain the hegemony (Escobar, 2007). As mentioned above the hegemony is here conceptualised as a dominant system that established and balances two dimensions—‘the good life’ and the ‘valid life’—inadvertently imposing them on everyone (Dussel, 2007; Joseph, 2002). These two dimensions represent a normative position which is culturally related and attached to a clear tradition that conceptualises reality (Ontological position), as well as understanding knowledge creation and its use in a particular way (Epistemic system). Therefore, it is here where the ontological and epistemological issues are located.

---

<sup>2</sup> Cosmovision is the way in which an individual and/or a society perceive and interpret the world.

<sup>3</sup> Hegemony is here referred to as a geopolitical space (see Dussel, 2007). First, ‘although human beings create hegemony through their actions, they do so under conditions not of their own choosing’ (Joseph, 2002, p.1). However, this system establishes and balances two dimensions—‘the good life’ and the ‘valid life’—for everyone, inadvertently imposing, as described above, a dominant system (Dussel, 2007), and therefore a dominant knowledge system too.

Firstly, the ontological critique is built on a Western conceptualisation of reality as universal that is incapable of understanding its own positionality. This idea is called 'zero-point' by Castro-Gomez and explained by Soldatenko (2015) as an 'imaginary position of objective neutrality that enlightenment science took for itself by displacing other epistemic frameworks in the colonial world as primitive, irrational and religious' (Soldatenko, 2015, p.140). To a certain extent, this Western tradition conceptualises nature as being detached from individuals and assumes a disembodied reality as universal (Mignolo, 2007), in contrast with other perspectives such as, for instance, indigenous communities that understand nature and human beings as being deeply connected (Smith, 1999). Hence, the problem itself is not this particular positionality, that is as valid as many others, but its imposition on others due to the argument that it is a universal way of understanding reality. Therefore, this critique is based on the influence of Western ontological positions as being universal and superior to others, not questioning its own positionality as superior, which is problematic.

On the other hand, ontological domination is linked to the epistemological challenge. In addition to the Western tradition imposing a way of understanding reality, it also imposes a way of understanding the nature of knowledge and the processes in which knowledge is produced, thus imposing an epistemological system. This issue has been named 'epistemological blindness' by Hleta (2016) or 'epistemicide' by De Sousa Santos (2015). Both terms refer to the destruction of other knowledge systems due to the 'universal' perspective sustained by the Western epistemological canon as superior (De Sousa Santos, 2015) or the inability to recognise other knowledge systems as valid (Hleta, 2016). For instance, an example broadly referred to in the literature is how indigenous people need to validate their knowledge by scientific procedures to be valid and rigorous, and therefore, become universal. Thus, this epistemic critique highlights how this dominant perspective has narrowed the richness of human knowledge and wisdom beyond the Western epistemic system (Zibechi, 2015).

In conclusion, these scholars do not deny the importance of Western thinking or its philosophical tradition. Conversely, they believe this tradition is rich and has brought valuable knowledge, also from other cultures and civilizations (Dussel, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). The issue lies in that this system does not understand its own superior positionality and does not allow for space in which knowledge is considered differently as well as produced in another manner (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Therefore, these critiques provide the foundation in which these scholars articulate the alternative solutions towards decolonisation and social justice. Moreover, as the interest of this study is based on higher education, the following section will explore universities under a particular decolonisation project towards social justice.

### 1.1.3. FROM A 'UNI-VERSITY' TOWARDS A 'PLURI-VERSITY'

In light of the complexity outlined above, what the universal project, the hegemonic project, ignores is the diversity of perspectives (ontological positions) and knowledges (epistemic systems) beyond itself. Therefore, this group of scholars (Boidin, Cohen, Grosfoguel, 2012; Dussel 2007, Mignolo, 2007) have developed a perspective able to provide the heterogeneous ground needed to reverse these colonial challenges, called the pluriverse project (Dussel, 2007). This project aims to transform a uni-verse into a pluri-verse better capable of accommodating the diversity that has historically been excluded due to structures of domination.



Nevertheless, although the pluriversal project is extensive and fertile I will focus here on its educational derivative, the 'pluriversity', as they are fairly similar, in order to understand the foundational ideas. Thus, in this pluriversity model, the idea is to transform a monolithic university institution into a less provincial one (Boidin, Cohen, Grosfoguel, 2012). In addition, in this project, the fight against epistemic coloniality is substantial for the transition to an academic model able to challenge academic knowledge production and practice (Tamdgigi, 2012).

In this matter, the concept of 'ecology of knowledges'—Epistemic multiplicity—coined by De Sousa Santos (2015) is helpful in order to understand the equal relevance of different knowledge systems and the possibility of bringing them together as a way of cooperation. De Sousa Santos (2010; 2015) asserts that every knowledge system is incomplete, due to its own internal and external limitations. Therefore, the incompleteness of all knowledge systems—including the Western epistemic system—necessitates an epistemological dialogue between them, which is called ecology of knowledges. In conclusion, when scholars are able to interrogate their knowledge system and bring it into conversation with others, an ecology of knowledges is stimulated. Therefore, this is a necessary condition in the approach of promoting a pluriversity in the direction of social justice.

Notwithstanding, the point is what are universities currently doing to challenge these colonial issues and how can these strategies be improved? Do we decide to propose a solution 'within' or 'outside' our higher education institutions? (Tamdgigi, 2012)

In this study, the strategy is taken as analysing internally what higher education institutions are doing so far, and how these practices can be improved by new theoretical insights. Thus, the following section deals with practices already used by our institutions to challenge colonial issues, as described above, on knowledge production and their role towards social justice in higher education.

## 1.2. TURNING TO PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES AND HIGHER EDUCATION

When we want to think about ways of resistances 'within', given the actual Global South academic context concerning the debates highlighted in the above section, the gaze focuses on participatory approaches. With the terminology 'participatory approaches', I refer to the extensive family of practices which use any kind of involvement of participants in research practice. This terminology is not widely used (Cleaver, 1999), due to the fact that scholars tend to refer to them as typologies (see Chapter Two). One of these typologies, Action Research, is overwhelmingly referenced as being the general title for all of them. To a certain extent, referring to all the categories under Action Research seems to mislead, confusing the richness of all these practices along with their foundational theories. This is why I use the term 'participatory approaches' throughout this study, as it is able to embrace the heterogeneity of this field by embracing participatory practices that are referred to as methods, methodologies, as well as full participatory research processes (see Section 1.8 in this chapter).

However, what do we mean by participatory approaches, beyond the act of involving research participants in the enquiry process? Participatory approaches, as stated above, refer to a widely diverse field in which the aim is to confront Western approaches to research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). In this orientation to research, we investigate 'with people' instead of 'on people' and implement research processes in other ways. In this regard, a comparative table by Bradbury (2015) can provide a better overview of the differences between conventional research and participatory

approaches. Nevertheless, this table cannot represent all the practices (see Chapter Two), but it does provide a general view of the way these practices understand the purpose of research, the positionality of both researcher and stakeholders, as well as the conception of time, the sources of evidence and the research process as a learning process, in its way of challenging traditional means of knowledge creation.

	Participatory Approaches	Applied Research/Consulting	Conventional Research
<b>Purpose</b>	To understand and improve.	To improve.	To understand.
<b>Researcher</b>	Embedded within the research. Problem co-definer, lead research co-designer, lead research co-implementer.	Invited expert who knows what good outcomes should look like and helps to move the situation towards them.	External to the context. Problem definer, research designer, research implementer.
<b>Stakeholder</b>	Problem co-definers, research co-designers, research co-implementers.	Clients of the research, sources of data.	Subjects of the research, sources of information; samples for testing conclusions.
<b>Time</b>	Focus on the here and now with reflection on past issues to influence future designs. Cyclical.	Match situation to known other situations to find existing techniques to change for the better. Sequential.	Either past focused or emphasising “control” comparison, isolation of key variables or forces at work. Unimportant. (Knowledge is timeless).
<b>Evidence</b>	Experiential, partial, emergent, dialogic, intuitive. Qualitative and quantitative.	Both qualitative and quantitative.	Both quantitative and qualitative.
<b>Learning process</b>	Learning and dissemination integrated into the research process; questions about the status quo made possible; nested systems made visible. Iterative.	Enquiry modes to define stakeholder problem and then match problem to existing intervention models or new combinations thereof. Linear.	Knowledge development with researchers distant from the phenomena. Dissemination efforts passive and after the fact.

*Table 1: Participatory approaches, applied research and conventional research comparison (Source: Extracted from Bradbury, 2015)*

Participatory approaches, thus, are part of an intellectual project established during the 1940s that has developed into a fruitful and legitimate research area awash with a diversity of theoretical and practical insights, not only related to decolonisation and knowledge democratisation, but also focusing on action and participation to pursue social change (Bradbury, 2015; Rowel et al., 2017).

In general, this field is highly developed and a solid area within academia, although some of these approaches are controversial and continue to be questioned internally (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

Some authors even mention the challenges of using this type of practice within academia. Levin and Greenwood claim that ‘the structure and ethos of universities often work against the processes of action research’ (cited in Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.3). Nevertheless, these practices still enjoy recognition and relevance, especially in some disciplines such as social sciences in general, or education. Proof of this are the five international handbooks published to date and their high visibility in general manuals about social science research (Bradbury, 2015; Coghlan, Brydon-Miller, 2014; Noffke & Somekh, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Rowell, Bruce, Shosh & Riel, 2017).

However, nowadays these practices are highly diverse and influenced by a multiplicity of theoretical foundations that might confuse their function as a way to challenge the persistent domination system (see Chapter Two). For this reason, this study introduces the Capabilities Approach as a foundational proxy to understand participatory practices in the Global South higher education context (see Chapter Two and Three). Thus, given the debates about decoloniality and its relation to knowledge production with participatory approaches, as well as the claim for acting within the higher education institutions to challenges and tackle these issues, it is necessary to clarify, primarily, what the Capabilities Approach is, and what is its potential to improve current participatory practices.

### 1.3. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

The Capabilities Approach is the philosophical foundation of the human development approach (Alkire, 2010). This approach conceptualises freedom as the base of development, it is intrinsically and instrumentally valuable to pursue the lives that people have reason to value (Boni & Walker, 2013). Therefore, the development aim is to remove the unfreedoms ‘that leave people with few choices and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency’ (Sen, 1999: XII), thus providing the real freedoms people have to be and to do the things they have reason to value (Sen, 2009). This approach is important because it challenges paternalistic perspectives about what development means for individuals, therefore, it centres individual’s agency and participation as the necessary conditions to broadly advance social justice (see Chapter Three).

In addition, the Capabilities Approach has been used in multiple studies using participatory approaches (see Chapter Three). Nevertheless, the use of this approach in these practices is mostly secondary despite the potential to reconsider some of the weak areas and limitations within participatory approaches (see Chapter Two). Furthermore, this seems to be substantial in the higher education context in the Global South, due to the current demands for decolonisation.

### 1.4. THE ACADEMIC GAP

In brief, summarising the previous sections, participatory practices are substantial for the achievement of social justice, especially in terms of cognitive global justice and decolonisation (De Sousa Santos, 2015). However, these practices, despite their expansion in the use of diverse and heterogeneous theoretical grounds, have not yet been conceptualised under a capabilities perspective despite its potential to resolve some of the weak areas of these practices, especially in the educational context of higher education in the Global South. The Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999), proposes a theoretical space to reflect and reconsider epistemological, methodological and operational issues, providing a solid people-centred theoretical frame, which can act within higher education institutions as a platform for an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Moreover, participatory approaches, which are of interest in this project, have been drawing on capabilities lenses in multiple development and educational interventions. Nonetheless, this

capabilities research area is still under-researched and is far from having reached its full potential (see Chapter Three). Scholars within the capabilities sphere have not yet achieved a consensual proposal, such as a participatory capabilities-based research.

### 1.5. AIMS OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Therefore, due to this academic gap and the potential to use the Capabilities Approach as a way to conceptualise and implement a participatory practice towards justice in the Global South. The study aims are:

- To create, conceptualise, implement and investigate a participatory capabilities-based research, which links the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education, given the academic gap between both fields and incongruences within participatory approaches.
- To explore opportunities, challenges and lessons with regard to socially just higher education that emerges from a participatory capabilities-based research experience with undergraduate students in South Africa.
- To investigate the capabilities that the participants have reasons to value and whether the participatory experience helped them or not to expand these capabilities.

Furthermore, the research questions that guided this research are,

- How can a participatory capabilities-based research be conceptualised, implemented and investigated in the light of the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education, given the academic gap between both fields and the limitations from participatory approaches?
- Which opportunities, challenges and lessons with regard to social justice and capabilities expansion emerge from a participatory capabilities-based case study with undergraduate students in South Africa towards socially-just higher education?
- Which capabilities do these undergraduate students have reason to value and why? Which of these capabilities are being expanded through their involvement in a participatory capabilities-based case study experience?

Therefore, these questions not only relate to the conceptualisation of this capabilities-based participatory research process that is of importance for this thesis, but to the implementation and exploration as a case study in a South African higher education context. For this reason, higher education institutions in the Global South are of substantial importance for this study. Thus, the section below justifies why a South African university is used as a case study, introducing briefly the current challenges of South African higher education and the relevance of this study with undergraduate students.

### 1.6. MOTIVATION FOR A SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CASE STUDY

The South African higher education context presents an invaluable space for this study. Its colonial past and current debates about decolonisation from grassroots movements and scholars (Pithouse, 2006; Botha, 2007; Luckett, 2016; Bulter-Adam, 2016) sustain and justify the need of this type of research as a way to humbly contribute towards transforming and challenging higher education institutions in the country.

To provide a brief contextualisation for those who are not familiar with the higher education context in South Africa, higher education institutions in South Africa began as a colonial establishment in 1829 with the South African College in Cape Town. In 1910, three establishments

existed in the country, the University of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and the University of South Africa, which expanded with affiliated colleges in every region of the country, creating the current higher education network (Pithouse, 2006; Cloete, 2006a). In 1953, the Bantu Education Act (1953, Act) enacted legislation to racially segregate all the educational facilities in the country (Tabata, 1960). Nonetheless, the higher education system developed into strong institutions internationally until the 1960s, when the international community questioned the legitimacy of the segregated system, provoking an academic boycott (Bunting, 2006). As Badat (2008) states, the apartheid system took legitimacy and freedom away from higher education institutions instrumentalising their functions to meet its political aspirations. Additionally, foci of resistance flourished against apartheid in South African universities, with grassroots movements<sup>4</sup> that positioned themselves as opponents of the National Party prior to the release, and subsequent ascent to the presidency, of Nelson Mandela (Naidoo, 2015; Karodia et al., 2016).

After 1994, a new South Africa was born with the first democratic elections, which reflect the aspiration to transform the nation and its higher education system prescribed by the White Paper of 1997<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, as Badat (2008, p.19) corroborated ‘social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities of race, gender, institutional and spatial nature profoundly shaped and continue to shape South African higher education’. Thus, all these historical and present challenges have fuelled public scrutiny on the functions and aims of public higher education institution in the country on the part of scholars and the student body (Badat, 2012; Luescher, Loader & Mugume, 2016; Msila & Gumbo, 2016; Postma, 2016; Van der Merwe & Van Reenen, 2016). These features make the higher education context especially relevant for this study, advancing the current debate towards solutions that can challenge persistent injustices in the area of knowledge production.

In addition, higher education institutions in South Africa have been using participatory approaches for years, having an extended body of knowledge, especially in community projects (Buskans & Earl, 2008; Caister, Green & Worth, 2012; Erskine, 1985; Isobell et al., 2016; L’Etang & Theron, 2011; Nemeroff, 2008; White, 2004 among others). Nevertheless, universities are the institutions that are implementing most of these projects outside their walls, as community projects, many of them in educational areas such as primary and secondary community schools (Ebersohon et al., 2012; Ferreira et al., 2013; Govender, 2013; Meyiwa & Wiebesiek, 2013; Scott, 2014; Theron, 2012; Van Der Voort & Wood, 2014; Wood, 2012; Wood & Zuber-Skerrit, 2013). The projects undertaken within the university limits, seem focused on Action Research projects in educational faculties to improve their teaching and learning or other aspects of the academic context, such as plagiarism (Du Toit, 2012; Esau, 2013; McKay, 2014; Piennaar, 2013; Waghid & Waghid, 2016; Wood, 2009). This dominant use in the literature explored highlights the missing transdisciplinary potential of these practices to contribute to the decolonisation of higher education institutions in South Africa. It assumes that the student body can only act outside of their university doors, in

---

<sup>4</sup> Student movements played a crucial role in the historical transformation of universities in the country. Education activism took place in South Africa during the 70s and 90s. Student associations such as the South African Students Organisation (SASO) or Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) nurtured intensive debates about policy, transformation and practice (Naidoo, 2015; Karodia et al., 2016) which continue today. During 2015 and 2016 diverse protests took place in different universities all around the country, and fourteen institutions were shut down in the largest and most effective student campaign post-1994 #FeesMustFall (Cloete, 2016). This campaign opened latent debates about the role of universities and the heritage of the colonial institution.

<sup>5</sup> See the link for more information [http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/White\\_Paper3.pdf](http://www.che.ac.za/sites/default/files/publications/White_Paper3.pdf) [25.06.18 13:15]



order to help other educational institutions or communities, presuming not to have any political or socially engaging question to resolve within its own walls through participatory processes that involve students beyond those of improving their teaching and learning. Therefore, it misses the potential of these practices to engage the student body—especially those with less access to spaces of knowledge production, such as undergraduates—on the transformation of these institutions, through their active and engaged participation in knowledge production.

Thus, this case study seems to be substantial not only because it follows the current concerns of the student body and scholars involved in the colonial critique of higher education institutions in the country, but because it is also a way to engage internally in debates that are relevant for undergraduate students from different faculties, as a way to include and transform the spaces for knowledge production within the university context towards a socially just higher education.

## 1.7. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Hence, to outline the study, this document is divided into nine chapters. These chapters draw on different aspects of the exploration of this scholarly work.

### 1.7.1. PART ONE

The first part of this study is dedicated to the background and theoretical basis of this enquiry, elaborating on the background of the study, the literature focused on participatory approaches, the theoretical framework used for the study and the research design implemented for the enquiry process. Hence, this part is composed of four chapters (1 to 4).

#### *CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW*

After a brief contextualisation in this initial chapter (Chapter One), the literature review explores the scholarly work focusing on participatory approaches. This review helps to better understand the academic gap between capabilities and human development literature, situating the adequate space for the conceptualisation of this innovative research process. In so doing, the categories that organised the different traditions among practices visualises the diversity and plurality as well as contradictions within the field. It lays the foundation on which the capabilities-based research proposal is situated.

#### *CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK*

The beginning of the theoretical framework chapter continues these debates by highlighting a dominant discourse in the field of participatory approaches, the decolonial debate, justifying its use throughout the theoretical framework. Thus, the theoretical framework contributes to the existent body of knowledge intertwining these two fields—the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches, in addition to the decolonial debate—into a common ground under the name of Democratic Capabilities Research (DCR). Moreover, DCR is conceptualised in the theoretical framework using five principles that might accommodate the variety of practices and implementations needed to diversify the research field under a capabilities perspective, being per se flexible and contextually related—thus, open-ended—as is the perspective of the Capabilities Approach that is used throughout this study.

The five DCR principles presented are (1) Injustices as an initial issue that unite a group of individuals to research about things that matter to them. (2) Uncertain horizon, as the promotion of democratic spaces for knowledge production, beyond simple participation, situating agency at the core of the research process. (3) Internal/External diversity, in the sense, of allowing the space for the ecology of knowledges or epistemic diversity within the spaces for knowledge production.

(4) Resituating the voiceless as a knowledge creator, including collectives and individuals excluded from official spaces of knowledge creation and considering them as worthy knowledge contributors. And (5) the process of knowledge production as a space for the expansion of an individual's valued capabilities. These principles represent pillars among the DCR frame that might accommodate different practices in different contexts and at different times—being not static, but dynamic—with the specific features surrounding the process of knowledge creation and the individuals immersed in it. In this manner, each principle needs to be contextualised in each practice. For instance, deciding together the issue under research or using the knowledge that is contextually relevant in that particular case.

#### *CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN*

In addition, the next chapter focuses on the research design, it discusses the decisions made to undertake this research and some of the ethical challenges when using participatory elements. Therefore, the case study is justified by explaining how it will help to achieve the aims of a doctoral thesis, at the same time as it will provide an adequate platform for the DCR project implementation. Three qualitative methods were chosen as part of the case study, using interviews, participant observation and journals as tools for the data collection.

##### *1.7.2. PART TWO*

The second part of the thesis is composed of four chapters, three of them dedicated to evidence (Chapter Six, Seven and Eight) and one for conclusions (Chapter Nine). These three evidence chapters highlight various elements of the thesis drawing from empirical results and the implications of the findings in the practice of DCR.

#### *CHAPTER FIVE: EXPLORING A DCR CASE STUDY*

Chapter Five attempts to clarify how the process took place and what we did in each of the workshops as a group with an emphasis on decision-making processes and ecology of knowledges. Thus, this chapter narrates the nine workshops carried out during the 2017 academic year undertaken by the group of students. In this manner, the reader can have a clear idea of how the process went, before continuing with some more concrete evidence chapters, focusing especially on capabilities explorations by the facilitator and their contribution to the DCR process.

#### *CHAPTER SIX: A PARTICIPATORY CAPABILITIES PRE-DESIGN TO GUIDE OUR PRACTICES*

Chapter Six explores the capabilities that these students had reason to value, focusing on the third research question. To do so, the data informed the contextual capabilities for this group of undergraduate students, and these capabilities were compared with Nussbaum's (2012) central capabilities list in order to understand their commonalities and differences. Thus, the chapter argues that despite the contribution of this universal list to the field of human development, we still have good reason to scrutinise these lists, as many cultural and contextual specificities can be lost in these types of aggregations, missing the grassroots potential of the Capabilities Approach. Therefore, the chapter presents a graphic representation of these valued capabilities as a continuum from active to latent capabilities as a way to theorise the dynamism and contextualisation of such capabilities. The chapter claims that valued capabilities are rich sources of information for the design and evaluation of participatory practices, guiding us in the implementation of DCR, orienting the process towards the lives the participants have reasons to value (Sen, 1999). Hence, to conclude the chapter, the use of these valued capabilities to design the DCR South African process is presented and discussed.

## *CHAPTER SEVEN: BROADENING OUR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS*

Chapter Seven explores two students' cases from among the twelve. This decision was taken due to the extent of the data collected for this study and the decision to pursue a particular perspective of the Capabilities Approach. In this regard, the chapter would be unable to explore the twelve cases from the twelve participants in depth because the use of all of them would force to use aggregations and significantly reduce the information provided about why they valued a particular capability or the impact of the project on their capabilities sets. Thus, two cases were chosen from the twelve, due to their uneven level of enjoyment in their capabilities sets when they became part of the project. This reinforces and maintains the argument that individual choices among valued capabilities and the initial enjoyment of those capabilities are important sources of information at the time of assessing DCR practices, highlighting the grassroots and local application of the CA. Thus, this chapter highlights what a capabilities analysis of a DCR practice adds to current evaluative spaces. It provides a more people-centred analysis, which seems residual in capabilities studies, but at the same time avoids paternalistic analysis. Therefore, instead of using general capabilities to understand their impact due to the project, the study uses the students' identified valuable capabilities in order to understand how a specific project influenced them in the way they want to be and they want to lead their lives (Sen, 1999).

## *CHAPTER EIGHT: DCR TOWARDS SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA*

Subsequently, Chapter Eight focuses on the idea of justice and the challenges and lessons learned from the project, thus, discussing the first and second research questions. Firstly, the chapter combines conceptual and empirical elements, providing a conversation between the principles in the theoretical framework and elements from the data in this project to conceptualise this DCR practice. Thus, the five DCR principles are taken back from the theoretical framework and reviewed after the case study implementation, exploring their actual application in the South African case as well as their contribution to social justice. Moreover, the chapter highlights the combination between the participants and the facilitator's role, arguing that the facilitator role is not only a possible extension of DCR as a way to facilitate our academic work, but also a means of enriching our participatory evaluations. To conclude, the final section of the chapter summarises some of the major challenges and opportunities, bringing some lessons learned at the end in order to answer the second research question.

## *CHAPTER NINE: SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSION*

The final chapter focuses on the main contributions, reflections on the research questions and conclusion of this research. Firstly, the main contributions of this study are summarised in two main aspects that are interwoven: conceptual-empirical. This section explores, for instance, the conceptualisation of the capabilities-based research process, the use of contextual capabilities to guide and evaluate participatory practices or the use of highly valued capabilities as distinctive from generic lists, classifying them from active to latent. Furthermore, the three research questions are here discussed together with some methodological reflections. The chapter concludes by highlighting the importance of public engagement and summarising the ways in which this study has been scrutinised in different spaces and with diverse audiences. In addition, it briefly outlines the future directions of DCR and how these practices might be expanded and further theorised.



## 1.8. POSITIONALITY

As educated, classed, raced, gendered, aged and locatable people, our ways of knowing and being are directly impacted by various positions we occupy in society. It is in this light that some might wonder and ask, why would a white European, Spanish woman come to South Africa to complete her doctoral studies and engage with contentious issues of knowledge production, decolonisation, higher education, social justice and democracy. I have been deeply reflexive about the various positions I occupy and what these positions make possible for me as well as others. I want to mention that I consider myself an abdicate European in the figurative sense of the word. What I mean by this is that I am still a European citizen, but I refuse to identify with some European values, visions, and life-styles such as: 'We are the centre of the world' or the view that the European civilisation is more advance and better. I believe that this dissatisfaction made me, in a way, to embrace ideas of being a global citizen and not to mind so much about where I live, study or work and the possibilities this would entail. Moreover, it made me want to connect with other places in the world, especially those that I knew very little about such as South Africa and learn deeply the diversity of the various ways of knowing and knowledge that makes life possible in different geographical contexts. This understanding was always present in my daily interactions within the university and outside even when I decide to undertake this research project. A good friend of mine, who is originally from Zambia once said to me during my first year in South Africa, 'It's funny and ironic that you colonised us in the past, and now we give you an opportunity to pursue your PhD here in Africa.' This statement touched the core of predominant understanding shaping our modern society. There is still a strong presence of the dualistic thinking in many circles that Europe and its intuitions is the producer of knowledge and Africa is the consumer of knowledge. This would make others to question the merit of a European woman, whose sections of society still feels proud about colonial massacres and spoliations to talk about decolonisation while studying in foreign country that is still immersed in the struggles of constituting a free and just society after a long history of oppression. However, I would assert here that the issue is not who says it but how power is exercise towards a more just society. This is how I dealt personally with this ethical/positional challenge throughout this study. It is not a question of whether I can or cannot deal/argue about these issues because I am white and European, but how I allow myself and others to challenge my own assumptions and acknowledge multiple realities and possibilities from our own 'privileged' positionality and using this available privileged position of power to enable meaningful change. I humbly hope that this encourages other scholars—especially from the North—to immerse themselves in such passionate as well as uncomfortable questions to challenge their academic status quo.

Even before I started to study for my PhD I was really interested in participatory approaches and the Capabilities Approach. Both areas of research were really inspiring to me in different ways. First, participatory approaches resonated with my values and ideas, such as treating everyone as equal or questioning power dynamics within the process of knowledge production. Moreover, I never knew how to deal with my position as a researcher and these type of practices offered me an alternative to seeing myself differently as a facilitator. Participatory approaches were claiming for spaces of collective knowledge production, including individuals from diverse backgrounds as necessary and essential in the process of research. However, I knew that all those amazing claims were also an ongoing dispute among practitioners, as projects were not always aligned with those type of visions. On the other hand, learning about the Capabilities Approach was an eye opener. Firstly, as an undergraduate, I had time to engage with multiple theories; however, those theories seemed always to be far away from the actual lives people lived. Thus, when I finally came across a theoretical approach that cared about what people want to do and to be, it was inspiring in so

many ways. Moreover, I liked the transdisciplinary view of this approach as it was in connection with multiple fields and provided a broad view of particular issues across research areas.

Therefore, I had a connection with both fields, one that talked about global issues in knowledge creation, promoting more inclusive ways of research. In addition to an open-ended approach focused on individual's agency, democracy, and public scrutiny. What I could not comprehend then was how and why the link between both fields was so frail when in fact they had so much in common. Thus, I decided to investigate both fields as part of my PhD to deeply explore their commonalities and bring out the potential using them together.

Furthermore, the higher education context was of especial interest, as I was fascinated by the strong commitment of the South African student body to fight against injustices. While I say this, I do not support all the violent actions, although I empathise with their messages of calling for social justice—claims which not only affect local institutions but other educational institutions around the world. I admired their courage to act for transformation against all odds to change the oppressive order within the university and beyond. This project does not claim to have contributed to the transformation the students aspired to or desire to trigger. It equally does not claim to give voice to South African students who wield their own agency and resolve to deal with multiple challenges. Nonetheless, this project created a possible condition in which critical issues that are at the centre of knowledge production, democracy and social justice were openly dissected and questioned and learned from. Pinpointing the impact of such a possibility lays with the individual's assessments of what they value doing and being.

## 1.9. OTHER TERMINOLOGY AND RESEARCH CLARIFICATIONS

To conclude this chapter, it is necessary to provide some clarifications of the terminology used in this document and ideas driving the study before the literature review on participatory approaches.

First of all, the word 'research' in this study is understood broadly, as is 'knowledge'. Research is one of the most contested words in academia, it seems to be as much an ideological as a political term, which is signified by what lies behind it; its historical and philosophical tradition (Smith, 1999). For this reason, in this study research should be understood from an open-ended definition which considers research beyond a disciplinary contribution to academic knowledge. In this way, research is a general capacity for investigating things that we need to know (Appadurai, 2006). As Appadurai claims 'It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one's current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal or aspiration' (2006, p.176) beyond any disciplinary or academic contribution to the body of knowledge. Therefore, although the thesis in itself can be taken as a conventional piece of research (see Chapter Four), the DCR case study needs to be understood in this broad way, as a pedagogical space in which the investigation itself goes beyond scientific standards of research.

Accordingly, the word knowledge is used in a similar way. As the outcome of scientific research is scientific knowledge, in expanding the meaning of research we do the same with the knowledge resulting from the enquiry process. As explained above, the epistemic injustices are based on the domination of an epistemic system over others that are thought unworthy and unreliable (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Therefore, when referring to knowledge, this is understood in a multiplicity of systems that are rooted in different cultural traditions as well as diverse processes of knowledge creation and rationality. Hence, this is to understand rationality in a broad sense that goes beyond the modern understanding of rationality, embracing other means of understanding and producing knowledge. To do so means acknowledging what lies under the meaning of knowledge in the

broadest way as including—but not limited to—scientific, conceptual, experiential, intuitive, local, indigenous and cultural knowledge. It is in this space, where knowledge creation seems to merge with the learning process, that there is no clear difference between a process of knowledge production and a process of active learning (see Chapter Two).

Secondly, the decolonisation claim throughout this study does not represent a radical perspective. Conversely, this positionality understands the importance of scientific knowledge and under no circumstance is trying to invalidate it. The case presented here clarifies the invisibility of other knowledge systems and other means of research that have historically been invalidated and need to be acknowledged if we want to advance towards social justice (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Therefore, as stated above (see Section 1.1.2. in this chapter) the argument sustains the creation of spaces within, as well as outside academia to promote other knowledge systems and other research processes. As Mignolo (2008) corroborates, it is not a question of a new hegemony that is changed from the old one, but how we are able to create bridges between all the different traditions of knowledge and apply them in a more egalitarian terrain. Furthermore, to acknowledge this positionality, the document makes use of the terminology ‘decolonial debate’ in order to clarify the particular vision of decolonisation sustained in this study, as the preservation of diversity and the multiplicity of practices for knowledge creation.

Thirdly, this document refers to participatory approaches as participatory practices that can be applied on three levels, namely participatory methods, participatory methodologies, and participatory research processes. This division is acknowledged intentionally to help the reader to understand the different categories and their various implementations. Allow me to elaborate on this division to provide a clearer idea. When the document refers to participatory methods—which is residual in this study—it highlights a specific use of a participatory element within a larger study. For instance, a quantitative research team working on food security want to have a participatory workshop with a particular community to better understand food habits and food availability before drafting their questionnaire, which will be answered by more than 50 communities. In this case, the research team prepare a series of participatory activities and implement them in order to acquire some knowledge about how to improve the following methodological step. This is a common practice, especially among development studies (Biggeri et al., 2006), but it does not deal with the many dilemmas in the way knowledge is produced. Due to this, the outcome of the workshop is only a preparatory step, not involving any further philosophical questions about knowledge production. Therefore, when referring to participatory methods, it is this type of practice that is referred to.

On the other hand, this study focuses more on participatory methodologies and research processes, which is the scope from the literature review (see Chapter Two). Surprisingly, the differences between them are not really clear in the literature and they tend to mix unintentionally, due to the significant differences between academic fields and their conceptualisation of ‘research’ and use of methodologies. For instance, the majority of social sciences research or educational research will see the process of enquiry as linear, from conceptualising the issue, finding the academic gap, designing an adequate research design, applying it, analysing it and conclude it. This is not the same process for some other disciplines such as anthropology in which, for instance, the case of grounded research challenges such a structure, as well as some other types of ethnography. Therefore, due to the transdisciplinary of participatory approaches and the different influences in their practices, the division seems to be insufficiently clear. Therefore, as a clarification for this study, when the text refers to methodology it does not necessarily imply that the community/group

of individuals participating have been deciding the issue under research—although this may be possible in some cases (see Chapter Two)—on the contrary, it mainly refers to when the scholar frames the issue under research and implements a participatory methodology that can be composed of diverse participatory techniques that are carried by the community, featuring a collaborative knowledge production process. And finally, when referring to the participatory research process, the text acknowledges a collaborative process from beginning to end, in which the individuals are those who define and propose the issue under research and implement the research process in a collaborative study. Therefore, due to the critiques that will be highlighted in Chapter Two, the conceptualisation of the capabilities-based participatory practice shall be framed and referred to throughout this study as a research process, rather than a methodology.

Furthermore, it is due to this ambiguity why some scholars may consider this thesis to be a methodological study, instead of a research proposal study. I will argue, as stated above, that this study proposes a research process which is informed by the Capabilities Approach and the decolonial debate. In this way, what I am claiming is not only the methodological space—the strategies to create knowledge—but the collaborative formulation of the issue under research. This is a major statement as it assumes that the conceptualisation of the issue is a political and ontological statement that may highly impact and/or misdirect the research process as a whole.

Additionally, in order to clarify, the study not only focuses on the conceptual formulation of this capabilities-based research process but on the development, implementation and revision throughout the case study, of the data collected being interwoven with the practices undertaken within the DCR South African project.

Equally, terms as North/South, voiceless, democracy, and social justice needs to be clarified in this section, in order to anticipate the reader what they stand for throughout this study. First, the distinction North/South in this thesis is referred more as a geopolitical space. This is to understand North and South more as a mind-set than as a geographical space. It does not represent a static or well delimited territory, it represents logics which give sense to the way we live and act in the world. This vision, in a way, confronts controversial territorial division that contradicts much of the arguments supported and defended in this work.

On the other hand, the voiceless terminology is here used under a particular meaning, which is necessary to remark. When students are referred to as a voiceless group, it does not assume they do not have a voice. Actually, the argument here supported is that they have it in diverse ways and expressed it by different means—as for instance, the students' protests as well as their capacity to choose those capabilities that are valuable for them—. Conversely, the voiceless refers to the difficulties to access and contribute to powerful/dominant structures of knowledge production. In this case, we acknowledge that they produce knowledge in their own ways and have a voice in certain spaces. Thus, what this project is doing is to link, build bridges between diverse areas of knowledge production, bringing to the top, especially those that were historically excluded in powerful spaces. Therefore, giving a voice to those that have not access to these privileged spaces of knowledge production.

As well, democracy and social justice need some clarification. Both terms are used in this study from a capabilities perspective. First democracy is understood in a broad sense, as Sen claims (2011). He asserts that democracy needs to be assessed by 'the capacity to enrich reasoned engagement through enhancing informational availability and the feasibility of interactive discussion. Democracy has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the

extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the people can actually be heard' (Sen, 2011, p.xii-xiii). In this way, democracy in this study is not understood as its institutional referral but by the extent, individuals from diverse sectors are scrutinising for a better decision-making process.

On the other hand, social justice is equally framed under the Capabilities Approach. In this sense, we are not trying to identify the perfect society or pursue a theory of justice. Conversely, we are looking for deplorable situations that leave individuals with few choices to exercise their reasoned agency. Therefore, injustices refer when individuals are not able to enjoy their valued capabilities. And in this sense, we are not talking about a unique way of achieving justice but as an incomplete sense of justice that needs to be guided by the lives, different individuals have reason to pursue. Furthermore, as Drydyk (2012, p.32) corroborates 'Acting justly, according to the Capabilities Approach, aims not merely for people to rise above capability deprivation, but to do it through processes that are empowering for them, so that they have become better able to shape their own lives'. Thus, these ideas are where the DCR practice and its orientation towards social justice fits. It is not only about enhancing capabilities but to do it through a process that empowers and prepares individuals to better shape their own lives in their own valuable ways.

As a final point, in the literature, the Capabilities Approach is also referred to as the Capability Approach, both terminologies are used indistinctly (Nussbaum, 2012). However, this study uses the term 'Capabilities Approach' throughout the text, its plural formulation, to highlight and emphasise the plurality of capabilities that are valuable for diverse and heterogeneous individuals and collectives.

Therefore, after some initial clarifications, the second chapter makes an exhaustive exploration of the field of participatory approaches, their various traditions and challenges, in order to better understand where this participatory capabilities-based research fits within this broad and diverse family of practices.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the complexities when investigating participatory approaches as a research field. Firstly, I divide the field into four major research areas (industrial, development, indigenous, and educational), in order to clarify the diverse foundational assumptions of different practices and their distinct theoretical grounds. Additionally, these families are used to structure the chapter and provide clarity about this broad field. Among the families, the Industrial family represents the beginning of Action Research (hereafter AR), a term coined by Kurt Lewin. This tradition, as the chapter highlights, is highly influenced by a positivist perspective to research; initially, their practices did not involve the participants to any significant degree. Secondly, the development family adds a critical perspective to the initial AR practice. This family uses terminologies such as Participatory Research (hereafter PR) and Participatory Action Research (hereafter PAR) as a way to highlight that active and engaged participation was at the core of these practices. In this section, various traditions are presented and their commitment to some of the decolonial aims is outlined, in addition to their focus on liberation and emancipatory-type theories. The third family, the indigenous family, focuses on postcolonial theory. Its foundation concerns the invisibility of indigenous people, their ways of understanding research and producing knowledge. The final category, the educational family, is presented as central to this study, due to the educational context explored here. This family is presented under the category of Educational Action Research (from now on EAR), which is explored under subcategories such as Action Science (AS), Action Learning (AL), Classroom Action Research (CAR), Action Learning Action Research (ALAR)/Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) and Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). All these subcategories represent different practices and theoretical influences bringing the educational field from more conventional practices focused on the exploration and improvement of pedagogical practices (CAR) to a more critical approach linking educational institutions with the larger society (CPAR).

Additionally, after the exploration of all these families, a summary of the major challenges throughout the field is provided, exploring issues on individual/collective practices, the contested terms and application of participation in different practices, the credibility and validity within the academic context as well as the challenges arising from the heterogeneous feature of embracing diverse practices. Therefore, to conclude, the chapter focuses on the gaps from each of the families proposed highlighting the space to introduce the Capabilities Approach as a theoretical frame. Thus, provides the starting point to conceptualise the participatory capabilities-based research in order to resolve the limitations of these families in the following chapter.

### 2.2. INTRODUCING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Participatory approaches represent an extended family composed by methods, methodologies and research typologies, from the most conventional and academic frame until the most radical post-modernist-decolonial understanding of enquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Bradbury, 2015; Rowell et al., 2016). This diversity of practices is reflected in the numerous terminologies used among the international literature in the field, highlighting different origins, aims as well as theoretical influences (Etmanski et al., 2014; Dick, 2015; Higgins, 2016). To provide some examples of these diverse typologies, the table below presents a few terminologies.



<b>Participatory Action Research</b>	<b>Cooperative Enquiry</b>	<b>Soft System Approaches</b>	<b>Feminist Participatory Action Research</b>
<b>Action Research</b>	<b>Industrial Action Research</b>	<b>Participatory Research</b>	<b>Participatory Community Research</b>
<b>Educational Action Research</b>	<b>Action Science</b>	<b>Classroom Action Research</b>	<b>Community Based-Research</b>
<b>Participatory Rural Appraisal</b>	<b>Action Learning</b>	<b>Critical Participatory Action Research</b>	<b>Community-Based Participatory Research</b>
<b>Tribal Participatory Research</b>	<b>Constructionist Research</b>	<b>Participatory Learning and Action</b>	<b>Cooperative Research</b>
<b>Critical System theory</b>	<b>PALAR (PAL and AR)</b>	<b>Participatory Indigenous knowledge Research</b>	<b>Visual Participatory Research</b>
<b>Participatory Design Research</b>	<b>Queering Participatory Design Research</b>	<b>Design-Based research</b>	<b>Rapid Rural Appraisal</b>
<b>Participatory Rural Appraisal</b>	<b>Participatory Poverty Assessment</b>	<b>Appreciative Enquiry</b>	<b>Participatory Video</b>
<b>Photovoice</b>	<b>Participatory Workshops</b>		

Table 2: Typologies of participatory approaches

The sample above shows that participatory approaches have been adapted to different fields and practices, creating specific tools for scholars that are committed to democratic values, social change, and social accountability in different ways (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Nevertheless, this has not been the case in the field of capabilities. For this reason, the present chapter aims to make an in-depth exploration of these typologies, highlighting some traditions and the current challenges in order to provide the space for a capabilities-based typology.

First of all, the diversity highlighted above has mostly been embraced by scholars in the field in a positive way. Reason and Bradbury (2008) among others (Greenwood & Levin, 2006; Dick & Greenwood, 2015), honour and value all the different orientations, appreciating the richness and diversity of this wide family. Additionally, Chambers (2008) calls it *eclectic pluralism*, which is inclusive of its diversity, expressing that all participatory typologies have to be complemented by ‘mutual and critical reflective learning and personal responsibility for good practice’ (2008, p.331). Equally, Dick and Greenwood (2015) attest that ‘being sectarian and narrow about the varieties of AR is not an option’ (2015, p.195). Nevertheless, although it seems correct to embrace all these typologies, it is true that not all of them act and are implemented in the same way, neither are their aims equal and this might confuse the way scholars in the field understand the different practices and traditions within participatory approaches, impacting the mutual and reflective learning between practices. For this reason, the following section attempts to undertake a critical review presenting a structure of traditions among participatory practices, in order to better understand their differences and commonalities and their role towards social justice in the sense supported by this study.

### 2.3. PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES: INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

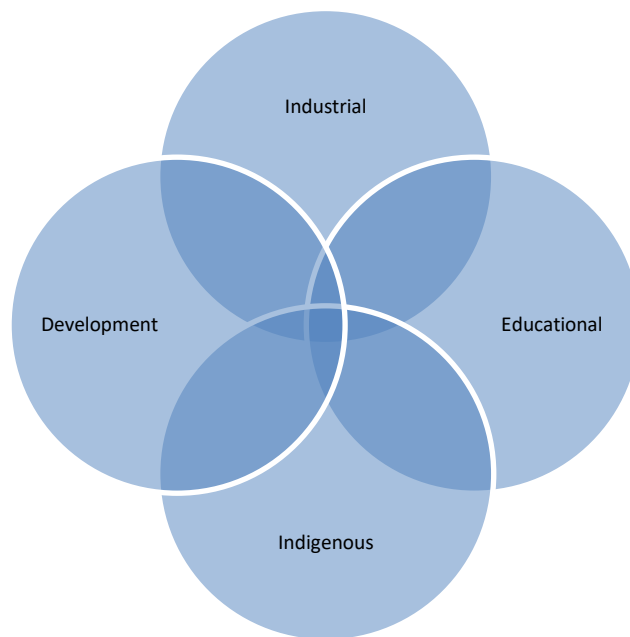
Action Research is the most extended terminology to name this type of practice, although as the text will highlight in the following sections, the initial understanding of AR differs greatly with

current practices and debates about participation and community involvement. Countless terminologies can be found within the AR family, as mentioned above, and it is very difficult to track down a clear classification in the literature.

In an attempt to historically organise influences over AR, Feldman (2017) proposes a classification based on three eras (Era 1; Era 2 and Era 3, see Feldman, 2017) in the English-speaking world. This analysis although helpful and inspiring does not cope with the major complexities among the field, making the Spanish-speaking tradition invisible, along with many other non-English speaking traditions, as well as the numerous terminologies used in the field over the last few decades. Therefore, according to the literature analysed, I have classified four research areas to be considered when referring to participatory approaches. These four families guide the structure of the chapter, organising their presentations and subcategories in the reading to finalise with limitations and possibilities.

In brief, the four families are: (1) the industrial family, where AR was born, which focuses on improving production processes and is strongly influenced by a positivist understanding of social change, implemented by cycles of reflection and action (Lewin, 1985). (2) The development family, which provides a more critical perspective to participation and epistemic debates and mostly focuses on community interventions and the voiceless (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). (3) The educational family, which initially is the application of an Industrial perspective to the improvement of professional educational practices (Noffke & Somekh, 2009), but which is progressively being influenced by more critical perspectives such as Freireian pedagogy or participatory practices from the development family with authors like Fals Borda, as in the case of CPAR (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). And finally, (4) the indigenous family, which is intimately linked to the development family, however, the indigenous strand has acquired more radical perspectives, demanding the consideration of research and the introduction of critical and radical methodologies to acknowledge the importance of indigenous knowledge and indigenous forms of research.





*Figure 1: Participatory families*

Although the graphic seems to clearly divide these four areas, categories can also be seen to overlap in terms of practices and foundational features. Nevertheless, some of them present irreconcilable theoretical features, such as the initial industrial family and the indigenous family. To a certain extent, this complexity explains the current difficulties in terms of classification and differentiation in the literature, which is camouflaged by embracing the diverse and extended family of participatory approaches (Greenwood & Levin, 2006; Dick & Greenwood, 2015).

Thus, the following sections attempt to provide an informed overview about some of the different research strands within participatory approaches. This is mediated by the four foundational sections explained above. Therefore, these sections explore a broad classification, due to the four research areas (industrial, development, indigenous, and educational) and their intersectionality with one another, producing the ideological tensions within the terrain of ‘participation’ and other challenges, which will be discussed as part of the conclusion of this chapter.

### 2.3.1. INDUSTRIAL FAMILY: ACTION RESEARCH

The industrial democracy movement refers to the first large-scale projects of AR (Greenwood & Levin, 2006). Kurt Lewin was the first person to use the term AR which dates back to 1934<sup>6</sup> (Adelman, 1993). Lewin was trained as a social psychologist and was interested in human behaviour, inter-group relations and social change (Lewin, 1946). This led him, together with his students, to test factories and neighbourhoods in quasi-experimental studies, exploring the increase of productivity through inclusive participation instead of authoritarian management (Adelman, 1993). For instance, an example of one of their studies is the case of the Harwood factory in Virginia, where they explored how participation affected productivity and work absenteeism (Krisitiansen & Bloesch-Poulsen, 2016). However, Lewin’s studies were not only related to factories

---

<sup>6</sup> Even though, Lewin was the creator of the term Action Research, some authors (Gazda et al., 1997; Dash, 1999) refer to Moreno as the methodological inventor of Action Research. J.L. Moreno was a group Psychotherapist in 1914 and he applied action oriented interventions for groups and inter-group therapies.

but also researched family habits and military efficiency. A particular example is his experiment conducting real-life research with the aim of achieving a particular goal in small groups, in this case, to modify family habits (Lewin, 1947). Equally, he conducted studies in the US, aiming to change food habits among American civilians, allowing the soldiers to get better quality meat, or his work with bomber squadrons in the Second World War, where the cycles of reflection and action are easily visible, the process repeating until the achievement of the goal (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013).

Lewin designed a research methodology, which through cycles of action and reflection could act as a catalyst towards social change as a desirable aim, under a pragmatic and positivist frame of human behaviour. This positivist frame presumed that there were universal laws leading human behaviour and, therefore, it was a cause-effect problem. The researcher identifies the problem and implements the research until the behaviour in the population under research changes. Lewin's research, especially in the early stages, aimed to change habits according to policy recommendations or the researcher's interest, with participants' involvement going no further than participating to be changed to the researcher's desirable outcome, which differs greatly from actual or/and critical understandings of AR.

According to Feldman (2017), the cycle of AR for Lewin was based on six steps.

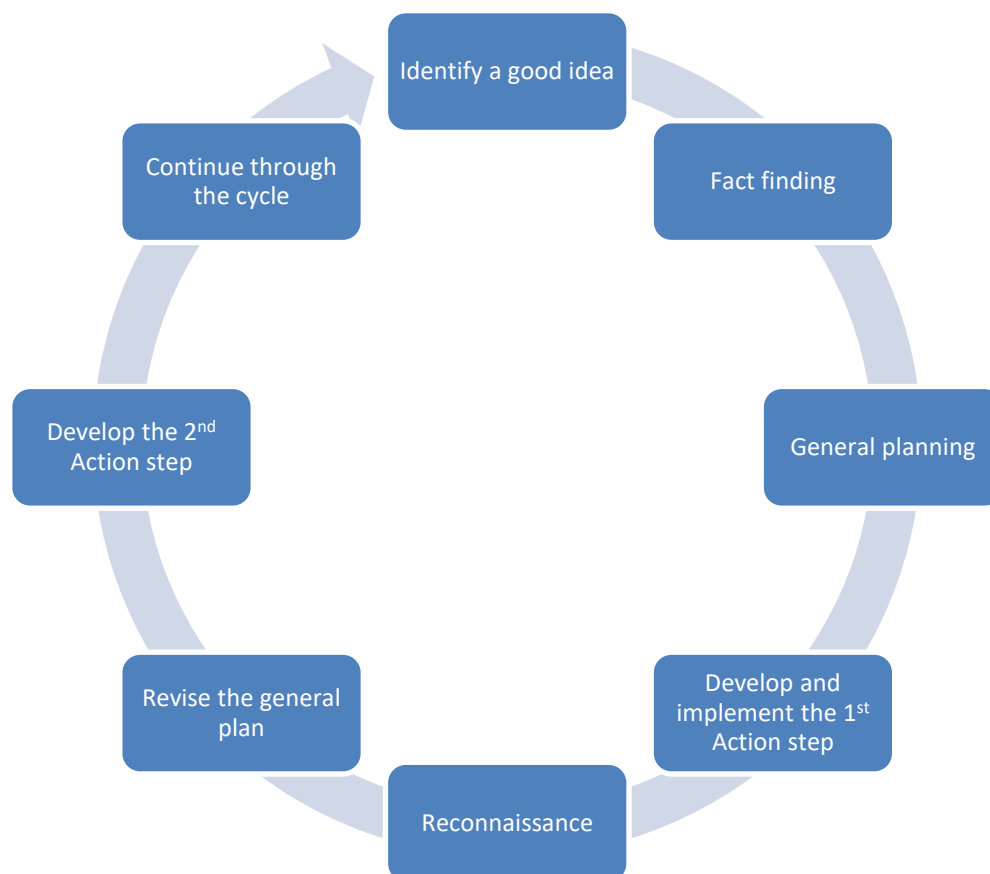


Figure 2: Diagram of Lewin's Action Cycle (Source: Fieldman, 2017, p.127)

Therefore, following these steps, the researcher catalyses the desired behavioural change in the population.

Notwithstanding, later in his career, Lewin also tried to democratise the research process by introducing the participation of communities or excluded groups within the enquiry beyond his initial approach (Adelman, 1993). However, there are challenges in the way of understanding 'participation', due to the historical moment and the positivist scientific background of Lewin. In Lewin's thought, participation was based on a superficial or instrumental enrolment or limited understanding of participation according to posterior practices (Kemmis, McTaggart & Retallick, 2004). Problems were determined by experts, and participants were used to resolve the experts' concerns, such as changing eating habits to provide better pieces of meat to the soldiers during the war, or reducing absenteeism in manufacturing to the benefit of the manufacturer's management.

Therefore, the scientific production and pragmatism underlying his creation of AR is clearly visible. As Adelman (1993) states, 'Action Research was the means of systemic enquiry for all participants in the quest for greater effectiveness through democratic participation' (Adelman, 1993, p.7). Nevertheless, that democratic participation was framed by the circumstances of the time, governed by authoritative and disciplinary models based on increasing productivity. In general terms, his studies were mostly framed under a pragmatic and scientific positivist rigour more than in terms of exposing abusive power relations within working environments or major ontological debates, such as unmasking an oppressive epistemic system. That is why Adelman (1993) corroborates,

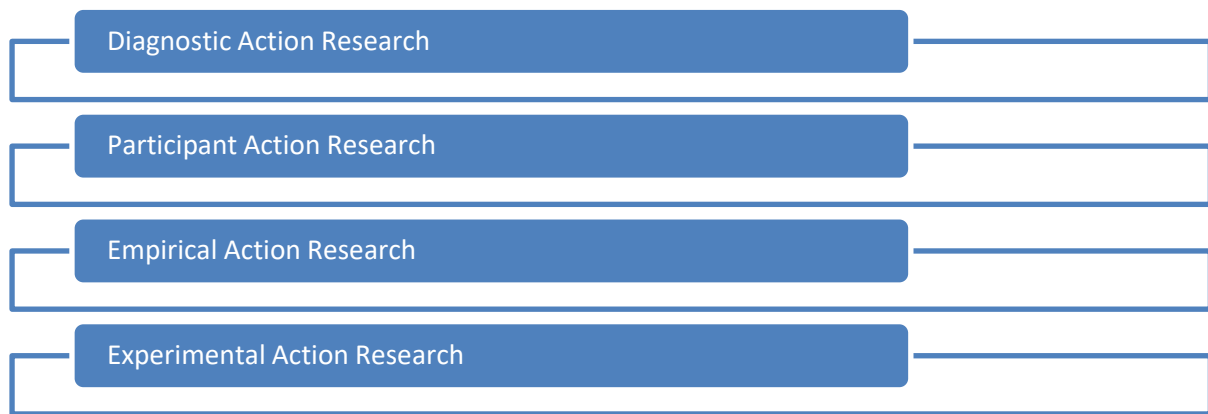
Lewin's ideas on democratic participation in the workplace did not include any critique of the wider society, particularly the range of economic relations between worker and employer, capital and labour. Indeed, a fair observation would be that although Lewin and his co-workers demonstrated the efficacy of action research for improving productivity, they did not develop conceptual structures that took explicit account of the power bases that define social roles and strongly influence the process of any change in the modes of production (Adelman, 1993, p.10).

Therefore, although Lewin's approach attempted to increase democratic relations within the arduous and intricate industrial context after the Second World War in Europe, it was implemented as a means of advancing better productive industrial processes and more efficient solutions to social problems within a Western industrial context.

Nevertheless, after several decades of work, Lewin and his co-workers were able to classify four distinctive typologies according to the different practices, which evolve from their initial work (Adelman, 1993). These typologies<sup>7</sup> were more varied, exposing not only the instrumental function of AR to increase productivity but alternatives that with the years became slightly different from the original AR type:

---

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the features of each of these categories, see Adelman (1993)



*Figure 3: Lewin's Action Research types (Source: Adelman, 1993)*

Furthermore, Lewin's ideas were original and ahead of his time, and they quickly spread to Europe where they had significant impact on the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London (Neumann, 2005), as well as in other parts of Britain and countries such as Norway and Sweden, where they were mainly developed as industrial management strategies (Greenwood & Levin, 2006).

Therefore, what is found today is a broad range of definitions to frame AR with mixture of features, which are at times contradictory, from a wide range of discourses across participatory approaches from the 1930s until today. What is clear is that the initial understanding of AR seems to be far from current practices and restricted in its means of advancing decolonisation aims. Nevertheless, I will discuss these ideas further in the following sections.

### 2.3.2. DEVELOPMENT FAMILY: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AND PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

In the 1960s 'participation' was added to AR, as an ideological sign of what came first; participation, not action. This second phase of AR is marked by enquiry implemented in developing contexts, such as Africa, Latin America and Asia (Kindom, Pain & Kesby, 2007). All of them sharing to a greater or lesser extent the alliance for a different research practice (Brydom-Miller, 2001). Enquiry was understood as a liberation toolkit that, when provided in an adequate manner, could liberate the oppressed (Greenwood & Lewin, 2006). Influenced by Freire's pedagogy, popular education and Orlando Fals Borda's awareness-building and liberating interventions, practices spread all over Colombia through Orlando Fals Borda, in Brazil through Freire, Tanzania through Liisa, and India through Tandon (Brydom-Miller, 2001; Thiollent & Colette, 2017). Furthermore, Rowel and Hong (2017) attribute the raising of participation, due to the intellectual and cultural colonisation of the North over the South, imposing the Northern episteme and extinguishing the heterogeneity of other knowledge in the South. Scholars (Rowel and Hong, 2017) acknowledge that Fals Borda used PAR as a way to reverse the unequal politics of knowledge through the validation of popular knowledge.

Notwithstanding, there is no agreement about who proposed PAR and when the terminology was coined, but two practitioners are mostly mentioned and proclaimed as their initiators within the PAR literature. On the one hand, Marja-Liisa with her Jipemoyo project (Nyemba & Meyer, 2017); and Orlando Fals Borda in Colombia with the term 'Investigacion Accion Participativa' (Thiollent & Colette, 2017).

First, Dr Marja-Liisa Swantz attributes the creation of PAR to herself through her work in Tanzania, stating that:

Somehow I actually wanted to create a different way of doing research and so I did not base it on specific theories but looked for ideas how to make people co-researchers and aware of the significance of their own ways of conceiving ideas and making use of their resources of knowledge (Nyemba & Meyer, 2017, p.4).

She especially refers to the Jipemoyo project as her first PAR project from 1975–1979, which aimed to encourage inhabitants of Jipemoyo, in Tanzania, to resolve their problems with their own resources (Nyemba & Meyer, 2017).

Secondly, Orlando Fals-Borda is recognised as the initiator of PAR<sup>8</sup> in Colombia, which was influenced by a Freirean ideology (Hall, 1997 cited in Brydom-Miller, 2001). These interventions were characterised by aiming for radical social change and emancipation (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). It was a practice focused on oppressed groups and classes as a liberation practice, unlocking the deplorable injustices arising from the politics of knowledge (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991). He highlighted the relevance of ‘empathetic engagement’ understanding participants and researchers as ‘sentipensantes’.<sup>9</sup> The principal aim of PAR was the combination of different knowledges supporting excluded groups or communities through investigative techniques (Rappaport, 2017). According to Rappaport (2017), Fals Borda combined rigorous data collection with the participatory process, inviting the community or group to determine the agenda, and them being the ultimate owners of the research outcomes as a political tool. The process was through a ‘dialogo de saberes’<sup>10</sup>, a communal self-reflection process, combining ‘academic and grassroots notions of research’ (Rappaport, 2017, p.147). Furthermore, Rappaport (2017) states that Vasco Uribe, another contemporary PAR practitioner, thought of the process differently, placing ideas at the core and thinking as a research process. For Uribe, it was not necessary to collect data, systematically analyse it, and give it back to the community. For him the process of thinking together was a counter-hegemonic way of non-academic research.

Although different practices could present different theoretical and practical insights, this group was characterised by a critical perspective of participation, where participants’ enrolment meant ownership of the process from the very beginning to the very end, combining different knowledges. The use of research was seen as an ideological weapon against homogenising trends and the use of practice as a catalyst for the liberation of the communities/individuals oppressed (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991).

In the last thirty years, development studies have made extensive use of this family of participatory approaches, diversifying its implementation; thus, new terminologies came onto the scene<sup>11</sup>, expanding the type of practices applied in each of them (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

---

<sup>8</sup> The literature presents divergences between terminologies, while initially Orlando Fals-Borda referred to the methodology as Participatory Research (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991), posterior publications situate equally Fals-Borda (Thiollent & Colette, 2017) and Swantz (Nyemba & Meyer, 2017) as the creators of Participatory Action Research.

<sup>9</sup> Thinking-feeling individuals

<sup>10</sup> Knowledge dialogue

<sup>11</sup> Southern Participatory Action Research, Participatory Community Development, Rural appraisal, Cooperative enquiry, Participatory Community Research, Community-Based Participatory Research, Tribal participatory

In order to briefly provide a conclusion of the differences between the first group, AR, and the second group of PAR, or PR, several authors support the distinction between the two typologies (Taylor et al., 2004 cited in Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). Scholars claim that AR does not necessarily imply the direct participation in the research process, it focuses on social action and systemic change (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). On the other hand, PAR or any of the other terminologies associated with the second group, possess democratic commitment, epistemic debates, and power struggles. It sees the research process as a means for fighting inequalities and increasing silenced voices (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007) as well as advancing towards inclusion, equity and social justice in the process of knowledge production with full participation (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015). Nevertheless, these ideas are not implemented in all cases or all practices as the last section shall explore; in addition, this family mostly focuses on actions in communities and ‘poor’ environments.

### 2.3.3. INDIGENOUS FAMILY: INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Indigenous research is closely related to PAR practices, however, in this case, these practices focus on indigenous communities and have a strong link with post-colonial theories. Scholars from this area believe that science assumes itself as a universal; an objective representation of reality, legitimising its own politics of truth (Soldatenko, 2015). Thus, there were, and continue to be, many scholars who highlight the contradictions within modernism and its imperial project (Thaman, 2003; Escobar, 2007; De Sousa Santos, 2015, Dussel, 2007; Appiah, 2010; Mbembe, 2015; Diop, 2010). Thaman (2003) states:

Critical reflection on the philosophy of science and liberal education, as well as what passes for “objective” truths, will reveal that our academic education is not culture-free and gender-neutral, nor does it occupy an ideologically neutral high ground because academic, scientific, and liberal beliefs and values, like all beliefs and values, are embedded in a particular cultural curriculum and agenda. (Thaman, 2003, p.6–7).

Therefore, there is a need to include indigenous knowledges and worldviews, as a historically excluded group, and for them to be promoted and recognised (Ninomiya & Pollock, 2016).

In brief, to clarify what they refer to as indigenous knowledges, Semali and Kincheloe claim that:

Indigenous knowledges are understood as the common sense ideas and cultural knowledge of local peoples concerning the everyday realities of living. They encompass the cultural traditions, values, belief systems, and the world views that, in any indigenous society, are imparted to the younger generation by community elders (2002, p.1).

Indigenous knowledges represent those internal processes through which members of the community understand themselves and their surroundings, their beliefs, and history (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002).

Academics using indigenous research support the idea that indigenous knowledges have been delegitimised, invalidated by the structure of academic economy, which is Eurocentric, white, male-centred, colonial, imperialist, heterosexual and Christian. This problematised the

---

Research, Rapid Rural Appraisal, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Participatory Poverty Assessment or Development Research (Greenwood & Levin, 2006; Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007).

understanding of communities from a Eurocentric perspective visualising them as 'romanticised to the point of helpless innocence' (Semali & Kincheloe, 2002, p.22). Therefore, as Dei (2014) states, academia has devaluated the potential and the perspectives of indigenous local knowledge.

Therefore, indigenous research supporters have presented an alternative paradigmatic positionality, which can account for the differences from the 'academics paradigm'. The indigenous paradigm negates the academic assumption that knowledge is created individually and that it is owned by the researcher and the academic community (Wilson, 2008 cited in Chilisa, 2012). The individual possession is not the only contradiction that academic research presents, it equally concerns its means of dissemination or organising research findings for publications. According to Schroeder (2014), this is the norm with academics and it seems to be the 'unique-valid' way of having a voice within academia, which diminishes and contradicts the prevalent 'oral culture in knowing'. Therefore, for this group of scholars, the problem lies in the assumption of a 'unique' valid way from a hegemonic system of disseminating knowledge. For them, knowledge is relational, not only among members, but also understanding those members in a wider natural context (Chilisa, 2012). Consequently, reflection from academics on the way they work with indigenous communities is urgently needed, as their academic methods, methodologies, theories, research questions, and dissemination are misdirecting the production of knowledge.

Thus, due to their concerns with post-colonial studies, they appear to pay attention to decolonisation challenges within academia. For Chilisa (2012) for instance, decolonisation is the process of co-researching through community ontologies and epistemologies, recognising the colonial issue under research and applying its palliative 'recognition' and 'use of otherness'. Therefore, as Smith highlights, it is a matter of decolonising the process of research through deconstructing its own tools, such as interviews, and substituting them for flexible methods or already accepted indigenous methods that are not in contradiction with indigenous cosmovisions and worldviews (Chilisa, 2012). Nnaemeka (2004) sustains that it is within that process that we can start talking about participation and real democracy, when indigenous views, indigenous ontologies in combination with knowledge and values can come to the forefront and be experienced. For Dei (2014), this process starts with the recognition of space, location, knowing 'otherwise' recognising the political, emotional and spiritual connection between knowledge, as she claims, 'Central to indigenous research are concepts of spirituality, spiritual knowing, the interface of body, mind, soul, and spirit, and the nexus of society, culture, and nature' (Dei, 2014, p.52).

Additionally, Hlela (2016) highlights that in the case of Southern Africa, that can be done through the 'discovery and rediscovery of the value of Ubuntu' (Hlela, 2016, p.4–5) in a constant and engaging dialogue. For her it is a question of historical justice and commitment towards their own future. Chilisa (2012) explains how the ethical aspect of indigenous research is of crucial importance for the researcher, as that person is a 'provocateur and transformative healer guided by the four Rs: accountable responsibility, respect, reciprocity, and rights and regulations of the researched, as well as roles and responsibilities of researchers as articulated in ethics guidelines and protocols of the former colonised, indigenous people and the historically oppressed' (Chilisa, 2012, p.7). In this matter, Chilisa (2012) proposes four dimensions for indigenous research, which are summarised in this section, namely:

1. It targets a local phenomenon instead of using extant theory from the West to identify and define a research issue
2. It is context-sensitive and creates locally relevant constructs, methods, and theories derived from local experiences and indigenous knowledge
3. It can be integrative, that is, combining Western and indigenous theories
4. In this most advanced form, its assumptions about what counts as reality, knowledge, and values in research are informed by an indigenous research paradigm. The assumptions in an indigenous paradigm guide the research process

*Figure 4: Four dimensions for indigenous research (Source: Chilisa, 2012, p.13)*

However, as Ninomiya and Pollock (2016) suggest, indigenous research and indigenous researchers face multiple challenges, due to the dominant assumptions and perpetuation of the universal manner of research. One such challenge comes from positioning scholars in compromised situations; for instance, in terms of finding the research issue with the community and not from your academic professional area of research, sharing the space to make decisions about the research process, time constraints, due to efficiency against the engagement with members, or searching for research designs that are appropriate and worthy for the community members. These challenges are not only related to the indigenous family as most of them are equally visible in other critical families of participatory approaches and a better explanation of them is given at the end of this chapter.

To conclude, indigenous methodologies and research processes can be easily linked with PAR practices, however, their focus is slightly different as these practices are centred on indigenous populations while PAR focuses on oppressed populations and communities. For this reason, Schroeder (2014) explains that indigenous research is not the same as PAR, although indigenous practitioners can use PAR as a methodology.

Therefore, it is clear in this family that indigenous research works towards the decolonisation of knowledge by widening the borders of the system, going beyond a Eurocentric-way of knowing caused by the distribution of European modernity as universal (Dei, 2014; Escobar, 2007). Nevertheless, this family focuses on indigenous communities not being able to embrace other groups of individuals, as well as giving primacy to indigenous research processes<sup>12</sup> beyond others as will be explored at the end of this chapter.

#### **2.3.4. EDUCATIONAL FAMILY: EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH**

To conclude with the last area of research, that most relevant for this study, the educational family offers a highly diverse field, which ranges from a more scientific line, close to the European-Western perspective of AR, to a more radical perspective, situating itself close to the borders of what a PAR practice is. Thus, the following sections shall explore the varieties, born of the need to accommodate distinct practices among educational practitioners.

The educational field also nurtured the development of AR within pedagogical lines. In this area, AR is considered a learning process (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002). According to the literature Educational Action Research (EAR) accomplishes a different set of features depending on the

---

<sup>12</sup> I must stress that when I refer to 'giving primacy' I do not consider this feature as absolute but as a priority in this kind of practices. This is to understand that indigenous processes are constantly transforming themselves as they interact with complex realities and cannot be seen as invariable or monolithic.



theoretical background under which is supported. It presents a diversity of practices among practitioners. All these varieties follow different guidelines, placing emphasis on different aspects and actors within the research. For instance, Action Science (AS) was born as an organisational/industrial strategy; however, it has been used to improve practices through collaboration and reflective dialogue among teachers (Argirys et al., 1985; Zuber-Skerrit, Fletcher & Kearny, 2015). Conversely, Classroom Action Research (CAR) is mostly guided by teachers with the help of a professional researcher to explore their own pedagogical practices and improve them (Somekh, 2006; Whitehead, 1991). Therefore, the following sections will examine these categories, in order to provide a better overview of the different practices and applications of Educational Action Research.

#### *A. EDUCATIONAL ACTION RESEARCH AS A BROAD CATEGORY*

As highlighted previously, AR has infiltrated the field of education, conceptualising its own category as Educational Action Research. EAR practitioners believe that AR involves a learning process: 'Action Research is always to do with learning, and learning is to do with education and growth' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p.15). Furthermore, in the last 20 years, there has been an increasing interest in EAR among the different continents. In one hand, across the Americas, Europe, Australia and Africa, and since the 1990s in Asia and Eastern Europe (Noffke & Somekh, 2009), with flourishing academic literature on its application and theorisation (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Elliott, 1991; McKernan, 1991; Stenhouse, 1975; McGrill & Beaty, 1995 among others).

According to the literature, EAR possesses particular aims, such as improving learning, teaching, curriculum and administration within primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015; Altrichter et al., 1991). Moreover, it acts as a link which connects people involved in educational institutions and social movements with the specific target of bringing about social change (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). As Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon state 'they made the global, local and the personal, political' (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013, p.13).

Additionally, Kember (2000, p.30) provides an explicit list of features which characterise the vision of EAR as a broad category, these are:

**Project teams are composed of small groups who share a similar interest or concern. It is also possible for individuals to conduct AR projects within courses they teach.**

**The topic for the project is defined by the participants, to fit within the broad framework of investigating and improving some aspects of their own teaching.**

**Project groups meet regularly to report observations and critique their own practices. This discourse provides for the possibility of perspective transformation.**

**Projects proceed through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. At least two cycles are normally necessary to implement and refine any innovatory practices. The time-scale for the cycles is consistent with the extended period necessary for perspective transformation.**

**Evidence of the effectiveness of teaching practices and their influence on student learning outcomes is gathered using interpretative methods.**

**The evidence gathered can be used to convince departmental colleagues, not originally participating in the project, that they too should change their practices and the curriculum.**

**Lessons learnt from the projects can be disseminated to a wider audience through publications. Participants are, therefore, eligible for rewards through the traditional value system of universities.**

*Table 3: Features of Educational Action Research (Source: Kember, 2000, p.30)*

As can be noted from the above features, in Educational Action Research, the staff involved at educational institutions are the main actors taking part in such practices, promoting their own reflection and learning among their different educational practices. Although nowadays there are varieties which also include students, among academics there is a visible predominance of practices using teachers (secondary, primary), lecturers (tertiary) or university students of education (becoming teachers) (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kember, 2000). For instance, two clear example of the main implication of professionals is visible in Carr and Kemmis (1986) when they state it 'involves [educational] practitioners directly in theorising their own practice and revising their theories self-critically in the light of their practical consequences' (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.198) or Kember (2000) who assigns teachers power over the research process:

The topic is something of interest to the teacher so there is motivation for them to conduct the study. The topic can be some innovation they feel is worth introducing into their teaching. It can be a problem they want to solve or an issue they want to tackle. It can often be a concern that they have been aware of for some time, but which has lain dormant because they were unsure how to tackle it (Kember, 2000, p.24–25).

Nevertheless, as in the family of AR, as stated previously, their use of different practice discourses and traditions over the years have included an extended variety of practices within the educational wing of AR too. Therefore, terms such as Classroom Action Research (CAR), Action Sciences (AS), Pedagogical Action Research (PAR), Action Learning (AL), Participatory Action Learning Action Research (PALAR) and Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) are becoming more and more common within EAR practitioners, implementing their projects in different ways, not only focusing on professional learning. In the following sections, I will explore such terms and varieties mentioned by authors in order to have a more informed perspective of some of the practices applied within education.

### **B. ACTION SCIENCE**

The first type reviewed in this section is Action Science. Action Science has been mostly used in organisations and management sciences, however, its application within educational institutions and educational practices make it relevant for this section (Argyris et al., 1985). To a certain extent, this typology can be situated between the margins of Industrial Action Research and Educational Action Research.

AS was developed by Chris Argyris<sup>13</sup>, a student of Kurt Lewin who also was influenced by the work of John Dewey (Raelin, 1997; Helskog, 2014). In this typology, AS:

Is a strategy for increasing the skills and confidence of individuals in groups to create any kind of organisation and to foster long-term individual and group effectiveness. This

---

<sup>13</sup> However, it can equally be attributed to his colleagues Schon, Putnam and McLain-Smith.

strategy applies to any form of human relations, either organisational, group, or interpersonal contexts where individuals work on challenging tasks together<sup>14</sup>.

For AS the aim is to increase professional effectiveness by helping individuals in small groups<sup>15</sup>, improving practices through collaboration and reflective dialogue (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015). This is an organisational frame to improve practices that build systematically 'between academic organisational psychology and practical problems as they are experienced in organisations' (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013, p.10). Moreover, it pays attention to formal and professional knowledge analysing gaps between theory and practice as a way to create new understanding and produce changes in practices (Dash, 1999). Therefore, this typology possesses a stronger link with initial approaches of AR from Lewin's tradition than other EAR practices, developing a systematic process of reflexivity individually or collectively with an organisational perspective.

### *C. CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH*

Classroom Action Research (CAR) is a practice developed by teachers in their own classrooms analysing their own practices with their students, mostly among primary and secondary education (Somekh, 2006). It usually involves an academic partner who helps the teacher to apply the research, collect data and reflect on how to improve the educational practice (Elliott, 1991). Moreover, it mainly applies qualitative, interpretative modes of enquiry (Whitehead, 1989). It lies in a practical exercise where theory and practice join the displace of 'living theory' or 'living one's educational values' (Dadds, 1995; Goodnough, 2008; Stenhouse, 1975; Wells, 2009). This typology seems to be the most widely used among practitioners in education, however, it has been criticised for not paying attention to the social and political aspects of educational institutions and their practices (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013) as its focus tends to be on professional improvement and teaching efficiency.

### *D. PEDAGOGICAL ACTION RESEARCH*

Norton (2009) proposes Pedagogical Action Research (PeAR) as a different methodology designed to be in an alternative educational context. He states:

I want to consider briefly the history of the action research movement and show how being a practitioner doing action research in higher education is distinct from being a practitioner doing action research in other educational contexts. This is why I have coined the term pedagogical action research (Norton, 2009, p.50).

Norton states that EAR might be of use to primary and secondary levels but not for higher education institutions. That is why he proposes Pedagogical Action Research (PeAR) as a specific typology for the higher education context, due to its significant differences with other educational institutions. Norton highlights that pedagogical 'refers to the principles of learning and teaching that occur at tertiary level' (Norton, 2009, p.59). Therefore, this practice is oriented to lecturers, creating a research process where professionals can systematically investigate their own teaching and learning, while also improving their practice and contributing to academic knowledge (Norton, 2009).

---

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.actionscience.com/acting.htm#basic> [20/06/18 17:59]

<sup>15</sup> For more information see <http://www.actionscience.com/acting.htm#basic> [20/06/18 17:49]

According to Norton (2009) referring to the literature available in the EAR, the purposes of PeAR are:

A training for university academics in systematically analysing their own practice
A training for university academics in systematically analysing their research methods and expertise; an aid to reflective thinking which results in action
A support for professional efficacy
A way of challenging existing beliefs, concepts and theories in the scholarship of teaching and learning
A method of improving the student learning experience and their academic performance
A process that enables university academics to articulate their knowledge about learning and teaching
An approach that enables university academics to understand better the process of teaching and learning
A method of continuing professional development for university academics
A method of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in universities
A method of inducting new professionals
An approach that helps university academics understand how practice is socially constructed and mediated
A process which can ameliorate the theory-practice gap in university learning referred to by Carr and Kemmis (1986) as 'praxis'.

*Table 4: Purposes of Pedagogical Action Research (Source: Norton, 2009, p.59–60)*

Therefore, Norton's approach differs slightly from other EAR typologies, giving particular relevance to the context of higher education. However, his conceptualisation equally supports the idea of PeAR as a practice by educational professionals—university academics—over their pedagogical practices. Thus, it is a type of CAR, but one centred on higher education institutions.

#### *E. ACTION LEARNING*

The next typology is Action Learning (AL), which appeared in organisational contexts as a developmental innovation in the 1960s. This typology, along with Action Science, is situated between the borders of the industrial family and the educational family, however, its importance lies more in it forming the foundational base for its educational successor ALAR/PALAR, which is explored in the following section.

Firstly, the term Action Learning was coined by Reg Revans, an academic professor of natural sciences, who changed to the social discipline, more specifically education, due to his interest in the role of non-experts in problem-solving (Pedler, 2011). He criticised traditional approaches to management as unsuitable for solving problems in organisations (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). The aim of AL is:

[The] improvement of human systems for the benefit of those who depend on them. Action learning is a pragmatic and moral philosophy based on a deeply humanistic view of human potential that commits us, via experiential learning, to address the intractable problems of organisations and societies (Pedler, 2011, p.22).

In Revan's view, the idea underlying AL was to bring people together to learn from each other. For instance, the cultivation of the relationship between workers and their institutions, aimed at harmonising conflicts and generating a positive method of conflict resolution (Dash, 1999). According to Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2013), the focal point of AL in Revan's view, is organisation efficacy and efficiency. Although this focus is visible in his work and posterior

academic publications, Revan also expressed a political commitment with processes of decision-making and organisational resolution of a problem from a bottom-up approach (Revan, 2011).

Revan (2011) created an equation regarding processes of AL ( $L = P + Q$ ), where L symbolises learning, P is programmed knowledge or the content of traditional instruction and Q is the questioning insight, derived from fresh questions and critical reflection. Pedler (2011) explains this equation by stating that Revan understood social problems differently to puzzles, therefore, there was no right solution for social issues, just a compendium of possible choices, and thus Q was essential to induce new lines of thinking, action, and learning. Revan (2011) equally acknowledged that this learning process must be in small groups or 'sets' from the organisation, workplace or community which is involved in the situation under investigation. This space was created to reflect critically on experiences and find a suitable action as an outcome of the shared learning experience (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015).

In the academic literature, AL seems to have a challenge finding its distinctive characteristics with regard to AR. This challenge primarily lies in the absent definition from Revan (Pedler, 2011) and the support of AL as an intrinsic personal/collective experience within AR (Kember, 2000). Therefore, according to Kember (2000), the popularity of AR compared to AL lays in the non-existent literary proliferation, due to the unpublished nature of learning experiences, which are rarely shared among academics. Furthermore, McGill and Beaty (1995) acknowledge that both (AR and AL) share the learning cycle, nevertheless, AL does not necessarily apply a research process, so participants focus on their personal observations and reflections. Also, they highlight that while AR can be implemented by an individual, AL requires the involvement of a group (Kember, 2000). Therefore:

Research is a form of learning which is more systematic and rigorous, and its outcomes are normally made public. The outcome of learning is usually confined to the individual or fellow members of the learning group or class. Extrapolating to action research and action learning implies that action research is always a learning process, but a methodological and rigorous form of action learning in which results are published. All action research projects are, then, action learning projects, but the converse does not hold true (Kember, 2000, p.29–30).

However, according to the international literature reviewed in this study, both typologies are not as different as Kember (2000) and McGill and Beaty (1995) claim. Nowadays, there is not a single general approved understanding of AR, nor is there a generally approved understanding of how to implement 'research' in AR or participatory approaches as a whole. Therefore, as I have stated previously, several interpretations can have features that contradict each other, approving or denying such a differentiation between learning and research. Thus, the ambiguities among the participatory approaches literature can position AL as a rigorous data collection based on participants' experiences—due to considering experiential knowledge as valid—or as a valid and rigorous research process. Furthermore, scholars have already unified both terminologies into a common ground ALAR/PALAR, which is the next category.

#### *F. ACTION LEARNING AND ACTION RESEARCH (ALAR-PALAR)*

ALAR (Action Learning and Action Research) was originally proposed by Zuber-Skerritt (2001) as a practice which combined AL and AR. Nevertheless, in previous publications, Zuber-Skerritt (2011) has reconceptualised the term as PALAR adding P 'participatory' to the original ALAR:



ALAR has been extended to PALAR by adding and integrating the concept of participatory action research, mainly for achieving social justice for all, positive change and sustainable development in disadvantaged communities' (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015, p.114).

Zuber-Skerritt and her colleagues have produced an extensive literature theorising and implementing PALAR (Zuber-Skerritt & Roche, 2004; Zuber-Skerritt, 2011; Kearney & Zuber-Skerritt, 2012; Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013; Kearney, Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013; Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015). They consider PALAR as more than a methodology, stating that it is more a way of living, working and being. It is a way of thinking influenced by values, philosophical assumptions, paradigms of learning, teaching and research (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011). It advocates the 'philosophical and methodological assumptions about learning and knowledge creation' (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015, p.107). PALAR is understood as a 'new vision of AR for professional learning in higher education and beyond' (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015, p.10). They consider that it is not only in an educational context, but also for the individuals excluded from the formal educational systems. Therefore, they acknowledge that as a global community we need alternative epistemologies:

We need to clarify what constitutes, in the widest sense, knowledge (including what is commonly recognised as scientific, conceptual, experiential, intuitive, local, indigenous and cultural knowledge) and learning (including individual, collaborative, professional, organizational, critical and reflective learning). We need to understand how to facilitate the processes of learning and knowledge creation at all levels (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015, p.2).

Therefore, PALAR, or its previous terminology ALAR, pay full attention to professional involvement in education, using participatory practice as a means to reconstitute their private and professional lives without excluding the external actors who do not take part in formal educational systems. This perspective opens up a more flexible and holistic approach to educational practices that have traditionally been influenced by the industrial family and its focus on professional improvement in educational institutions. PALAR gives emphasis to the social context and time where educational institutions are situated as well as advancing some of the critiques proposed by the PAR or IR families.

#### *G. CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH*

The last category, but not the least, is Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR). It shares common characteristics with PALAR practices, due to its related approach to participation and critical commitment to social issues, social change, and social justice. Nevertheless, CPAR was born under a different theoretical frame, with different authors who have developed it further during the last thirty years (Kemmis, 2008).

Carr and Kemmis (1986) conceptualised the term of Emancipatory Action Research (EmAR) during the 1980s. However, this conceptualisation was further theorised by these same academics together with other staff members at Deakin University in Australia, coining the term Critical Participatory Action Research in the 1980s and 1990s. This typology was designed as an academic resource for students and published as "The Action Research Planner" and "The Action Research Reader" in 1988. CPAR emerged from the Deakin academics as a dissatisfaction with CAR, which according to them, did not present a critical point of view regarding the relationship between education and social change (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). They used CPAR as a means

of advancing social justice and participants' emancipation from a critical theoretical perspective. They presented a distinction between Technical, Practical and Critical Action Research, selecting the critical line to determine their methodology (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, 2005; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Kearney, 2015).

Additionally, the theoretical background of CPAR differs from other educational typologies. The group of scholars framed the methodology under Habermas's thinking, which made the theorisation and practices slightly different. CPAR has a strong commitment to participation, a critical approach of social phenomenon trying to highlight disempowerment and injustices brought about by industrial societies (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). It focuses on the revitalisation of the public sphere and the decolonisation of the life-world. It looks for alternatives to recreate *vivencias*<sup>16</sup>, and it deconstructs the social systems usually understanding humans as institutionalised (Kemmis, 2008). The approach provides a more comprehensive human perspective exploring and acknowledging human living. It understands participatory practice as an inclusive instrument not only related to educational institutions and professionals but also as a nexus with other AR collectives, building alliances with social movements (Kemmis, 2008).

In brief, the distinctive feature with other educational approaches is its strong positionality regarding who gets involved in the research project and how, which is also supported by some PAR practitioners (Fals-Bordan & Rahman, 1991). They sustain the idea that participants do not need the explicit intervention of academic practitioners, participants are able to research for themselves due to their 'insider' role and, as insiders, they enjoy advantages when researching their own context (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). Moreover, this practice also challenges, as does PALAR, the traditional practices of EAR, highlighting some of the decolonial issues discussed in the development and indigenous family.

## 2.4. GENERAL CHALLENGES WITHIN THE USE AND PRACTICE OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

Following this comprehensive analysis and review of the four initially proposed families—industrial, development, indigenous and educational—the next section will provide a summary and present the arguments to take this study forwards.

First of all, there are several challenges among the broad family of participatory approaches that need to be mentioned before exploring the limitations of each of these families. One of these complexities lies in the debate regarding the individual or collective practice of participatory approaches. The individual use of participatory practices is referred when a researcher enquires into her/his own practice as an Action Research process. In this individual area of AR, the living theory presents a huge influence on today's practices (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). This practice represents an individual reflection of a professional practitioner about her/his educational influence. On this matter, Adelman (1993) heavily criticised the use of AR as an individual practice, involving Somekh and Schon as the major promoters of the idea. Adelman (1993) considers that it departs from the real understanding of Lewin of AR as a collective democratic process or posterior conceptualisation challenging the individual aspect of academic research

---

<sup>16</sup> *Vivencias*—Spanish for 'lived experiences'.



(Chilisa, 2012). Nevertheless, current academic literature continues to use Action Research as a process that can be developed individually (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Torbet, 1998).

On the other hand, the collective use of participatory practices seems to be the major source of disagreement among scholars. It lies within the diverse interpretation of 'participation' and the levels of enrolment possible among practices (Webb, 1996; Hayward, Simpsons & Wood, 2004; Cornwall, 2003; Vaughn et al., 2016). On this matter, Thiollent and Colette (2017) question the fact that some scholars working in this field attribute little value to active participation. They critique scholars' superficial understanding of participant involvement and poor critical perspectives on what participatory practices aim for and fight against. This links with the abuse or misuse of participatory practices (White, 1996; Higgins, 2016) or the ambiguity in the use of different terminologies (Balakrishnan & Claiborne, 2016). Nevertheless, all of this is summarised well in the following quote:

The term participation has various meanings, forms, types, degrees, and intensity. It is sometimes confused with other terms such as 'collaboration' or 'cooperation'. Moreover, the term is also used rhetorically and in political or ideological discourse. We should note that the term participation or the adjectives 'participant' or 'participatory' are often associated with research or investigation as if it were easy to characterise – yet, in actuality, the research may or may not be participatory (Thiollent & Colette, 2017, p.169).

Therefore, that scholars use this rhetoric does not assume that their practices are participatory in nature, as Thiollent and Colette (2017) claim. Some scholars relate successful practices with their level of participation, and there are a significant number of practitioners who support the full, high participation of the co-researcher as an essential part of participatory approaches (Copabianco, 2007; Rowel et al., 2017; Wick & Reason, 2009 among others). Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent these claims are purely theoretical or have been applied in practice. As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) state:

Participatory research is theoretically situated at the collegiate level<sup>17</sup> [Community full ownership] of participation. Scrutiny of practice reveals that this level is rarely if ever, achieved. Much of what passes as participatory research goes no further than contracting people<sup>18</sup> into projects which are entirely scientist-led, designed and managed [...] In many cases, people participate in a process which lies outside their ultimate control. Researchers continue to set the agendas and take responsibility for analysis and representation of outcomes (1995, p.1669).

Therefore, although there is an extended use of participation in research practices. The use of this and other terminologies might not refer to full participation, but conversely, partial participation.

Secondly, the field of participation faces bigger challenges in academia regarding its credibility; participatory approaches are still not seen as a 'valid' or 'appropriate scientific methodological tool' for some sectors of academia (Thiollent & Colette, 2017). Additionally, there are challenges linked to the distribution and dissemination of participatory research outcomes, due to them being widely considered as vague and insufficient among participatory approaches practitioners

---

<sup>17</sup> Collegiate level involves full participation. The local people have control over the process in a process of mutual learning (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995)

<sup>18</sup> The contractual level of participation refers to when: 'people are contracted into the projects of researchers to take part in their enquiries or experiments' (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p.1669).

(Thiollent & Colette, 2017; Vaughn et al., 2016). Therefore, the result has been crystallised in the limitation of knowledge systematisation and dissemination among practitioners with a lack of freedom for experimentation and knowledge production, and the creation of a scientific brain drain to other fields, known for their more flexible structures, such as non-profit organisations (Tandon et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, these challenges and complexities arise in a research field which accepts the diversity and heterogeneity of practices, despite arising in a scientific space ruled by sterility, division and increasingly excessive order, which endangers the potential of participatory approaches to critique the traditional scientific space. Indeed, what participatory approaches bring to the debate is the nature of science and the philosophical tensions between schools of thought, which is substantial for the reconsideration of colonial issues in the present. Moreover, in this matter, Higgins (2016) acknowledges that participatory approaches have ‘degenerated into a cure that may be worse than the disease’ (2016, p.1), exposing that the very idea that participatory approaches exist is mystifying and distracts from the deep challenges that they present. This is why it is important to explore the diverse terminologies and research areas within participatory approaches, to recount their differences and divergent foundational assumptions, in order to understand their potential for decolonisation and social justice as a whole.

Regardless, all these typologies perform distinctive function and practices, and are validated by their accomplishments under different theoretical frames. This obviously frames participatory approaches under incommensurable margins. However, this can be challenged when we are evaluating these practices according to their contribution towards challenging colonial issues and to promoting social justice in a particular way, as this study does. Therefore, what are the limitations of each of the families explored above? And how can the CA help to resolve some of these tensions and challenges in the promotion of social justice?

## 2.5. LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

Going back to the families analysed in the chapter and bringing into debate some of the limitations highlighted above, this section aims to visualise the limitations of the families presented above as a way of preparing the terrain to introduce the CA as a theoretical ground for a participatory capabilities-based research.

Firstly, the industrial family seems to perpetuate much of the critiques towards the hegemonic system. It understands the AR process as a rational process of thinking rooted in modern rationality. AR focuses on efficiency and social change, in a desirable way for the researcher who is able to identify the issues. It promotes a vision of a community/group of individuals that need help from an expert to change, which is problematic when having a decolonial perspective at the core. Indeed, this pragmatic view limits the potential of such practices to challenge some of the highlighted colonial issues in this introduction. By saying this, I am not limiting or refusing the use of AR in this way but highlighting its internal limitations towards some of the colonial issues under resolve in the process of knowledge production. For instance, it does not consider the multiplicity of knowledge systems (beyond experiential knowledge) or the involvement of participants in all stages of the research process, as participation is mostly limited to a contractual manner. Furthermore, Management theories seem to also be rooted in modern thinking, which is a limited and reductionist way to understand industries, organisations and human relations in Western societies.

Secondly, although there is a critical strand within the educational family, the majority of practices seem to be approached from an industrial perspective and as individual practices. For instance, the extended use of projects that focus on teachers reflecting on how to improve their pedagogies in a class. Again, this practice is not bad per se, as it needs to continue being implemented to achieve its own aims. However, in the way this study is highlighting colonial issues, these types of practices instrumentalise—as do conventional research processes—the participants to achieve a desirable outcome or to better understand a phenomenon in order to change it. Moreover, the educational family, in general, seems to pay little attention to the connection of their institution with the larger society and their role in the resolution and advancement of social justice, as a political and ideological tool from the dominant system (Freire, 1972). Nevertheless, I will elaborate on the CPAR and PALAR typologies under the development family for being situated in the margins between both families.

Thirdly, the indigenous family has a relevant and adequate critique of the Western system and the impact on communities. Nevertheless, this perspective seems at times to be reductionist to ‘indigenous peoples’ neglecting other knowledge systems beyond the indigenous one. This is not the case for all scholars and practices of this group. However, it is most definitely, a widespread perspective among scholars in this group, overlooking the potential to embrace other excluded groups. In addition, the position to rely uniquely on indigenous research processes, methodologies or methods might jeopardise the potential for combining other knowledge systems, as it is aimed at ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015).

Fourthly, the development family initially seems to be the most closely related to a powerful critique of the hegemonic system of domination and epistemic justice. Nevertheless, first of all, it seems to be disconnected from all kinds of pedagogical practice, in which the space of research is a space for learning, being per se trans-disciplinary, beyond ‘poor’ communities. Secondly, the claims acknowledge the need for full participation, which does not mean their actual practices involved communities/individuals as owners of the process, as highlighted in the previous section (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). And thirdly, it is mostly based on theories that might misdirect the potential of the practice towards decolonisation. For instance, the use of complete theories instead of approaches able to accommodate cultural specificities for cultural translation, which is essential in order to provide a more egalitarian epistemic ground (see Chapter Three). This would be the case of Habermas’s theory in practices as CPAR, or other theories related to ALAR/PALAR (Living theory, Critical theory, Experiential learning theory, hope theory or complexity theory), typologies that, although not necessarily in the development family, are situated within the margins of educational and development practices.

Therefore, all these limitations provide a suitable space for the introduction of an alternative frame that, although it has been applied to the educational context in this investigation, does not overlook society at large and can be used both within educational institutions and beyond. For instance, by being applied in communities or collectives that are not related/linked with educational institutions. Moreover, this alternative frame needs to be conceptualised under the colonial critiques of Eurocentric theories in a way to provide an ontological incomplete frame able to accommodate different epistemic systems; this is the Capabilities Approach.

## 2.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter covers an incomplete but exhaustive revision of the literature within participatory approaches. Firstly, classifying four research areas/families (industrial, development, indigenous,

and educational) not as static but as a fluid classification. This structure has contributed to understanding the foundational pillars of various typologies, revealing some of the more relevant categories; and discussing their commonalities and divergences for a better positioning regarding participatory issues and debates.

The final section has explored the main debates and discrepancies among participatory approaches, highlighting issues such as, participation, individual/collective approach or relevance as a way of being and doing and the challenge of validity. However, these debates are summarised reviewing each family of practices and highlighting their limitations towards social justice in a decolonial perspective. Thus, this chapter has been used to lay the groundwork for the introduction of the following chapter exploring the Capabilities Approach as well as its potential to overcome the limitations here highlighted and present a participatory capabilities-based research process.

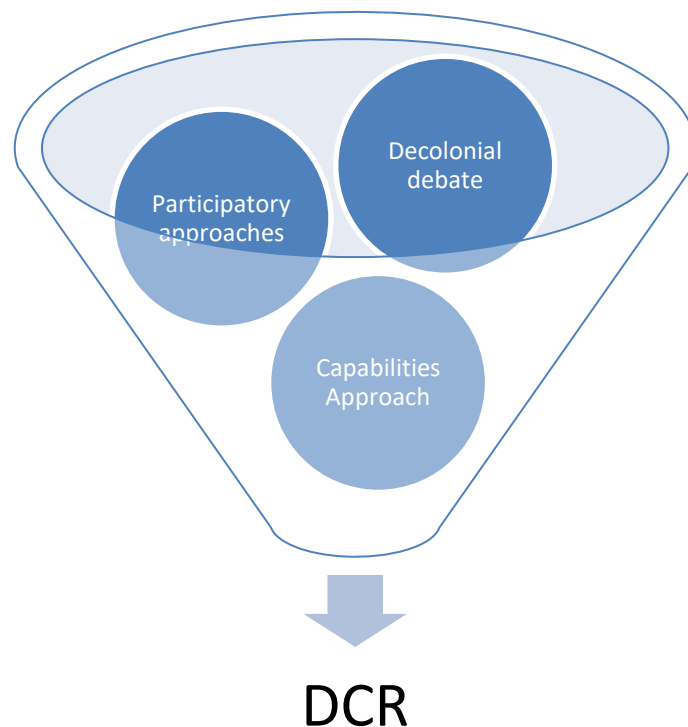
## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to answer the first research question: how can a participatory capabilities-based research project be conceptualised and implemented in the light of the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education, given the academic gap between both fields? To do so, the first section links the literature review in the previous chapter with current tendencies on participatory approaches. This part presents that, despite the diversity of practices and the possible classification in families, there is indeed a dominant discourse based on decolonial ideas towards social justice within the academic field of participatory approaches. This decolonial debate has shaped the rhetoric within diverse families of approaches, and it highlights the special importance of decolonisation and epistemic justice expressed by several scholars (De Sousa Santos, 2015; Dussel, 2007; Maldonado-Torres, 2015; Mignolo, 2007 among others). Thus, to reverse current limitations in the field, as presented in the previous chapter, the Capabilities Approach is important to advance this type of social justice.

After investigating some of the key ideas of the decolonial debate immersed in participatory literature, the second section attempts to understand the similarities and commonalities between the decolonial debate and the Capabilities Approach. It corroborates that the Capabilities Approach is unquestionably an incomplete theoretical space, where much of the decolonial discourses can fit and mutually enrich each other, without becoming dogmatic as previous theoretical perspectives presented in the previous participatory approaches families (see Chapter Two).

However, despite these similarities, and the fact that participatory approaches have been used for years within the capabilities field, this area of research is still underdeveloped and is far from achieving its full potential. Therefore, section four examines the capabilities literature using participatory approaches. It identifies its weaknesses and the academic gap in the field. Thus, the section concludes with the proposal of 'Democratic Capabilities Research', a capabilities-based participatory research, as a way to enrich the field of capabilities and participatory practices in their advancement towards justice.



*Figure 5: Chapter overview linking participatory approaches, the decolonial debate and the Capabilities Approach*

Section five aims to provide a theoretical and practical account of this participatory capabilities-based research. The theoretical space is also presented as a way to understand how participatory practices can be enhanced by the inclusion of the Capabilities Approach as a theoretical ground. The chapter concludes with a section which explores the use of DCR towards social justice, exploring the contributions of the Capabilities Approach towards broadening justice, but equally allowing the space for diverse and plural justices.

### 3.2. CONVERGING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The previous chapter classified four families within participatory approaches (industrial, development, indigenous, and educational). However, despite their foundational differences, their actual claims are related to certain values of togetherness, democracy, inclusion, heterogeneity and social justice, which are strongly represented, mainly by the development and indigenous families with their colonial critique. This discourse is especially visible within the Action Research family, which, despite being part of the industrial strand, nowadays embraces all the typologies displayed previously. To provide some examples, “The Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research” (2017), one of the latest compilations about the diverse practices of AR, claims in its preface:

We believe Action Research has a crucial role to play in the work of creating, an ‘alternative globalisation’ (De Sousa Santos, 2014) that counters the standard view being propagated by those whose interest lies in maintaining the status quo of colonial domination largely by the Global North at the expense of the peoples, cultures, resources, and epistemologies of the Global South (Rowell et al., 2017, p.xii).

Equally, they state ‘[They] represent efforts to push against various forms of colonisation of hearts and minds’ (Rowell et al., 2017, p.xii). These claims show that despite the original divisions,

currently, Action Research practices and participatory approaches practices are influenced by the decolonial debate and, especially, issues of epistemic justice.

In addition, the “The SAGE handbook of Action Research” (2008), another reference for AR practitioners, states:

Most of us educated within the Western paradigm have inherited a broadly ‘Cartesian’ worldview which channels our thinking in significant ways. It tells us the world is made of separate things [...] and it tells us that mind and physical reality are separate [...] This split between humanity and nature, and the abrogation of all mind to humans, is what Weber meant by the disenchantment of the world. As Fals Borda has put it, participation is one way through which we may ‘re-enchant’ our plural world (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.8).

They incisively expose the Western worldview, calling for a shift towards a more plural world. This is especially relevant for many of the decolonisation arguments, which acknowledge the colonial imposition of reason over tradition in modern-Cartesian thinking as a Western creation, and its perpetuation through imperialism. This is why they confirm that:

Action Research without its liberating and emancipatory dimension is a shadow of its full possibility and will be in danger of being co-opted by the status quo (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.5).

So, despite the diversity of practices among the development/indigenous family, from the industrial family, current discourses of AR sustain and support the use of these practices as a way to move towards decolonisation. They claim:

The institutions of normal science and academia, which have created such a monopoly on the knowledge-making process, place a primary value on pure research. [However] [...] The language turn drew our attention to the way knowledge is a social construction (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.5).

The role of epistemic justice, which has been used by several scholars, basing their ideas on those of De Sousa Santos (2015) regarding ‘epistemicide’—the killing of knowledge—is central to this debate. These handbooks focusing on AR expose the invisibility of other knowledge systems that are dominated by the technocratic and objectivist perspective sustained by a hegemonic academic system. Additionally, the same book, in its most recent edition from 2015 (Bradbury, 2015), maintains similar ideas:

While our theoretical groundings are informed by the post-modernist deconstructing of classical theorising, which privileged the objective observer with his ostensibly value-free language and logical deduction/generalisation, we also know that criticism is not enough (Bradbury, 2015, p.3).

In this claim, similar observations are made regarding the objective imposition of the ‘zero point’ (Soldatenko, 2015) stated by some decolonial authors, which represents a viewpoint—in this case, Western—that is incapable of acknowledging its own positionality and its own perception (see Chapter One). Similarly, the following quotes argue that epistemic justice and the Cartesian representation of reality, are monolithic:

When action researchers think of epistemology, we understand the impoverishment of having only the objective voice of conventional social science. We are called to consider



how multiple epistemological voices can be better integrated to serve our inquiry and our co-inquirers' (Bradbury, 2015, p. 4).

Or:

Conventional science, suggests post-Cartesian, objectivist descriptions of the world. Dualism abounds: Knowledge is presumed to be pitted against practice, mind separate from heart, reflection from action, expert from lay person, self from the other, etc. These dualisms—the result of the Cartesian catastrophe—are not mere philosophising' (Bradbury, 2015, p.1).

Comparable ideas are found in the educational family. For instance, in “The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research” (Noffke & Somekh, 2009), although, arguments are not as evident and clear, they identify logics that impede the understanding of education beyond their market profit and expansion. Thus, it is linked to the imperial vision of the decolonial debate, in a universal system which is mediated by market logics (Mignolo, 2007, Dussel, 2007):

This change can be seen as an indication of a move toward a market discourse in which notions of education for the public good are reduced to a focus on individual and sub-group achievement. What students learn in schools is thereby positioned solely in terms of their preparation for a fluid and internationally competitive labour market, rather than in relation to some sense of their participation in building more socially and economically just global societies (Noffke & Somekh, 2009, p.18).

However, more recent versions which are linked to Educational Action Research practices, such as Critical Participatory Action Research, pursue these critiques more eloquently, expressing that this type of Educational Action Research aims to:

Promote decolonisation of lifeworld that has become saturated with bureaucratic discourses, routinised practices and institutionalised forms of social relationships, the characteristic of social systems that see the world only through the prism of organisation, not the human and humane living of social lives (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013, p.12).

It is remarkable that, despite the foundational differences, which are helpful in terms of appreciating divergent traditions, most of the participatory approach families have connections with decolonial issues. In summary, the democratisation of knowledge, epistemic justice, the promotion of a pluriversal world, or justice as a whole, are just examples of the challenges the diverse and extended family of participatory approaches is aiming to achieve in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, their practices are not always oriented to these aims, neither are their theoretical grounds the most appropriate to promote these aims and advance social justice, as presented in Chapter Two.

Therefore, it is necessary to explore how this debate is in conversation with the Capabilities Approach, and how a capabilities participatory practice can be informed by this decolonial perspective to advance current limitations in the field (see Chapter Two). Thus, the following section aims to provide a justification of how the Capabilities Approach is aligned with this discourse, especially on decoloniality and epistemic justice, as a pluriversal vision of social justice, before investigating the use of participatory approaches in the capabilities field and proposing capabilities-based participatory research. The section explores how the Capabilities Approach,

being ontologically incomplete and epistemically diverse, can provide a more adequate foundational ground for the decolonial debate within participatory practices.

### 3.3. CONVERGING CAPABILITIES AND THE DECOLONIAL DEBATE

#### 3.3.1. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

Despite the global influence of human development under positivist perspectives, the foundational formulation of human development, the Capabilities Approach, presents a radical shift in traditional tendencies. While Western intellectual currents opt for aggregation and universal formulas, which match with the modernist and imperialist *modus operandi*, the Capabilities Approach calls for stakeholder engagement (Sen, 1999; Spreafico, 2016). It brings the individual to the fore, with a strong sense of democracy, in terms of diverse voices being heard (Sen, 1999), displacing the technocratic analysis/solution, which is, essentially, universal and represents a unique, single perspective among all those available. Nevertheless, this vision of the CA is not always used towards its grassroots potential, conversely, aggregations and universal lists tend to dominate much of the scholarly work.

Therefore, this section highlights the importance of the Capabilities Approach as a way to balance Western thinking with other epistemic systems, elaborating a theoretical space that is incomplete, and therefore able to accommodate contexts that are essentially different from Western and Eurocentric societies. This theoretical contribution is relevant and necessary in the wake of the previous literature review chapter. Thus, the following sections aim to conclude that, without being dogmatic, the Capabilities Approach sustains an ontologically incomplete positionality able to embrace different perspectives and families within the heterogenic field of participatory approaches, as a way to resolve its limitations. It provides a diversified epistemic space able to accommodate diverse participatory practices towards a decolonial perspective of justice in education and beyond.

Firstly, to elaborate on some of the major elements of the Capabilities Approach, the work of Amartya Sen mainly focuses on outlining an approach that might provide better ways to evaluate human development. Sen (1999) criticises previous theorists, because their evaluative frameworks are incomplete; for instance, exclusively focusing on economic features such as GDP. Thus, he introduces a new way to look at human development that relies on an evaluative space that is determined by the freedoms that people enjoy, a space that is people-centred and multidimensional (Sen, 1999; 2011).

Therefore, freedom is the base of development for Sen, not just as an end, but also as its principal means (Sen, 1999). The development aim is to remove the unfreedoms ‘that leave people with few choices and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency’ (Sen, 1999, p.XII). It refers to the real freedoms that people have to be and to do the things that they have reason to value (Sen, 2011). This is why, if we want to evaluate an individual’s development it will be necessary to pay attention to their effective freedoms/capabilities (Robeyns, 2005; Nussbaum, 2011).

Capabilities are the real opportunities people have to live the life they have reason to value or be the person they want to be (Sen, 1999, 2011; Nussbaum, 2011) and functionings are the beings and doings that can be achieved by their capabilities (Sen, 1999, 2011). Sen criticises approaches which focus on outcomes (functionings) because they have little information about real people’s lives (Sen, 1999), even though they are also necessary to evaluate human development. For instance, the fact that two students succeed at university and both obtain their degrees actually says very little about their experiences during the process. If we consider that one of the students comes from

a middle-class family while the other is from an indigenous community, both may well obtain their degrees, but their experience, the process, is completely different. Therefore, two similar outcomes, in this case obtaining a degree, can differ greatly from the capabilities they enjoy and the process towards achievement. Thus, the process (capabilities, real freedoms) provides important facts to determine someone's well-being in an evaluative/prospective framework of human development.

The Capabilities Approach does not ignore the context where people are positioned and how it affects their choices and preferences. Firstly, it conceptualises three different conversion factors that interact in our opportunities and freedoms by enhancing or constraining them. These are social, personal and environmental conversion factors (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2005). Personal conversion factors refer to those personal features related to the individual's body. Thus, they are physical or mental disabilities, psycho-motor skills or metabolism (Robeyns, 2005). For instance, it is evident that a student with limited mobility will need more resources than a person with no mobility disability, to attend class in a university which has not implemented a plan to remove architectural barriers. Social conversion factors are those linked to our social context; they may be gender practices, social norms, hierarchies and government policies. All of these play a crucial role in the performance of our opportunities. Thus, a person who has been born in a country where democratic values are powerful will have more opportunity to achieve participation in their political sphere than someone who is born in a dictatorship, where opportunities for participation and public reasoning are low. The last of the conversion factors are environmental conversion factors, which refer to public provisions, good climate and infrastructure facilities (Robeyns, 2005). For instance, the installation of lighting on a street can affect the capability of free movement of a woman walking at night in a country where security is an issue. Thus, the Capabilities Approach offers a theoretical space that combines structures and subjects as necessary to understand the available opportunities for an individual.

To provide a graphic representation the figure below presents a static representation of the CA designed by Robeyns (2018),

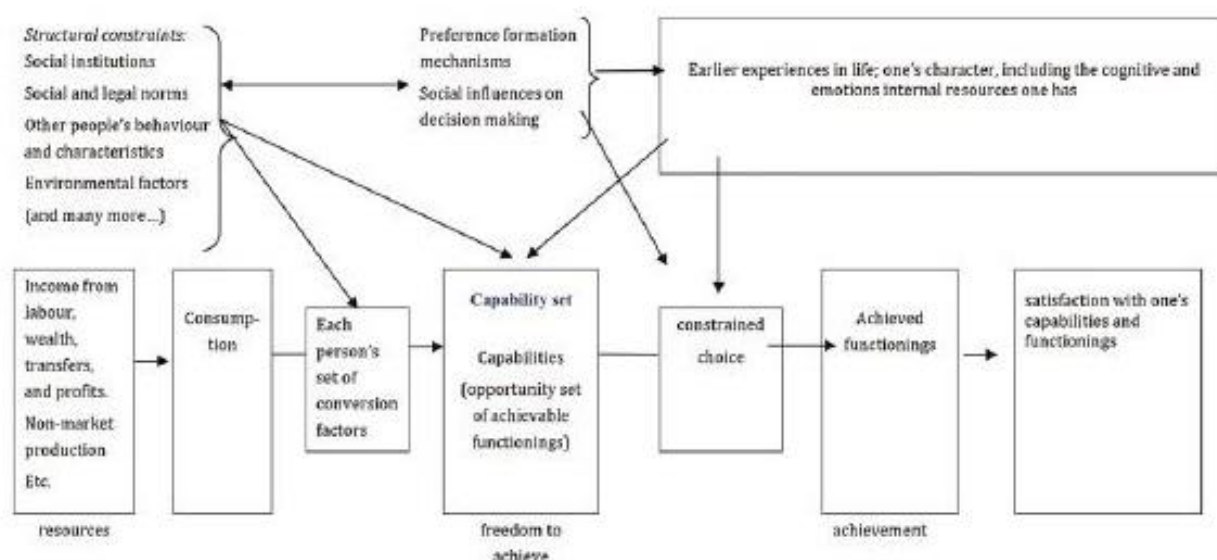


Figure 6: Analytical framework of the Capabilities Approach (Source: Robeyns, 2018, p.83)

Furthermore, the Capabilities Approach is not only a prospective and evaluative frame to assess human development, but, beyond that, it represents an idea of justice. For Sen (2011), it is not

important to look for a perfect society but to identify deplorable situations that leave people with few opportunities to lead their lives and to make them better (Sen, 2011). This idea of justice is equally guided by a strong sense of public scrutiny and democracy, in the sense that it is necessary to provide adequate platforms for public discussions. However, these ideas will be developed in the following sections. Firstly, the text will investigate the commonalities between the Capabilities Approach and the decolonial debate.

### 3.3.2. AN INCOMPLETE THEORY TOWARDS DECOLONISATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The potential of the Capabilities Approach under a decolonial debate and as a contribution to participatory approaches lies in its incompleteness and non-universalist perspective. Frequently, Eurocentric theories tend to orient participatory practices. Nevertheless, this vision of theory as a universal and totalising is deeply rooted in the enlightenment period as part of the Eurocentric-modern project (Mignolo, 2007). This is why scholars have, for several decades, been pointing out that knowledge is contextual and needs to be assessed according to the place and time where it emerges and then be connected globally throughout epistemic systems networks (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

All this has created fruitful debates. It has certainly brought a shift in the way of theorising, especially in the field of social sciences. For instance, Hoffmann and Metz say that ‘theory cannot provide a pre-defined, absolute set of procedures’ (2017, p.2) Thus, flexible approaches are required, ‘incomplete theories’ that can act as a space to translate different cultural assumptions (De Sousa Santos, 2006a). De Sousa Santos (2006a) says:

Knowledge as emancipation does not pretend to build itself as a big theory but as a translation theory that can convert in the epistemological base of the emancipatory practices, being these practices finite, incomplete and thus only sustainable if it is able to be incorporated into networks. (2006a, p.30).

In this incompleteness, the Capabilities Approach, in its more flexible and open perspective presented by Amartya Sen (1999; 2011), is a suitable and appropriate partial theory, being an approach that can be a translation tool to promote decolonisation and recognition of other epistemologies and worldviews. Moreover, it frames participatory practices under a group’s specificities and respects their own cultural frames. This can be done through the Capabilities Approach’s notion of ‘positional objectivity’ (Sen 2004), which recognises the varying views of different actors situated in the social fabric. ‘Positional objectivity is both objective and relative to the position of the observer’ (Bonvin, Laruffa & Rosenstein, 2017, p.7). It challenges positivist views claiming an objective as well as relative position as necessary and substantial.

Indeed, although the terminology is slightly different, the decolonial debate advocates the very same idea. Dussel (2007) assesses that what has to be promoted through a pluriverse is a ‘subjectivity of intersubjectivities’—in the sense of an incomplete positionality that needs a compendium of subjectivities—in the same way that Sen promotes the diversification and inclusion of ‘positional objectivities’. Bonvin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein assess that:

The issue, then, is not to create the conditions allowing people to abstract themselves from their own interest and situations, but also give equal weight to all existing positional objectivities, which requires overcoming the material, symbolic and cognitive barriers identified (Bonvin, Laruffa & Rosenstein, 2017, p.8).

Nevertheless, the democratic potential of the Capabilities Approach is jeopardised when arguing for an universalisation of capabilities, reversing its foundational incompleteness, into a complete theoretical ground, towards a universal theory of justice.

Within the CA, a group of scholars supports the universalisation of capabilities, with the creation of a global capabilities list (Nussbaum, 2011). Without diminishing its relevance and importance in such complex times of injustices and global inequalities, it perhaps simplifies the challenge. This position might impede and lack the agency of the individuals to decide over their relevant capabilities in their own time and context. It might decrease its democratic potential, or freeze the context and time that greatly influences capabilities choices in a constantly changing reality. Sen supports an onto-epistemological incompleteness, which is well described in the following quote:

Pure theory, Sen contends “Cannot freeze” a list of capabilities for all societies for all times to come, irrespective of what the citizens come to understand and value. That would not only be a denial of the reach of democracy, but also a misunderstanding of what a pure theory can do (Hoffman & Metz, 2017, p.2).

Therefore, the potential of the Capabilities Approach as a decolonisation tool lies in its understanding, from an emancipatory perspective, that can embrace the diversity of lives that different people have reason to value in different times and contexts through democratic dialogues among diverse subjective positionalities (Sen, 1999). Thus, avoiding the claim of universalism, inasmuch as the Capabilities Approach is able to locate and provide the space for a pluriverse (see Chapter One). Bonvin, Loruffa, and Rosenstein (2017) endorse that the idea of ‘reason to value’ for Sen transcends the universalistic misrepresentation of rationality from deliberative theorists. The incompleteness of the approach is a way to avoid parochialism, but equally to broaden the notions of rational public debate and democracy beyond their Western understanding.

Another key point to argue regarding the Capabilities Approach and the decolonial debate is its individual focus, the individual person being the final entity to decide which freedoms are important and relevant for her or him. However, in defence of this individualism, which has been conceptualised as an anthropocentric understanding, Robeyns (2005; 2003) has defended it as an ethical or methodological individualism, which differs from an ontological individualism. In the case of the Capabilities Approach ethical individualism situates the person as the moral unit but does not restrict reality to a person’s view, due to the substantial position of democracy and public scrutiny. This debate is especially relevant in its introduction to participatory approaches and ecologies of knowledge, due to the anthropocentric Western perspective of life (Zaffaroni, 2012). First, scholars advocating decolonisation sustain that cultures, like groups, are not homogeneous (Dussel, 2007). They claim the need to understand the individualities that compose a particular group (Dussel, 2007, De Sousa Santos, 2010; Mignolo, 2007), which the Capabilities Approach is able to capture. And secondly, the ‘anthropocentric fear’ within the Capabilities Approach is unjustified, when the approach is flexible enough to transcend the individual as the unique capabilities-deserving entity if collectives consider doing so. An example could be to provide animals or plants with capabilities, which is already an ongoing debate in the capabilities literature (Nussbaum, 2017).

On the other hand, capabilities can be defended as being aligned with decolonial ideas, due to the concept of ‘diatopical hermeneutic’ (See below) defended by De Sousa Santos (2006b). However, it is difficult to understand diatopical hermeneutic without the concept of the ecology of knowledges. Ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2006a; 2015), as explored in Chapter One,

is of particular relevance, in terms of making the wide representation of different epistemologies effective (see Chapter One) due to the aftermaths and consequences of the colonial/modern universalisation through an imperialist globalised system (Dussel, 2007). De Sousa Santos (2006a, 2006b, 2010, 2015) proposes a theoretical, and partly practical, sociology of absences. This sociology is composed of four different ecologies under an incomplete ontological position, which is not limited to what can be seen and experienced (De Sousa Santos, 2006a). With this sociology, the author seeks to visualise the multiple realities and practices that have been discredited under the global hegemonic frame. Therefore, to bring about the ecology of knowledges, it is necessary to make use of what Santos (2006a, 2015) has called ‘Diatopical hermeneutic’, which is the practice of dialogue where different knowledges can be translated into a comprehensible space for others. It is partly a theory of translation which makes cultures understandable to each another. The role of diatopical hermeneutic is not only to translate cultures but also to look for ‘isomorphic’ issues and their different responses to it. It provides the assumption that all cultures are incomplete and relative<sup>19</sup>, therefore, all of them can gain from being in translation with each other (De Sousa Santos, 2010b). Sen equally sustains this idea, when he claims democracy as the inclusion of as many positional objectivities as possible (Bovin, Laruffa & Rosenstein, 2017). In this case, capabilities can be used as part of a diatopical hermeneutic, providing the space to translate between different cultures, diverse ways of human flourishing, and diverse ways of human development. Capabilities can look for isomorphic elements among diverse cultures, and act as a link for them to understand each other in a space of democratic dialogue (see Chapter Six).

All this situates the Capabilities Approach in a similar perspective towards justice, while the decolonial debate calls for the removal of historical injustice through the conservation and promotion of diversity in the world, throughout the pluriverse project (see Chapter One). The Capabilities Approach fosters the expansion of freedoms that people need to lead different lives, not only in terms of basic resources but, beyond this, the mere consideration of open spaces for diverse individual valuable lives (Sen, 2011).

Thus, to conclude, the table below summarises the different elements discussed in this section, detailing the commonalities between the Capabilities Approach and the decolonial debate.

	Decolonial Debate	Capabilities Approach
<b>Theoretical space</b>	(Non-universalism) Partial theory: Ontologically incomplete and epistemologically diverse.	Incomplete theory - Approach: As a cultural translation theory. Ontologically open and able to accommodate epistemic diversity.
<b>Voices</b>	Subjectivities of intersubjectivities.	Positional objectivities.
<b>Individualism/ Anthropocentrism</b>	Pay attention to individuals that compose groups, but equally oppressed groups and entities that are beyond humans (Beyond anthropocentrism).	Moral individualism. Flexible enough to reconsider humans as the only capabilities deserving entities.
<b>Democracy</b>	Non Western-institutionalised. democracy, participation as central	Acknowledge the western appropriation and imposition of democratic institutions. Consider democracy in a broad sense, such as including voices from different positionalities.
<b>Diversity</b>	Universe to be transformed into a pluriverse, which highlights and promotes diverse knowledges and	Development as the expansion of freedoms that different individuals have reason to value (Doings and beings). Promoting

<sup>19</sup> Relative does not claim for a philosophical posture of cultural relativism. De Sousa Santos himself states that cultural relativism is an erroneous positionality, the same as cultural universalism (De Sousa Santos, 2010b)



	cosmovisions. Allows individuals to live out of the mono-culture. Promotion of ecology of knowledges.	different lives that individuals have reason to value.
<b>Units for cultural translation</b>	Diatopic hermeneutic.	Capabilities.
<b>Justice</b>	Onto-epistemological justice, removing hegemonic structures that do not allow diverse people to lead different lives and recognise diverse knowledges.	Removal of unfreedoms and promotion of the different lives diverse individuals have reason to value. Pay attention to processes and outcomes.

*Table 5: Converging the decolonial debate and the Capabilities Approach*

Therefore, in this section, I have argued that the Capabilities Approach is aligned and congruent with the decolonial debate. Firstly, it presents an open-ended onto-epistemological position able to embrace a diversity of perspectives. This is framed in an approach that is an incomplete theoretical ground towards decolonisation. This position does not acquire a radical positionality, as has happened with some of the decolonial perspectives. It does not deny the richness of the European tradition or the relevance of Western knowledge, but positions it in an equalitarian place with other traditions, displacing its superiority. Secondly, democracy is approached broadly, including many voices in a horizontal dialogue. This is especially relevant with the use of participatory approaches that include processes of knowledge production much more than a classified and reduced group of individuals selected by an institution in a hierarchic system. It not only represents the inclusion of diverse voices, but also the representation and validation of other knowledge systems and cosmovisions to enhance our democratic space. Thirdly, the ecology of knowledges is compatible with the Capabilities Approach as the approach is able to value other lives that different individuals have reason to value, and therefore, other knowledge systems. The section has claimed that capabilities can be used as a multi-cultural translation tool, helping to look for isomorphic elements in different cultures. This does not mean unifying them, but looking within the cultural specificities for elements that are not the same, but that retain symbolic similarities. The section concluded that both the Capabilities Approach and the decolonial debate sustain the preservation of our global diversity as a way to achieve social justice, claiming that the issue is not only related to resources inequalities, but historical structures of oppression, hindering people from living the lives that they, diverse individuals, have reason to value in different places and times (Sen, 1999).

### 3.4. EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES WITHIN THE CAPABILITIES LITERATURE

Having looked at how the Capabilities Approach bares similar position on the various ways of knowing, knowledge and research outcomes, and before exposing the potentialities of the Capabilities Approach compatible with participatory approaches, the following section attempts to situate the literature within capabilities using participatory approaches. The text explores bringing back challenges and gaps from Chapter Two before proceeding with the capability proposal of a participatory research project.

Participatory approaches are of interest in the area of human development and the Capabilities Approach. Despite being a recent practice, more scholars are becoming interested in the combination of both areas, due to the participatory nature of the Capabilities Approach and the centrality of public scrutiny and democracy.

Some scholars, mostly from development studies, have explored theoretical debates between participatory approaches and the Capabilities Approach (Biggeri & Anich, 2009; Duraiappah et



al., 2005; Frediani, 2006; Frediani, 2007; Fedriani, 2010; Mink, 2016; Negrini, 2009; Pellisery & Bergh, 2007; Robeyns, 2006), and others have used participatory methods and methodologies in educational studies (Boni & Millan, 2015; Boni & Walker, 2016; Fertig, 2012; Heather, 2014; Lizzio & Wilson, 2004; Ley, 2013; Vanderkinderen & Rose, 2014) or community projects (Conradie, 2013a; Conradie, 2013b; Conradie & Robeyns, 2013; Lavelle-Wijohn, 2017; Mazigo, 2017), in addition to the application in environmental projects (Simpson, 2018; Simpson & Basta, 2018) or children's projects (Del Moral-Espin, Perez-Garcia & Galvez-Munoz, 2017), among others. There is also a network group within the HDCA association in participatory methods<sup>20</sup>.

However, the literature explored notes that there are three main challenges and a clear gap in the publications linking the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches. In general, there is very limited literature about the interrelation of participatory approaches and the Capabilities Approach, which is especially deficient in the educational and decolonial areas of research. The literature mostly focuses on development studies and the application of participatory methods; the use of participatory methodologies is residual, almost non-existent. And, finally, there seems to be a diversity of terminologies being used among the community of scholars using participatory practices—Action Research, Participatory Action Research or Indigenous research—but despite the flourishing of new terminologies in the field of participatory approaches, this community has not agreed or attempted to understand or conceptualise their practices under a participatory practice which is informed and implemented under the Capabilities Approach.

Therefore, in response to the previous challenges highlighted in Chapter Two and the academic gap, a research process named 'Democratic Capabilities Research' (DCR) is proposed, which might serve a specific group of scholars interested in participatory approaches and capabilities. This tool is deliberately incomplete (Sen, 1999) so it can be adapted to different research fields and contexts under debates of decoloniality and epistemic justice. Equally, it embraces the commonalities between the diverse participatory families previously displayed, contributing to the extended family of participatory approaches with a more appropriate theoretical frame that goes beyond totalising theories and Western frames, as a way to understand justice broadly.

To explore more deeply the constitutive elements of Democratic Capabilities Research and to answer the question why these elements—'Democratic' and 'Capabilities'—are chosen, and not others, the following section will highlight each of them under a capabilities lens, linking them with decolonial and participatory debates, highlighting the theoretical and practical advantages of using this incomplete theoretical ground.

### 3.5. INTRODUCING A CAPABILITIES-BASED RESEARCH PROCESS

#### 3.5.1. DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITIES RESEARCH: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To understand DCR as a practice, firstly, it seems relevant to clarify the main elements of the Capabilities Approach within this proposed participatory research. DCR arises from two main terminologies within the Capabilities Approach 'Democracy' and 'Capabilities'.

Sen (2011) clearly states in his preface to "The Idea of Justice":

Democracy is assessed in terms of public reasoning, which leads to an understanding of democracy as 'government by discussion'. But democracy must also be seen more generally in terms of the capacity to enrich reasoned engagement through enhancing

---

<sup>20</sup> For more information see [https://hd-ca.org/thematic\\_group/participatory-methods](https://hd-ca.org/thematic_group/participatory-methods) [21.06.18 14:47]

informational availability and the feasibility of interactive discussions. Democracy has to be judged not just by the institutions that formally exist but by the extent to which different voices from diverse sections of the people can actually be heard (2011, p. XII-XIII).

In this introduction, Sen (2011) not only provides a different perspective of democracy regarding the extended representative democratic system (Isakham & Stockwell, 2011; Bonvin, Laruffa & Rosenstein, 2017) but equally dismantles the Eurocentric creation and appropriation of democracy. Sen (2011) highlights the erroneous dilemmas between groups which argue for the imposition of democracy in non-Western territories and groups which argue against a Western-centric imposition of democracy. By framing democracy as public reasoning, it is much more than a Western creation, it represents elements found in different civilisations and times across history (Sen, 2011). Therefore, if democracy is the platform for public discussion by individuals, not exclusively powerful and well-established institutions, these discussions should embrace all the dimensions and cosmovisions prevailing in the world beyond regional and institutionalised logics, promoting an alternative way to advance an inclusive system of progress. Bonvin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein (2017) clarify Sen's notion of democracy, stating that:

The normative implication is that democratic processes should include as many positional objectivities as possible. Indeed, the more such viewpoints are included and considered, the more collective decisions will be objectively informed. In this perspective, effective democratic participation is justified on epistemological grounds, as a prerequisite to reach informed decisions. It is not based simply on the normative superiority of collective discussion or public debate over unilateral imposition, but on the epistemological necessity to include all relevant information into the collective decision-making processes (Bovin, Laruffa & Rosenstein, 2017, p.8).

Therefore, the Capabilities Approach is suitable as an incomplete theoretical frame, which is able to promote a heterogeneous epistemic ground, where it is no longer only one valid type of knowledge, but the promotion of a democratic dimension, which needs to be composed of different voices. As Bovin, Laruffa, and Rosenstein (2017) state:

The Capabilities Approach calls for re-politicising the production of knowledge – in contrast to contemporary tendencies that reduce the process of policy formulation to a technical matter based on scientific evidence (2017, p.11).

Thus, a participatory research project like DCR must include a conceptualisation of democracy, such as the one above, understanding the need to promote the diversification of voices and the enhancement of inclusivity within processes of knowledge creation.

On the other hand, Capabilities are the real freedoms that a person enjoys (Sen, 1999). They are 'the substantive freedoms he or she enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value' (Sen, 1999, p.87). Thus, capabilities represent all those freedoms to do and to become the person that different individuals want to be, but equally be able to lead their lives in the way they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Furthermore, to live under a different cosmovision or to be able to value one's own knowledge system. Therefore, capabilities are an incomplete-suitable unity of analysis, able to embrace a diversity of ways of living and knowing.

### 3.5.2. REINFORCING PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES: CONTRIBUTIONS OF A CAPABILITIES-BASED PERSPECTIVE

Despite the two main elements of the Capabilities Approach composing this DCR practice informed by decolonial issues, there is also a need to explore the contribution of this incomplete framework to participatory approaches.

Summarising, the decolonial debate calls for more inclusive ways of knowledge production, and more flexible epistemic frames. The use of participatory research is a way to overcome the Western situated boundaries within higher education institutions. However, these practices are at times pervasively used to mimic the colonial logics they condemn (see Chapter Two). On the other hand, the Capabilities Approach can be a useful and a suitable theoretical frame to understand the implications of Western traditions in our practice as participatory practitioners better than other theoretical grounds. Thus, in doing so, we are not only reinforcing the theoretical ground of participatory practices and reversing some of the actual limitations in terms of fighting colonial issues towards justice, but providing a common ground in which critical families of participatory approaches can be gathered.

In the following sections, the text focuses on a perspective of participatory approaches. It highlights how a participatory practice can be enriched using a capabilities perspective, but equally strengthen some of the areas that are not as consistent and reliable within participatory approaches, such as participation (see Chapter Two).

#### *A. WHY DEMOCRATIC AND NOT PARTICIPATORY?*

Participation or participatory is a word commonly used by participatory approaches practitioners, even though its meaning can differ greatly from one to another, as explored in the previous chapter (Santos, 2015; Hayward, Simpson & Wood, 2004; Webb, 1996; Frediani, 2015). These divergent positions to understand 'participation' represent an intricate theoretical space, perhaps nowadays overused and overestimated, for the fact of providing more or less space for an individual's participation. Sen (1999, 2011) states that individuals might participate in national elections voting once every four years, but this does not mean democracy in a broad sense. It can be said that participation is one necessary component for democracy, but is not democracy in itself, in a broad sense, as the Capabilities Approach presents it. Therefore, do we want to create participatory spaces of knowledge production? Or democratic spaces of knowledge production?

The term 'democracy', under a capabilities perspective, focuses on the micro-politics of everyday life acting according to what we want to do and to be under a critical reasoning, taking conscious decisions over our political affairs and expressing them through our aware agency (Sen, 1999). In this endeavour, public interaction through dialogue is a necessary precondition, being able to accommodate as many perspectives (positional objectivities) as possible (Sen, 1999). This is especially substantial, whether we approach participation in knowledge production in our own traditional frames, or whether we offer space for more democratic spaces of knowledge creation, beyond simple participation. Democracy represents a step further than participation. When individuals share a democratic space, members of the group are more than participating in something. They are creating a new intellectual space which did not exist before getting together. They are raising their voices in different ways and forms. Thus, democracy understood under a capabilities frame provides a more comprehensive concept, able to evaluate its adequacy according to the voices being heard (positional objectivities) under public scrutiny, which is aligned with the promotion of ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015).

In conclusion, the concept contributes to avoiding current ambiguities in the use of participation (see Chapter Two), broadening its meaning from an instrumental idea to a communal dialogue and decision-making understanding. Participation is a component of democracy, thus democracy embraces a more solid and accurate ethical meaning under the Capabilities Approach. It is not enough merely to involve individuals in the process; it is a much-needed step forward to reverse the structures of power over the spaces of knowledge creation, returning the democratic elements in terms of ecologies of knowledge and democratisation of knowledge. It is not only about participation, but about more inclusive democratic networks, able to connect with, particularly, the voiceless beyond our individual academic endeavour of research.

### *B. WHY CAPABILITIES AND NOT ACTION?*

Equally, in participatory approaches and due to the dominant logics and practices of production and efficiency, most participatory projects—especially those focused on AR practices—are expected to have a tangible outcome which impacts the context and/or participants in different ways, as in the way the participatory industrial family framed their practices and continue influencing them. For instance, behavioural changes in a community. This vision can diminish a more comprehensive perspective of such practices, reducing the focus to a part of the whole; the change towards what the researcher is aiming to transform in a particular community. Furthermore, what about the individual impact on research members? And the impact on the lives they, as individuals, have reason to value?

This is well illustrated by the Capabilities Approach, as in the example previously displayed. If we pay attention to, for instance, educational outcomes in terms of a qualification certificate, we miss the inequalities in the process of achievement, the freedoms that different individuals had to reach the outcome. Within participatory practices, we can state the same, due to their pedagogical relevance. What about the freedoms that diverse individuals enjoy and/or enhance during a participatory practice? In addition, which capabilities are valuable for those individuals, and is the process able to expand them or not? This question shifts our attention from a concrete collective action expected by the researcher, as in traditional participatory projects, to an impact on the lives the participants have reason to value.

Therefore, when individuals are implementing participatory research projects, it is necessary to pay attention to the valuable capabilities of the participants, the potential choices the process enhances, and equally the functioning, the research outcomes in a tangible way for the individuals involved. To explicitly illustrate this debate, DCR switches ‘Action’ to ‘Capabilities’<sup>21</sup>, providing an alternative view to explore collaborative research, which not only pays attention to the tangible outcomes desired by the researcher but to the individual’s valued freedoms, the process is able to expand in its participants.

In conclusion, the Capabilities Approach as a framework can greatly contribute to the theorisation and implementation of participatory practices. It provides an incomplete framework able to accommodate the challenges that participatory approaches need to face in the twenty first century under an increasingly complex landscape (see Chapter One and Two). To do so, it redirects the knowledge creation process to the individuals’ valuable lives, providing the appropriate platform

---

<sup>21</sup> Capabilities are the real freedoms people have to be and to do the things they have reason to value, what people is able to do and to be (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2018)

to enhance their valuable capabilities. It sustains a democratic space in which to share and sustain valuable knowledges to lead the lives individuals involved have reason to value.

### 3.5.3. DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITIES RESEARCH: PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

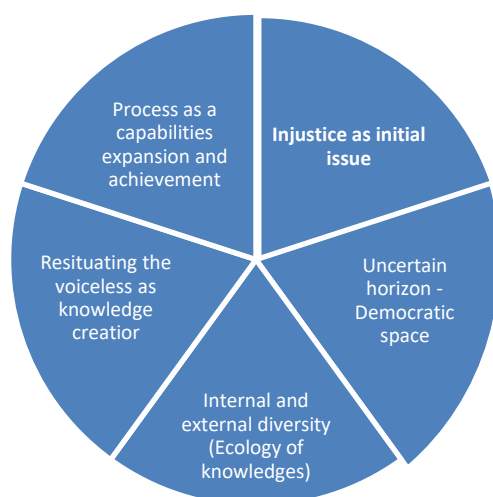
The following section justifies some of the foundational elements of this proposed DCR process, clarifying the challenges, when theoretical implications are brought down to earth, into real practices. Thus, Democratic Capabilities Research is here presented as a practical insight to achieve its epistemic pretensions imperfectly. It is needed to recognise the incompleteness of the tool and to add it to the current compendium of artefacts being used towards justice under a particular understanding. Democratic Capabilities Research presents a participative research process as a pedagogical space, which is flexible enough to embrace different worldviews and knowledges through a critical analysis of valuable freedoms of the team members. Equally, it cannot be considered as a method, which follows one, two or three specific steps. It is a tool, which needs to be reconsidered in each context although it can provide guidance for its implementation, through its principal dimensions and its foundational principles.

In the following paragraphs, some of the practical implications of DCR are highlighted. These key points are in process of creation, and therefore, not complete nor universal for all DCR processes. As said before, the DCR project is only possible within wide networks of individuals connected to improve or create otherwise. These steps are informed by the decolonial debate and capabilities principles and they have been accommodated into a coherent DCR frame.

Thus, according to this initial conceptualisation of the practice, there are five original DCR foundational principles generated for this project. (1) Injustice as an initial issue: Injustice/s should be the foundational issue/s, which means that ‘injustice’ is not framed by the ‘facilitator’, but embraces a multiplicity of understandings of injustices according to the members involved. (2) Internal and external epistemic diversity<sup>22</sup> (ecology of knowledges): In the sense of the promotion of the ecology of knowledges throughout the research process. (3) The voiceless as knowledge creators: DCR is a space of knowledge creation for the excluded. The participants involved represent collectives excluded from ‘validated knowledge production processes’, which does not mean that they do not create knowledge in their own frames or use validated sources of knowledge. (4) Uncertain horizon: This involves flexibility. In the sense that DCR is not a business intervention, nor a sterile intervention. Therefore, it is desirable to promote and conserve an ‘uncertain horizon’ able to transform what comes next through the constant democratic dialogue and decision-making of the research group. This approach seems especially difficult in scientific contexts, which are flooded with endless bureaucracy, efficiency drives, and results-orientated projects. These issues underscore the urgency and imperative need for the approach. (5) DCR as a platform to expand/achieve the participant’s capabilities: Capabilities expansion and achievement is put under a critical lens; the process should collectively investigate and promote the achievement of the capabilities that are valuable for the members during the research project. This achievement cannot be evaluated with an external checklist, but through an individual exploration of the valued capabilities by the members of the group with the participation of the facilitator, orienting the practice towards the identified valued capabilities, as well as assessing the process by evaluating the extent to which these capabilities have been expanded and achieved. Furthermore, these broad principles might guide other projects with similar values and aspirations.

---

<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Eight for more information



*Figure 7: Principles of DCR*

The beginning of DCR should start with a sense of injustice, perceived by a group of individuals—organised or not—who are excluded from legitimate knowledge creation processes. Thus, it is clear that the perceived injustices should be identified and analysed by the group, and not by the researcher. DCR should be able to be applied in different contexts and times, in the Global North, in the Global South, in communities or educational institutions, in NGO's or local associations, transcending the actual divisions among participatory practices. There is no limit of application, apart from the need to be aware of rightly adapting the tool to the specificities of the spaces where it is being applied.

The research process should embrace and recognise a diversity of cosmovisions and different epistemic systems, as much as possible—as it is understood that some spaces are better prepared or more flexible to embrace such differences. When epistemic diversity cannot be promoted internally, the facilitator has a responsibility to increase external networks as a way to foster ecology of knowledges (see Chapter Eight). That means a strong connectivity externally with different knowledge systems. During the research process, a democratic space for communicative spaces that are loyal to the participants 'frames of reference' (Chilisa, 2011, p.14) should be promoted. All of this should be coherent in practice and theory during the whole process, including the outcome of the research.

DCR is intrinsically agency-centred, that means that group members maintain the ownership of the research process from the very beginning until the end. They are responsible for leading all the stages of the research together and with the collaboration of a facilitator. The facilitator has the task of identifying substantial capabilities of the participants in an early stage of the process, in order to orient the process towards those valued capabilities; equally, the facilitator is responsible for the promotion of different knowledge systems among the group, to ensure internal and/or external diversity (Ecology of knowledges).

DCR does not represent a linear approach to research, neither does it constrain its 'partial phases' into time frames. Spaces are complex and, therefore—in a DCR practice—a few phases can be implemented at the same time, some stages can be repeated at various points in the research, and so on. DCR not only represents an approach to research, it is a frame to understand a research



process in itself. DCR is not separate from the daily life of the members; life and DCR are in constant conversation as a space of questioning and reflection. Therefore, DCR goes beyond a conventional research process, it offers the way of co-constructing sense together, co-building reality and co-creating pluriversal knowledge imperfectly towards social justice.

### 3.6. DCR: BROADENING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Therefore, to conclude this chapter, the last section focuses on how the Capabilities Approach might provide a better frame to not only understand justice, but also establish a better theoretical space to conceptualise capabilities based-participatory research, such as DCR, towards socially just higher education.

Social justice seems to be as ambiguous as the term ‘participatory’, perhaps even more so. (Buchanan & Mathieu, 1986). Equally, it is a term whose definition has historically been ascribed to the few elites able to influence its understanding (Capeheart & Milovaoic, 2007). Moreover, it has ended up as a highly contested idea that differs according to individuals, place, and time mostly sustained under an agonistic perspective<sup>23</sup>. For instance, by classifying situations as dichotomous; they are either just or they are unjust. Conversely, Sen (2011) claims that there is a need to identify unfair situations through an evaluative framework in order to take action against them. However, this identification is not based on a dichotomous frame, but as a continuum, where situations can be assessed as more or less just according to the individual capabilities evaluation. Moreover, Sen (2011) addresses questions such as how to enhance justice or remove injustices rather than to resolve the question of what justice is, or how a perfectly just society would look. The use of capabilities as a way to assess individuals and detect shortfalls is a sufficient way to promote an open-ended version of justice, which does not aim to build itself as a complete theory of justice. It is not a question of building a justice theory but allowing partial justices to understand one another in a plural world.

In addition, to go beyond a transcendental institutionalism is what the Capabilities Approach contributes to the debates on justice. The Capabilities Approach connects justice ‘with the way people’s lives go, and not merely with the nature of the institutions surrounding them’ (Sen, 2011, p.x). As Drydyk (2012) corroborates, ‘Acting justly, according to a capability approach, aims not merely for people to rise above capability deprivation, but to do it through processes that are empowering for them, so that they have become better able to shape their own lives’ (Drydyk, 2012, p.32). These implications are far-reaching for participatory approaches. The introduction of a capabilities-based participatory research not only pays attention to the diverse lives the members have reason to value, but equally uses the processes as a catalyst of a member’s agency. Added to this is the possibility to provide an evaluative space able to accommodate the specificities required by diverse contexts and times in the direction of justice, this being considered not as a perfect achievement, but as a continuum.

DCR, therefore, is here proposed as a contribution from the capabilities field to participatory approaches. Presenting an incomplete frame in which to situate collaborative research processes that not only aim to produce knowledge more democratically but, beyond that, aim for the use of the process as a capabilities expansion towards justice. That implies the recognition of the valuable lives diverse individuals have reason to value, and promotion of these lives through processes of knowledge creation, in an empowering experience. It implies the recognition of other knowledge

---

<sup>23</sup> For instance, by dichotomising justice as two ends that are irreconcilable, being either just or unjust and not considering the middle terms and different positionalities in between both points.



systems and its introduction to our knowledge creation processes. And finally, it implies the recognition of a democratic space able to accommodate our global diversity in a communal intellectual and decision-making process. In conclusion, DCR is a way to promote an incomplete vision towards more just participatory practices, which, although not perfect, are headed in the direction of a less imperfect world.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Having reviewed the literature on participatory approaches and explored the theoretical framework under which this DCR research process has been formulated, the last chapter of Section One explores the decisions involved in the research design together with their justifications. Therefore, the research design in this study has been addressed through a case study on a DCR project. Nevertheless, this chapter shall first engage in methodological debates about the two interlocking research projects that are part of this study, explaining why they are together yet separate: Research Project A, which represents the open-ended participatory project under the name DCR; and Research Project B, that refers to my own individual research of a DCR experience with undergraduate students as a case study. Firstly, I highlight the complexities involved in a participatory thesis, especially the ethical questions that arose at the time regarding involving participants as researchers. I settled my concerns by making a final division, as stated previously, into two separate research projects: an individual one (Project B), to accredit my doctoral qualification; and a participatory one (Project A), so as not to compromise the full participation of the team members as researchers. I clarify that this is not only an ethical question, but also represents a different ontological and epistemological positionality. To do so, two paradigms are used to describe the differences and define the divergences between project A and B.

The second part of the chapter focuses on my individual research (Project B) presenting my methodological decisions under a qualitative case study to address the research questions of this study. I debate the potentialities of using a qualitative case study to explore capabilities among the participants enrolled in a DCR project, as well as the challenges and opportunities from the project. Moreover, I describe the methods used for data collection (interviews, journals, and participant observation) and the analysis procedures undertaken to answer the research questions. Towards the end of the chapter, special attention is paid to ethical considerations, rigour, and validity as they are key elements in this thesis as a whole.

### 4.2. COMBINING RESEARCH PROJECTS: INDIVIDUAL (PROJECT B) AND COLLECTIVE ENQUIRY (PROJECT A)

Various scholars have noted that academic research tends to offer constrained choices because of set standards that are static and rigid (Smith, 2013). These standards are often presented as pre-accredited choices that are displayed as a range of final products suitable for achieving one's set research questions. However, methodological choices involve much more than a pre-accreditation procedure made by a specific discipline; they are, indeed, a representation of one's philosophical assumptions within a particular field of research. For this reason, the following sections will highlight the tensions and challenges when using participatory practices within a doctoral study, as well as various paradigmatic foundations to justify the proposed division into two projects (Project A and Project B).

#### 4.2.1. PhD AND PARTICIPATORY THESES: CHALLENGES AND COMPLEXITIES

The research project on which this thesis is based was originally framed in the form of a participatory research project. Nevertheless, various challenges arose in the process of designing and implementing the entire participatory research project as a thesis. The first challenge relates to

the linear research process that a thesis requires and the standard of judgment for a PhD. This is an obstacle in as far as a participatory research project does not render itself well to a research process that is linear, building chapter after chapter, because research and action are in constant conversation and create spirals of reflections. Moreover, the second challenge relates to ethical issues regarding knowledge property and doctoral accreditation. Therefore, the following section will explore how I examined and dealt with these challenges in the process of conducting my research.

The challenges involved in writing a PhD thesis using participatory approaches are not a new debate. Davis (2007), who used an Action Research process for environmental education in a primary school, presents the traditional linear writing as an obstacle for Action Research practitioners. Citing Stapleton and Taylor (2004), Davis (2007) concludes that traditional theses and dissertations have 'historically been based on the structural template of positivism' (Davis, 2007, p.182), although they are used in different disciplines and research areas. This, in various ways, decreases the potential of different ways of research. In order to challenge these assumptions, Davis (2007) proposes an alternative structure that is adjusted to the internal cycles of an Action Research process. However, I suggest that a single shift on writing a thesis will not resolve other research outcomes and ethical challenges that are linked to the writing.

Secondly, Vaughn et al. (2016) conclude rightly that the issue not only lies in the forms of academic writing per se—as Davis (2007) highlighted—but also in the content, which traditionally focuses on academic research outcomes—the disciplinary contribution to the field. This, especially when publishing in journals, excludes other type of outcomes, as well as limiting and jeopardising the partnership undertaken by the project with the participants. This issue is substantial within participatory approaches because it directly impacts the potential to share the different practices we use as practitioners transparently among scholars, clearly visualising the extent to which we engage with participants, as well as considering the knowledge produced beyond the disciplinary contribution.

In addition, a PhD thesis involves ethical implications in terms of knowledge property and doctoral accreditation. Yassi et al. (2016) raise the issue of knowledge property highlighting how authorship, ownership, and consent to use the work can be jeopardised and not recognised as community property. A PhD thesis is thought, in the end, to accredit an individual scholar for her/his academic merit. This accreditation is hardly ever recognised by the community in the case of participatory practices, even if, occasionally, the knowledge is recognised as collaboratively created and worthy of being disseminated by academic means (Damons, 2017). In my own perception, a partnership with participants in a thesis or dissertation is always subject to suspicion due to the academic procedures, in terms of the pre-planning stages individually undertaken by the researcher that involve a 'research proposal' before its implementation, academic accreditation given to the researcher, and intellectual property. All this alienates 'co-participants' and in various ways prevents them from fully achieving ownership of the project or the final knowledge property of the doctoral study.

Prior to this study these debates were not entirely unknown to me. Over the years I have developed experiences with participatory approaches. This clearly shaped my own methodological decisions at an early stage, by deciding that even if I wanted to conceptualise and implement a research project with the participants enjoying full ownership of the process (Project A)—by this I mean, ownership of the research topic, questions, aims, methodology, and outcomes—my PhD (Project B) could not be under a participatory methodology due to the pitfalls previously highlighted. Thus,

my decision was to implement a research design that was individual and separate from the collective research, allowing me to produce a ‘standardised’ thesis and accredit myself for a PhD qualification (Project B). At the same time, the participatory research project (Project A) was part of my research, but it did not affect the research team’s decisions and ownership, as it was framed under the role of the facilitator. In this manner, my case study will follow the stages to be taken by the facilitator in a DCR process—identifying valued capabilities and understanding whether the process achieved these valued capabilities for the participants—as well as expanding and adding some other data collection tools in order to better implement and review the case study after the practice. Therefore, these two components (Project A and Project B) were informed by two main paradigmatic foundations, as I discuss below.

#### 4.2.2. PARADIGMATIC FOUNDATIONS

Historically, paradigms have been used as a way to standardise a stream of thoughts. However, their divisions are in constant iteration, providing diverse ontological, epistemological, methodological and axiological guidance for researchers (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). This means that paradigms represent a classified set of assumptions to help the researcher to acquire coherence and alignment, not only theoretically, but also practically.

The rationality behind this research division (project A and B) relates, therefore, to the assumption that academic knowledge creation towards an academic accreditation, such as a degree, MA or PhD is framed individually. This individual perspective on knowledge creation is the standard supported by higher education institutions, considering the individual as the appropriate unit to reward a certain qualification due to their contribution to knowledge in a determined discipline. However, contrary to this assumption, the participatory paradigm considers knowledge as co-created, displacing the idea of individual knowledge creation. This paradigmatic mismatch allowed me to theoretically and practically divide the process into two research projects, which equally represent two diverse paradigm positionalities.

On the one hand, the participatory research (Project A), named DCR, is positioned under a participatory paradigm (Heron & Reason, 1997). See Table Six below,

PARTICIPATORY PARADIGM	
AXIOLOGY	Transformation based on democratic participation between researcher and subject. Practically knowing how to flourish by means of a balance of autonomy, co-operation, and hierarchy in a culture is an end in itself and is intrinsically valuable.
ONTOLOGY	Participative reality: subjective-objective reality, co-created by means of the mind and the given cosmos. Freedom from objectivity with a new understanding of the relation between self and other. Socially constructed: similar to constructivism, but does not assume that rationality is a means to better knowledge. Subjective-objective reality: knowers can only be knowers when known by other knowers. A worldview based on participation and participative realities.
EPISTEMOLOGY	Critical subjectivity in a participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings. Holistic: replaces traditional relation between ‘truth’ and ‘interpretation’ in which the idea of truth pre-dates the idea of interpretation.

Critical subjectivity: understanding how we know what we are aware of and the knowledge's consummating relations. Four ways of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical.

METHODOLOGY

Political participation in collaborative action enquiry; the primacy of the practical; use of language grounded in shared experiential context.

Use deconstruction as a tool for questioning prevailing representations of learners and learning in the adult education literature; this discredits the false binaries that structure a communication and challenges the assertions of what is to be included or excluded as normal, right, or good.

Experiential knowing is through face-to-face learning, learning new knowledge through the application of the knowledge.

Democratisation and co-creation of both content and method.

Engage together in democratic dialogue as co-researchers and as co-subjects.

Table 6: Participatory paradigm (Source: Reason & Bradbury, 2008)

The participatory paradigm appears for the first time in the fourth edition of the Sage Handbook of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This new perceptual orientation was born from a critique made by Heron and Reason (2007) which cautioned about the failure of constructivism to account for experiential knowing. They argued (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) that a new paradigm was needed to embrace the assumptions of a participatory reality, which relates to a different axiology, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Exploring its various philosophical dimensions in detail, the participatory paradigm is based on a transformational axiology which relates to democratic participation (Researcher/Researched subject). It asks, 'What is intrinsically valuable in human life, in particular, what sort of knowledge, if any, is intrinsically valuable' (Heron & Reason, 1997, p.2–3). Therefore, the nature of reality is co-created and 'Knowers can only be knowers when known by other knowers' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.102). It constructs a worldview 'based on participation and participative realities' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.102).

The paradigm supports an extended epistemology<sup>24</sup>, based on co-created findings in a critical subjectivity which is inclusive of other ways of knowing which constantly interrogate 'how we know, what we know' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.103). Therefore, although experiential knowledge is here highlighted as necessary, other knowledge systems are also considered (Bradbury, 2015; Heron & Reason, 1997). In brief, as Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007, p.13) claim, this epistemology 'represents a challenge to scientific positivism and seeks to practice the radical'.

Thus, the process of enquiry is informed by values based on collaboration and determined by political commitment, which changes the traditional nature of language in conventional research processes for grounded language. Hence, instead of using specialised language the researcher establishes a democratic dialogue with the participants on the participants' own terms and codes (Heron & Reason, 1997; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).

Power in this paradigm plays a crucial role in its interrelation with knowledge, knowledge production and truth. Therefore, 'knowledge is an expression of power' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.113); and 'power is a factor in what and how we know' (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.111). Thus, power relations within the research process will require special attention

<sup>24</sup> Extended epistemology refers to the use of different knowledge systems, as presented in previous chapters, as ecology of knowledges.

because ‘without equal or co-equal control, research cannot be carried out’ (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p.113). Therefore, this paradigm presents an obvious assumption regarding the shared ownership of the knowledge process between the researcher and the participants.

As stated before, it is tricky to maintain and respect all these characteristics of co-participation, ownership, democratic spaces or political action when the aim of a PhD thesis is to qualify yourself for an academic diploma granted individually through an original contribution to academic knowledge. That is why the second paradigmatic positionality is under a transformative paradigm, as an individual research process using a case study. The case study intends to deeply explore DCR as an experience of co-enquiry. This comprehensive research helps the thesis to acquire a more individual approach towards the PhD qualification, but equally provides robust evidence and constant assessment for rigorous research based on complementarities and different perspectives combined.

To sustain this enquiry, the transformative paradigm has been chosen, due to its critical perspective and proximity to the participatory paradigm, albeit still distinct. This paradigm allows the researcher to use various qualitative methods with the possibility to engage actively with the participants. It perceives knowledge inextricably linked to power and it conceptualises reality as a compendium of worldviews that need to acknowledge positionality and highlight diverse types of inequalities. It is a political perspective that allowed me to develop my individual research critically without contradicting, nor undermining the nature of the participatory research project. See Table Seven for more details about the transformative paradigm.

TRANSFORMATIVE PARADIGM	
AXIOLOGY	Ethical choices in research and evaluation need to include a realisation that discrimination and oppression are pervasive, and that researchers and evaluators have a moral responsibility to understand the communities in which they work in order to challenge societal processes that allow the status quo to continue.
ONTOLOGY	The transformative ontological assumption rejects cultural relativism in the sense that multiple definitions of reality are possible. It also investigates issues of power that lead to different definitions, acknowledging that multiple realities are socially constructed and that it is necessary to identify explicitly the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and disability values that underlie definitions of realities.
EPISTEMOLOGY	Knowledge is neither absolute nor relative; it is constructed in a context of power and privilege with consequences attached to which version of knowledge is given privilege. In order to know a community’s realities, it is necessary to establish an interactive link between the researcher/evaluator and the participants in the study. Knowledge is socially and historically located within a complex cultural context.
METHODOLOGY	A researcher can choose quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods. However, there should be an interactive link between the researcher and participants. Power issues should be addressed explicitly, and issues of discrimination and oppression should be recognised.

Table 7: Transformative paradigm (Source: Mertens, 2008)

To conclude, the aim of this initial part of the chapter is to account for the participatory constraints when producing a doctoral study, but also to look for an innovative way to deal with them

methodologically according to academic cannons. Dividing the study into two research projects (A and B) is able to value both knowledge processes from different paradigmatic lenses and perspectives. Combining them, it sustains each research process frame, neither jeopardising the integrity of the participatory process (project A), nor the integrity of my scholarly work (Project B).

#### 4.2.3. ENQUIRY DISTINCTIVENESS

I will now briefly draw attention to the differences between the individual (Project B) and participatory research (Project A), in order to highlight their distinct practices as a way to conclude this section.

The first and more significant difference between the two projects is their paradigm positionality, as highlighted previously. The participatory project (A) is under a participatory paradigm, while the individual project (B) is under a transformative paradigm, due to their different specificities and methodological implications. The participatory project (A) was implemented by a group of 12 undergraduate students and a facilitator (myself), in a participatory open-ended research process that was decided, designed and implemented by the research team. On the other hand, the individual research project (B) is my own doctoral study, which I designed and implemented individually. Project B is the work that is mainly written about here, with specific research aims and questions, along with the pre-designed methodology. Thus, the table below summarises these points and compares both research processes.

	PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH Project A	INDIVIDUAL RESEARCH Project B
PARADIGM	Participatory	Transformative
WHO?	Team (12 undergraduates) + Facilitator	PhD student (Facilitator role)
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES	Open	Specific Valued capabilities for the co-researcher Challenges and opportunities from the collective research Reflexions on the DCR implementation
METHODOLOGY	Open	Case Study
METHODS	Open	Interviews Participant Observation Personal Journal
OUTCOME	Open	Academic: Thesis

*Table 8: Project A and Project B comparison*

Therefore, as the participatory project (A) is taken in this thesis as evidence and a secondary part of the methodology implemented in this study, I will focus on my individual research (project B) inasmuch as the DCR participatory project will be displayed appropriately in the following chapters as the focus of the case study.

#### 4.3. INDIVIDUAL STUDY (PROJECT B) QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

The individual research is presented under a transformative paradigm, which considers the ethical and moral responsibility of the researcher to explore injustices and bring about change. It assumes that reality is socially constructed and knowledge is socially and historically situated (Mertens, 2008), as presented in the introduction chapter. Moreover, the procedures used for examining the



object under study are broad, thus, quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods are allowed to be used, while always maintaining attention to power, discrimination, and oppression (Mertens, 2008).

#### 4.3.1. QUALITATIVE STUDY

I decided to use a qualitative research design, which uses a case study to systematically investigate DCR as an event or set of related events with the specific aim of explaining the phenomenon (Given, 2008). Qualitative studies allow the researcher to deeply explore phenomena, when the aim is not to quantify, but to exhaustively explore an event or set of the event (Creswell, 2013) as this research project aims to do. In this case, to explore DCR with experimental research using quantitative methods would jeopardise the potential to explore numerous variables, as in the case of a qualitative research and case study when a generalisation is not in the spotlight (Gray, 2013).

Qualitative research allowed me to investigate and explore the process of twelve participants enrolled in a DCR experience. Furthermore, it captured the ‘individual’s thoughts, feelings or interpretations of meaning and process’ (Given, 2008, p.XXIX). These elements are substantial when exploring capabilities expansion, as the richness of the qualitative data allowed me to support the research evidence from different variables and sources. Specifically, in order to make this richness effective, I made use of the case study format as the adequate methodological perspective.

#### 4.3.2. CASE STUDY

According to Mertens (2008), the use of a case study for transformative research is crucial because the systematic collection of data is needed to investigate social transformation. She also highlights the strength of this approach as being able to capture reality in detail, at the same time, analysing a larger number of variables related to concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge in the particular research. Yin (1993 cited in Gray, 2013) asserts that case studies are mostly used in qualitative inquiries, due to the fact that their focus is to examine tentative or doubtful relationships, and therefore, they look for causal relationships instead of simple descriptions. They answer questions as to how and why (Wamba et al., 2015). Thus, the case study offers an optimal tool, able to collect distinct sources of data and delve into variables that are not adequate for quantification. It operates as an analytical approach that—contrary to some scholars’ opinions of case study as a simple and easy tool—represents a rigorous and ambitious approach, which demands that the researcher possesses a broad range of skills (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013; Gray, 2013).

Therefore, the case study is an adequate methodological perspective to explore DCR exhaustively, collecting data systematically from different sources, focusing on the relation among multiple variables and not on the simple description of the process of DCR. It not only analyses how the dimensions of human development (as capabilities) are being expanded in the participants by the DCR process (or not), but also why.

#### 4.4. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

The case study of a group of students involved in a participatory research project as DCR, needed to attend to the specificities of DCR as a practice. Therefore, the DCR project provided the participants of this individual study (B), selecting twelve undergraduate students as the participants. The sections below display the specificities of the group of participants, the roles that they had during the research project (B) and the recruitment stages.

#### 4.4.1. POPULATION

The DCR project was created as a space for the democratisation of knowledge and inclusion of other knowledge systems, as well as to enhance participation in knowledge production for excluded collectives. Furthermore, as explored in Chapter One, the South African higher education context was chosen due to its significance in the process of decolonisation, in addition to the demands from the student body and scholars concerning the need for transformation. Additionally, as already mentioned, educational participatory projects in the country tend to focus on projects outside the university walls, diminishing the potential of the student body to actively participate in the resolution and advancement of social justice within and beyond the university space. Therefore, as undergraduate students in university contexts are on the whole linked to processes of knowledge creation only through post-graduate programmes, the study focused on undergraduate students due to their limited access to the aforementioned processes. Hence, any undergraduate student from the main Bloemfontein campus (UFS) was eligible to participate.

The choice of the students in Bloemfontein campus was partly due to their proximity to the facilitator, but also a decision made according to previous experiences with participatory projects and the importance of relationship building, trust and proximity to the participants.

#### 4.4.2. RECRUITMENT

The recruitment was implemented by a public campaign; posters about the project were displayed in central designated informational panels around the Bloemfontein campus (UFS). Furthermore, A5 flyers were distributed at a central point of the main campus over the course of three days. Additionally, a meeting was planned with the head of student affairs in order to get access to university residences for undergraduates. I attended a second meeting with different residence supervisors and gave them information, together with posters, to distribute around undergraduate residences on the Bloemfontein campus.

Fifteen students responded to the advertisement campaign by different means: emails, calls or SMS. I met all of them individually to inform them about the research projects (Project A and B) and to determine their interest and continued availability regarding both projects. The table below summarises the process of recruitment from an early stage until the individual meeting with the potential participants.

STAGE	ACTIVITIES
Stage one – Advertisement campaign January 2017	-Poster (Different locations) -Flyers (Central point) -Meetings (Head of students affairs and residence supervisors)
Stage two – Individual meetings January –February 2017	-Individual meeting: Information about the projects (A and B) -Agreement on interview date -Information about the interview -Duration: 30 minutes/1 hour

Table 9: Recruitment stages

Selection criteria were not necessary, as fourteen of the respondents were undergraduates. They were from a diverse group of disciplines and faculties: from natural to social science (Biochemistry, Genetics, Microbiology, Psychology, Finances, Education, Accounting, Law, Political Sciences, Administration, Medicine, Governances and politics); in their first, second, or third year of study; highly motivated to participate in the project; and from diverse cultural backgrounds (Sotho, Zulu, Afrikaans, Tsonga, Venda, Tswana, Xhosa) and gender (7 females and 7 males), forming a proportional representation of the university population.

Nevertheless, three participants withdrew from the project after the first interview (Project B) and before our first participatory workshop (project A) during February 2017. Two of them for personal reasons, and one for no longer being interested in the project. Moreover, one further participant was recruited on the suggestions of the participants after the first workshop making a total of twelve participants for the full project.

MEMBER	GENDER	DEGREE	CULTURAL BACKGROUND
MEMBER 1	Male	Finance	Sotho
MEMBER 2	Female	Administration	Sotho
MEMBER 3	Male	Psychology	Afrikaans
MEMBER 4	Male	Law	Zulu
MEMBER 5	Male	Accounting	Tsonga
MEMBER 6	Female	Biochemistry	Tswana
MEMBER 7	Female	Political Sciences	Xhosa
MEMBER 8	Male	Governance and politics	Zulu
MEMBER 9	Female	Microbiology	Xhosa
MEMBER 10	Female	Education	Sotho
MEMBER 11	Female	Medicine	Zulu
MEMBER 12	Female	Genetics	Sotho

*Table 10: The twelve participants in the DCR project*

#### 4.4.3. PARTICIPANT/RESEARCHER ROLES

The participants in the study occupied multiple positions, due to the duality of the research project (Research Project A and Project B). Firstly, they were enrolled as researchers in the participatory project through the DCR experience (Project A). Moreover, they were participants in the individual project (Project B) to produce part of the data collection for this thesis, using diverse research methods, articulated in the following section.

#### 4.5. RESEARCH METHODS

In a case study, the data should be gathered by means of diverse sources (Gray, 2013). This diversification and variety provides the insight needed for a comprehensive investigation. The instruments were selected in order to triangulate the data and increase the rigour of the research outcome (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013); equally, data was collected at different stages of the research, as the data collected for the case study also was used for the implementation of the DCR project (Project A) as part of the facilitator's role.

##### 4.5.1. INSTRUMENTS USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

Three instruments were selected as the means to gather the case study data: journals, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Moreover, in order to deeply explore the DCR experience, it was also necessary to collect data in different stages of the participatory project

(Project A), helping to produce data at different stages of the process for the implementation of Project A. The table below outlines the three instruments with their respective stages, from February to October 2017.

INSTRUMENT	STAGES
JOURNAL	First – May 2017
	Second – October 2017
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	First – February 2017
	Second – May 2017
	Third – October 2017
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	First – March 2017 (25.03.17)
	Second – April 2017 (24.04.17)
	Third – May 2017 (06.05.17)
	Fourth – June 2017 (03.06.17)
	Fifth – July 2017 (29.07.17)
	Sixth – August 2017 (09.08.17)
	Seventh – August 2017 (27.08.17)
	Eighth – September 2017 (23.09.17)
	Ninth – October 2017 (14.10.17)

*Table 11: Instruments used for data collection and stages*

The journals were handed out in February 2017 after the individual interview, and they were collected for analysis in two different stages, May and November 2017. Interviews were conducted in three stages for all the participants, February, May and November 2017. Finally, participant observation was implemented during the nine participatory workshops in the participatory research (Project A), usually once a month from March to October 2017. The sections below examine the specificities of each data collection tool.

#### *A. JOURNALS*

The journals explored the personal process of being involved in the DCR research project (A). They provided an individual dimension where the participants were able to write, paint or use any other creative technique as a means to reflect on the collective research process. The aim was to offer the students a private space to reflect on the participatory project (A) expressing their thoughts on a personal level. The technique of participant journals is used in different research processes, including participatory projects and educational studies. Wagner (1999) used students' journals as an instrument to collect data in a course evaluation. The author states that the tool provides a longitudinal perspective of students' perceptions during the entire project duration, informing the researcher if the aims of the course are being achieved. Therefore, the participant journal is useful in terms of monitoring a participatory project. Moreover, the journal is a valuable instrument to be complemented by other sources of data; it provides an alternative perspective on data that is not possible to compile with other tools, due to its individual and personal character (Wagner, 1999). As Wagner corroborates 'Journals are claimed to integrate theory and practice, stimulate critical thinking and reflection on practice' (Wagner, 1999, p.263).

The journals used in this project, not only referred to the participants' journals but also to the researcher journal. The researcher journal, or field journal, is commonly used in participatory practices as a way to reflect on cycles during the research process. It records the investigator's thinking, how it changes during the process and contributes to increasing awareness (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013). According to Kemmis et al. (2013):

Keeping a journal imposes a discipline of stopping to think each day about what you have been doing on your project, forcing you to reflect and compose your thoughts for your own record. It also allows you to review what you have done, your progress in changing your work in relation to your felt concern, and what you have been preoccupied by in earlier phases of your project [...] Using a journal helps you to steer the process of your own learning (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2013, p.175).

The researcher journal began at the very beginning of the project; it contained personal perceptions, research context, critical incidents and interpretations of the process (Tuckett & Stewart, 2004). For Boyd and Boyd (2005) the journal should be a flexible tool and the validity and implementation will vary from researcher to researcher. Therefore, I decided to record my own personal perceptions, reflections about project A and B, and critical incidents within the participatory project (A). The journal not only helped me to develop my reflexivity, my critical thinking about my practice, but it was also a worthy tool; it allowed me to go back and forth anytime in my thoughts, in order to change or preserve aspects of the DCR project (A) (Boyd & Boyd, 2005).

Nevertheless, while my journal was a substantial source of information that increased the validity and rigour of the project, that was not the case for the participant's journals. However, these challenges will be explored in the following sections and Chapter Nine.

#### *B. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS*

Interviews are a common tool used in qualitative research. Using interviews in a case study not only allows the researcher to focus on the research theme, but also to contribute by collecting 'original and illuminating data' (Yin, 1994 cited in Gray, 2013, p.135). Interviews are especially relevant when we want to gather an individual's meanings, views, and attitudes, as in this research project (Gray, 2013). Although diverse typologies of interviews are available for researchers, this research has used semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible approach to gather information. Although interviews were planned in advance, in the process of the interview, I was looking for themes related to the interview questions. This means that, although all the interviews had a structure used for all the participants, during the course of the interviews, the order of the questions could vary or some new questions could arise in the interview due to interesting answers. Therefore, it was a suitable tool, due its flexibility to examine certain topics of interests more deeply and acquire the necessary clarifications to gather the object of study adequately.

Nevertheless, one of the challenges regarding the use of interviews is the power imbalance created by this tool (Clegg & Stevenson, 2013; Kvale, 2006). Kvale (2006), specifically, highlights how an interview created as a dialogue can fake 'friendship', instrumentalising human relationships as a 'Trojan horse'. He points out the danger of overlooking well-intentioned interviews, which create a fantasy of democratic relations. Therefore, there are a few points worth mentioning here. Unfortunately, as much as we want to minimise power relations within an interview, the interview act per se presents a power structure where one is the observer and the other the object of study. Kvale (2006, p.484) says 'research interview entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution'. Therefore, knowing that and trying to take corrective actions, I



decided to start the first stage of interviews—the first contact I had with the participants—in a reverse way. As I met with all the participants for an information session during the recruitment process, I explained to them about the kind of questions I would ask to them during our first interview. Thus, I suggested that they think about the questions they would like to ask me before I asked my questions to them. The idea was to start with the participants interviewing me about things they wanted to know about me, and then I would continue by interviewing them. This measure did not resolve all the complexities within power imbalances by any means, but at least it provided a more equalitarian space, exposing me to the private questions the participants wanted to know, also as a starting point of the relationship we were to develop through the workshops of the participatory project during 2017.

A second substantial point to highlight, in terms of the power imbalance in using interviews is that my research did use interviews alone as data collection instrument, nor was this the only time I contacted or related to the participants. The participatory project (A), with its various workshops, offered an ideal space through which I got to interact with the participants in a relaxed, cordial and informal way. This offered me and the participants a safe space in which to bond and form affiliation over a period of time. Therefore, although I could not directly avoid the power issues of being the ‘formal researcher’ collecting data for this research project (B), it is true that the participatory project (A) facilitated some of these aspects in terms of balancing power relations, imperfectly, but efficiently.

Therefore, the study used three interview phases implemented during 2017, at three different stages of the research project (A). The first interview aimed to gather the valuable capabilities of the participants through their life experiences and learning. This level of interviews was carried out with fourteen participants in February 2017 (in addition to one member in April 2017). The second interview was aimed at understanding the extent to which the participants were able to enhance or/and achieve their valuable capabilities, according to their individual lists from the first interview in the initial stage of the project and, in addition, to capture challenges and opportunities from the experience. In this phase, twelve students were interviewed individually in May 2017. These interviews were strategically divided into two phases; the first focused on the participants’ feedback regarding the research project. This involved, mapping the aspects of the project that each participant thought were helpful. Additionally, participants made suggestions for improvements or changes, such as timing, remuneration or the role of the facilitator. The second phase aimed to review the individual capabilities list elaborated at the beginning of the year, according to the project implementation. Therefore, each participant reviewed which functionings were being achieved (or not) for each capability, based on the participant’s involvement in the project.

The last phase of the interviews was implemented in November 2017. This final phase aimed to conclude the project and make observations of the transitions of the participants into the last and final stage. The interview reviewed aspects of the study, as in the second phase, and was therefore able to capture further enhancement or achievements on valued capabilities as well as general reflections on the project. The table below summarises the phases with the participants and aims of each stage.

PHASE	DATE	PARTICIPANTS	AIMS
1 <sup>ST</sup> PHASE	FEBRUARY 2017	15 PARTICIPANTS	-To explore valuable capabilities through

		(+1 April—Additional participant)	participants' narratives at the moment of the interview
2 <sup>ND</sup> PHASE	MAY 2017	12 PARTICIPANTS	-To explore variations of enhancement and/or achievement of capabilities based on the participant's involvement in the project. -To explore challenges and opportunities from the participatory project.
3 <sup>rd</sup> PHASE	NOVEMBER 2017	12 PARTICIPANTS	-To explore variations of enhancement and/or achievement of capabilities based on the participant's involvement in the project. -To explore challenges and opportunities from the participatory project.

Table 12: Interviews summary

### C. PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Participant observation allowed me to be immersed in the context that I was researching. I took part in the participatory project (A) with the participants in order to understand the events taking place as a participant observer (Gray, 2013; Gold, 1958). Observation enabled me, as a researcher, to go beyond the individual's opinions, observing actions, attitudes, behaviours, and dynamics within the participant group. As Yen (1994, cited in Gray, 2013, p.135) states regarding case studies: 'Participant observation is insightful into interpersonal behaviour and motives'. This was especially relevant when comparing and triangulating different sources, as the participant observation was an adequate source to increase validity and verify other instruments.

The participatory observation was implemented from March to October 2017, during each of the participatory workshops<sup>25</sup> (Project A) with the research team, composed of the participants and myself as a facilitator. Various means were used to record the information: video-recording, audio-recording, field notes, photos and/or posters. The means to gather the data were selected according to the workshop agenda; for instance, in workshops one to five, video was used to complement the audio data, due to the richness of the discussions and the guests we had during those workshops. In workshops five to eight, the meetings were dedicated to specifying details about the project, so the audio recording was sufficient as data, together with the field notes. Field notes were collected after every workshop, complementing them with the audios recorded during the session. All field notes included the agenda of the day, the participants and guests attending the workshop, and sections on the different activities of the day, conversations, debates and agreements. The field notes about the different activities of the day focused on key interactions among members, power relations between the participants and I, as facilitator, and also the ways in which decisions were

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter Five for more information about the participatory workshops.



made. Thus, the table below presents the dates when the participant observation was carried out and the means by it was undertaken.

DCR (Proj. A)	DATES	MEANS
1 WORKSHOP	25.03.17	-Video-recording, Audio-recording, Field notes, Posters, Photos
2 WORKSHOP	22.04.17	-Video-recording, Audio-recording, Field notes, Posters, Photos
3 WORKSHOP	06.05.17	-Video-recording, Audio-recording, Field notes, Posters, Photos
4 WORKSHOP	03.06.17	-Video-recording, Audio-recording, Field notes, Posters, Photos
5 WORKSHOP	29.07.17	-Audio recording and Field notes
6 WORKSHOP	09.08.17	-Audio recording and Field notes
7 WORKSHOP	27.08.17	-Audio recording and Field notes
8 WORKSHOP	23.09.17	-Audio recording and Field notes
9 WORKSHOP	14.10.17	-Audio recording and Field notes

Table 13: Participant observation summary

#### 4.5.2. SCHEDULE DATA COLLECTION

To summarise the previous sections, the table below outlines the one-year data collection period which was implemented according to the following three stages: pre-project (Phase 1), project implementation (Phase 2), and post-project (Phase 3).

PHASE 1		PHASE 2		PHASE 3	
2017		INDIVIDUAL PROJECT (B)	PARTICIPATORY PROJECT (A)	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT (B)	INDIVIDUAL PROJECT (B)
	Feb.	Campaign Participants Selection Informal meeting First Interview			
	Mar.		Workshop 1	Part. Observation	
	Apr.		Workshop 2	Part. Observation	
	May		Workshop 3	Part. Observation Journal (1 <sup>st</sup> phase) Second Interview	
	Jun.		Workshop 4	Part. Observation	
	Jul.		Workshop 5	Part. Observation	
	Aug.		Workshop 6 Workshop 7	Part. Observation Part. Observation	
	Sept.		Workshop 8	Part. Observation	
	Oct.		Workshop 9	Part. Observation	Third Interview Journal (2 <sup>nd</sup> phase)

Table 14: Summary of data collection

## 4.6. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a focal point in qualitative studies. The research analysis allows the researcher to explore and introduce categories into the theoretical space. According to Given (2008), although there are diverse types of perspectives and paradigm positionalities that orientate qualitative research, there are general common traits for analysis, such as coding, memos, analysis writing as an iterative process, and the linking of concepts with theory. In the following section, I examine the analysis procedures undertaken for each of the data collection instruments, the iterative coding phases and the software used for this analysis.

### 4.6.1. ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

As diverse sets of data were used, diverse sources were created and uploaded into the Nvivo software for data analysis. Nvivo software helped me to review and compare numerous sources, not only cross-checking them between cases, but also being able to focus on specific codes or themes (Given, 2008). The Nvivo project was created at an early stage of the project; therefore, the analysis process was iterative and continuous throughout the various stages of the process in 2017 and 2018.

The first set of interviews were analysed with interview notes, and the review of the notes was made with the audio recordings of the interviews. All of them were coded in three stages, firstly highlighting emerging codes, secondly combining codes into bigger categories and finally transforming these categories into the theoretical elements from the Capabilities Approach (Saldana, 2009). The decision not to transcribe the first set of interviews was due to time constraints, and the need to elaborate the individual capabilities list before the first participatory workshop of the group, which was only two weeks after the interviews. Nevertheless, as a way to increase the validity of the list, I arranged an individual meeting with each of the participants to scrutinise the individual capabilities list that came out of the data analysis before making the final one. In these meetings, which usually lasted between one or two hours, I engaged individually with each participant to scrutinise their capabilities list, adding, removing or merging categories and definitions according to our conversations. The outcome of this interview, the individual capabilities lists, served as a roadmap for the facilitator (myself) in order to direct the participatory research (Project A) to one or another aspect depending on the participant's list of outcomes (see Chapter Six). Moreover, this list was used for coding subsequent interviews in order to understand whether the participatory project was impacting participants valued capabilities (see table below).

The second and third interviews were transcribed verbatim in the different phases of implementation. These interviews aimed to look for capabilities expansion and functionings achievement deriving from the DCR participatory project (A), as well as challenges and lessons from the project. Therefore, the transcribed data was necessary to deeply analyse the source of information from the interviews (Gray, 2013). All interviews from the second and third phases were coded according to three levels: (1) emerging codes, (2) regrouped into categories and (3) linking categories to theoretical elements from the Capabilities Approach (Saldana, 2009). Moreover, the second and third phases of interviews were also coded—beyond the three phases initially used—by using the initial capabilities list (from the first set of interviews), applying the individual capabilities to code sources from the same case (Therefore, from the same student). This double analysis provided twelve cases across different data sources.

Additionally, Wagner (1999) expresses that data coming from journals can be very complex, due to the diverse and mixed information that can be provided. In this research, journals were firstly scanned in both phases and uploaded into the analysis software together with my own journal. However, some difficulties arose from the use of the participant's journal. That is why, all the participants' journals available were scanned and uploaded into Nvivo but only coded under an emerging code phase that was sufficient to identify the weakness of the data available. Therefore, only my personal journal was coded in three stages (emerging codes/categories/ theoretical elements).

Participant observation was composed of various sources, such as videos, audios, field notes, and posters. Videos were not used in all the participatory workshops, as I used them for key conversations with the group and debates with an invited guest to the workshops. Therefore, audio recordings and field notes were the key tools to collect the participant observation data, using the field notes as principal and audio recordings to corroborate or complement the notes, if necessary. A synthesis of the analysis process is presented in the table below.

	PHASE	UPLOADED ON	SOURCES NVIVO	ANALYSIS
Interviews	1 <sup>st</sup> Phase Interviews	February 2017	14 Interview notes reviewed with 14 audio recordings of interviews	One process of coding: 1.Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of the CA
				Individual meeting with each participant to validate their individual capabilities lists
			14 Individual capabilities lists	(Outcome analysis 1 <sup>st</sup> phase interviews)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Phase Interviews	May 2017	12 Interview transcripts	Two processes of coding: <b>Process One:</b> 1.Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of the CA <b>Process Two:</b> Capabilities list (As individual codes per case)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Phase Interviews	November 2017	12 Interview transcripts	Two processes of coding: <b>Process One:</b> 1.Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of theory <b>Process Two:</b> Capabilities list (As individual codes per case)
Journals	1 <sup>st</sup> Phase	May 2017	-Scanned pages of each individual journal (12 in total)	Process One: 1.Coding: emerging codes (Irrelevant data)
			Word document of my journal	Process One: 1.Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of the CA
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Phase	November 2017	-Word document of my journal	Process of analysis: 1.Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of the CA

Participant Observation	1 <sup>st</sup> Workshop	March 2017	-Videos, Audio recordings, Field notes, and Posters	Process of analysis: (Field Notes) 1. Coding: emerging codes 2. Categorising codes: clustering by categories 3. Theorising: linking categories with elements of the CA
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Workshop	April 2017	-Videos, Audio recordings, Field notes, and Posters	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Workshop	May 2017	-Videos, Audio recordings, Field notes, and Posters	
	4 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	June 2017	-Videos, Audio recordings, Field notes, and Posters	
	5 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	July 2017	-Videos, Audio recordings, Field notes, and Posters	
	6 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	August 2017	-Audio recordings and Field notes	
	7 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	August 2017	-Audio recordings and Field notes	
	8 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	September 2017	-Audios recordings and Field notes	
	9 <sup>th</sup> Workshop	September 2017	-Audios recordings and Field notes	

*Table 15: Summary of data collection and analysis of the study*

#### 4.7. PRINCIPLES FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

As the analysis has shown, this research process has been in constant iteration during different phases, not abandoning its analysis or ethical consideration at a single stage of the process. For this reason, the ethical implications in this study were divided into three levels: a meta-implication as a social justice principle; a meso level as procedural ethics; and a micro level with everyday ethics considering both projects in this section (A and B) (Yassi et al., 2016).

This structure, based on Yassi et al., (2016) presents various sublevels. Firstly, as stated above, the principle of justice as a meta-implication of the project. Secondly, the meso-level a grade below has three points to consider: Meaningful participation, Consent, and Confidentiality/Anonymity. To conclude, the micro-level considers the everyday ethics of the project with another three points: Avoiding harm, Caring for team leaders, and Engagement/Commitment. Thus, the table below summarises these ethical considerations for the project.

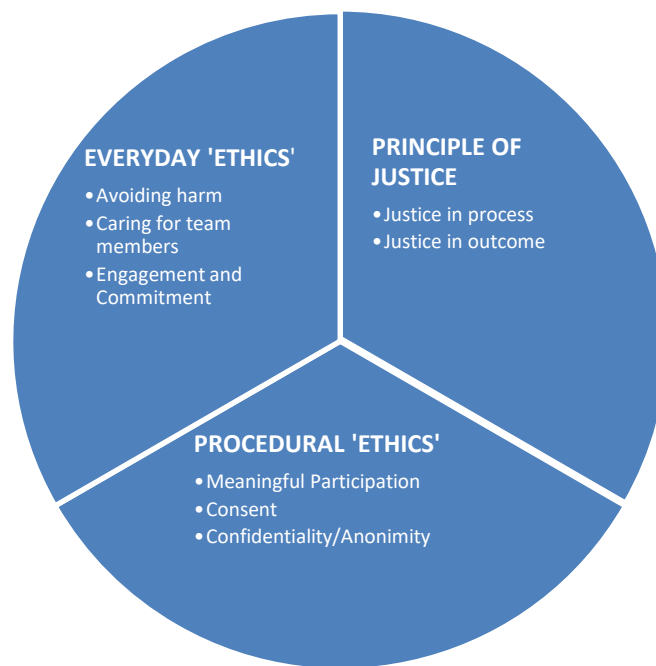


Figure 8: Levels of ethical implications (Source: Yassi et al., 2016)

Looking at these levels one by one, firstly, with regard to the meta-level by the principle of justice, Kemmis et al. (2013, p.159) say 'The principle of justice, in research, requires avoiding injustice in the process of the study, for example, by processes that oppress or dominate participants [...] and oppression occurs whenever practices or structures unreasonably constrain participants' rights or opportunities for self-expression and self-development'. This statement clearly reveals the usefulness of the Capabilities Approach from a micro perspective of the participants in a participatory process. Even Sen's conceptualisation of justice matches perfectly with these ideas. The research process not only aimed to enhance the capabilities of the participants, but also to provide a platform through the participatory process as a valuable space to raise their voices and promote their self-development in different ways. This principle was present in the process and outcome for both research processes involved in this thesis, as my individual research attempted to provide a research process able to foster the role of participants as the main owners of the research process, and the research process as a platform for human development expansion.

The procedural 'E' is comprised of three different issues: meaningful participation, consent, and confidentiality. For Yassi et al. (2016) meaningful participation is caused mainly by power imbalances on compensation. While the researcher will be remunerated, those involved in the research process intend to volunteer their time. This creates an ethical issue and establishes a barrier to equality and respect for participants work and time. Yassi et al. (2016, p.4) state that 'in many settings within the work, community members cannot participate in research activities with scholars unless they are financially compensated'. This jeopardises the participation of the most disadvantaged members; thus, they recommend researchers to be sensitive to economic imbalances and try at least to provide the participants with partial remuneration. Equally, Given (2008) affirms that research participants involved in in-depth interviews, providing personal experiences and being recorded during the interview might be compensated by different means.

Therefore, due to the different roles the participants took during both research processes (project A and B), vouchers compensated their participation in each workshop and interview attendance, and this measure was discussed and agreed with the group as the best choice for all of them. They agreed on a specific voucher, from a local shopping mall, as well as the regularity it would be given. For instance, giving the vouchers per session (workshop or interview attended), instead of a single payment at the end or beginning of the project.

Nevertheless, the monetary compensation was not the only measure of the project. Different resources were offered and/or provided to the participants. Firstly, five participants did not have a personal laptop, which would impact their participation in the collaborative project. Usually, students on campus have a computer lab available; however, it is well known to have long queues to access the laptops, which affects students' educational duties and personal lives regarding time management. Thus, the project, with the support of the HEHD programme, provided all of them with laptops for the duration of the project. This benefited them greatly, allowing them to look for information or prepare documents for the project (see Chapter Five). Additionally, transport was offered to those students living off campus to attend the meetings, which was used several times by a group of them, and food and refreshments were provided at each meeting.

Informed consent relates to the consent given freely and voluntarily by the participants (Kemmis et al., 2013). This informed consent was elaborated at different stages and modes. Firstly, an ethical clearance application was submitted to the Faculty of Economic and Management Science at the University of the Free State with number UFS-HDS 2016/1287, which was approved on 11 November 2016. Secondly, I had an individual meeting with each of the students to be asked questions and clarify any doubts, as well as inform them clearly about the project through an informal conversation. Finally, I met with the participants individually again and provided three different informed consent forms—one for each of the methods used—which they all signed at the beginning of the project. Thus, one was for the interviews, clarifying the three different interviews that would be conducted during the project and their voluntary participation. Another was for the personal journal, informing them about their use of the journal and the voluntary nature of the tool. The final form explained the participant observation, the data being collected during the observation and the different means to be used.

To conclude, privacy and anonymity played a double role in this process, while the recognition of the participants was important in terms of the participatory project (A), for my individual research (Project B) in this thesis, privacy and anonymity were considered necessary, as personal details are shared as part of the findings of this study. Therefore, in this document, the real names of the participants are replaced with names that are common in the country, and there is limited information provided on the outputs from the participatory research, such as a link to the website, or the collaborative book or videos, in which the real names of the participants are featured.

At the micro-level of 'everyday e', I selected three main points: avoiding harm, engagement and commitment, and caring for team members (Yessi, et al., 2016). Avoiding harm refers more to emotional or psychological harm than physical harm (O'Leary, 2004). According to Kemmis et al. (2013, p.159) avoiding harm includes respecting the participants: 'Respecting their integrity and humanity as individuals, as people whose rights and whose physical and psychological and cultural integrity must be protected, and not damaged, in the research process'. Therefore, for researchers, it is important to have an understanding of the everyday lives of their participants, in order to evaluate a threshold of harm (Given 2008). Nevertheless, this was not a challenge to the project, due to the close relationship between the members, and between the members and myself.

From the very beginning of the project, I knew about the participants' lives and they knew about my personal and professional life. Furthermore, this point links perfectly with the second one, caring for team members, and the two concepts complement each other. Since the participants valued support and friendship, from the beginning of the project we created a safe/support/family culture. This meant in practice that when we became aware of one of the members struggling for any reason, we provided support in different ways. A few examples can be given, for instance, some members were looking for a part-time job, and we helped them to write an improved CV and looked for appropriate newspapers or websites to find jobs in the city. Another example was during the complex time of de-registration<sup>26</sup> for those students who had not cleared their tuition fee debt. As that situation was not new for some of the team participants, we met with some members from the Students Representative Council and we looked for viable solutions and bursaries for the members who were impacted by this problem. Furthermore, when one of the members was sick and needed a free clinic, other members advised about free medical services offered close to campus. Examples like these became common practice and were repeated during the process, and they were not unidirectional. Various members (myself included) faced different issues and the team became an excellent space for accessing counselling, support, resources, information or comfort in different ways throughout the course of the project. As Yassi et al. (2016, p.6) state 'valuing all team members through taking care of their material and emotional needs is part of the imperative of the research', however, this is even more important when the Capabilities Approach is used and the well-being of the members is at the heart of the research process.

Finally, engagement and commitment refer to the flexibility provided by the research project to accommodate the diverse personal responsibilities and different commitment levels that the participants possess. Yassi et al. (2016) propose a transparent agenda reviewed periodically which facilitates transparency and honesty within the group. This was achieved throughout the project with a major measure; at the end of each meeting, we all formulated the agenda for the next workshop together, agreeing on dates that were suitable for the whole team. Equally, interviews were agreed on the suitable dates for the participants and several changes were made due to unforeseen circumstances. Additionally, after the absence of two members during two workshops, the team debated the conditions of commitment for all the participants. This brought about a final decision that participants could miss a maximum of two workshops to remain fully committed to the project. Therefore, two members withdrew from the project during the second semester, due to their absence in more than two meetings, although they both attended the last interview phase.

#### 4.8. RIGOUR CRITERIA

Although ethical considerations are crucial, rigour, validity, and reflexivity are equally important. Rigour refers to a research process that reaches trustworthy findings. Researchers use different criteria, depending on their ontological perspectives which also guide their ethical considerations. This research employed a list proposed by Meterns (2008, p.196) as a compendium of rigour criteria which she elaborated on with the help of various scholars for transformative studies. The list consists of seven criteria, expressed by questions to answer by the research process. Therefore, to achieve rigour the research will need to answer these questions.

- **Consequential: What are the consequences of the enquiry regarding furthering social justice and human rights?**

---

<sup>26</sup> De-registration refers to the process the university undertakes, when students are not capable of settling their fees with the institution, expelling them from their academic programmes.



This research project has special emphasis on social justice under the Capabilities Approach and a decolonial perspective. It aims to highlight historical injustices and inequalities brought to the present at the same time as it proposes and advances current practices towards a solution. The way in which we produce knowledge in higher education institutions, as well as how we implement it, is key and necessary for global social justice. That is why De Sousa Santos says ‘There is no global justice without cognitive global justice’ (2015, p.8) and this research is substantial to open up and advance some of these debates beyond theoretical discussions.

On the other hand, it is not only the democratisation of knowledge and the production of knowledge that this study tackles; it also examines how these processes take place in the advancement of the individual aims different individuals have to lead the lives they have reason to value. This is substantial in order to challenge monolithic ways of understanding human nature, and to go beyond the assumption that all human beings want the same.

- **Interpersonal: How have the relationships among researchers and participants changed?**

Before the project, there was no relation among the team members. Although studying or working at the same institution, we were from different departments, disparate educational levels, diverse cultural backgrounds, and from various socio-economic levels. Indeed, the project has been a nexus for all of us, and part of the evidence of this study proves it. Drawing from the previous section on caring for team members, as a group, we became a family—a group of individuals watching out for each other and helping each other in the good times and the bad. This is also visible in some of the capabilities expanded in the two cases displayed in this study (see Chapter Seven). However, I suggest that the most important point is not how the relationship between the researcher and participants has changed, but how this relationship has impacted all of us, in the way we were and we are now.

- **Ontological: How has the nature of reality been modified to contribute to social justice goals?**

The research project helped all the members, including myself, to understand the complexities and heterogeneous nature of social justice, how intrinsically diverse people perceive reality differently, but equally how diverse values are used to assess justice in micro contexts. This complex view did not diminish the potential for critical thinking of the group, but expanded it in so many ways, because injustices were always at the centre of our debates, conversations, and actions.

- **Catalytic: What actions resulted from, or are potentially possible as a result of, the study?**

The study resulted in a compendium of actions from academic to grassroots actions. First of all, in terms of academic engagement, this study has been discussed and scrutinised by a range of diverse scholars, from conferences presentations to university seminars or online presentations (see Chapter Nine). All this has helped to engage academically and think about the future actions of this study. Moreover, in terms of the DCR group actions, they have carried out some activities. First of all, they created a website with information on the outcomes of the project and as a means to engage with other students and citizens as a whole about injustices in South Africa. This has been complemented by the videos that can be watched on the website created by the participants and the collaborative book. These sources were intended to start conversations with the larger society about the social issues the group was researching: racism, inequalities, and gender

inequalities. Additionally, the group of participants planned a book launch in August 2018 as a way to engage in informal conversations with the student body. In this presentation the participants presented the videos in addition to the book, and expanded this conversation to other interested groups.

- **Critical reflexivity: How do the researchers and participants understand themselves differently?**

Without a doubt, the project has shifted my own understanding in diverse ways. First, as a participatory practitioner, it has shown me that power relations are insuperable. This does not mean that it is impossible to challenge these internal structures of power, but that it requires a strategic view. For instance, my own role in the project was crucial to reverse or/and transform the hierarchical institutional culture and stereotypes that the group started with at the beginning of the project. However, I was able to use this image to deconstruct stereotypes for myself and for the group. On the other hand, the participants have been engaging with me at different levels, and this has changed the way they see me as a PhD student, from Europe, to achieve a closer relationship. This is visible throughout the interviews, and also in the way we relate to each other after the project.

- **Reciprocity: What has the research contributed to the community?**

The project cannot claim a direct contribution to the community. However, the critical learning and the various engagement events planned with the student body and the university in the future might impact them in different ways. Especially, as a secure and open platform in which students can raise their concerns about informal culture on campus and the extent to which these structures impact their lives and student experiences.

#### 4.9. VALIDITY

Validity talks about the quality or soundness of a study (Given, 2004), however, generally validity is framed in terms of data and methodological coherence and quality. In this study, I thought it was appropriate to go beyond a conventional validity assessment, including other aspects of the research that were necessary to add to the check list. O'Leary (2004) presents a highly innovative way to assess validity through a truly comprehensible frame, which not only accounts for the methodological requirements but also adds different ethical dimensions. Three main strategies are proposed by the author: (1) Appreciating alternative realities; (2) Getting the full story; and (3) Ensuring the authenticity of data. These strategies embraced the themes discussed in the previous sections, adding to the importance granted to the participants as being beyond 'an object of study' and to the constant iteration process, in terms of data collection and verification of the results. Equally, the strategies tackled the empowerment of the participants through capabilities expansion or the democratic nature of the project, concerned with the inclusion of unheard voices and the creation of plural spaces.

STRATEGIES	MAIN POINTS
Appreciating alternative realities	Actively explore the personal and societal assumptions that underpin the understanding of the researcher and the researched, and accept that these may be quite distinct
	Suspend initial judgments
	Check your interpretation of events, situations, and phenomena with 'insiders'.
Getting the full story	Attempt to empower silenced voices
	Seek out and incorporate alternate and pluralistic points of view
Ensuring the authenticity of data	Work towards researcher-researched relationship built on trust and mutual respect
	Triangulating data and findings
	Confirm the accuracy, relevance, and authenticity of interpretations

*Table 16: Validity strategies (Source: O'Leary, 2004)*

#### 4.10. CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the challenges when applying participatory research as a PhD study and the ethical issues that such practices carry. I have justified my decision to divide the study into two research projects (A and B) able to embrace the different principles according to my PhD qualification (B), and for the total ownership of the process by the group of participants (A). The second section of the chapter has presented the methodological decisions regarding my individual study as a case study (Project B), the rationality behind the methods used, the population and a brief clarification of the phases during the data collection and analysis. The last part of the chapter has paid attention to ethical issues, rigour criteria, and validity, highlighting how these different spheres of the research project are interwoven with both research projects (A and B) and are central for the trustworthiness of the project as a whole.

Therefore, after introducing the literature, exploring the theoretical framework and providing the research design, the second section of this thesis will explore the empirical data of this study. This part will provide an initial investigation of the case study. Thus, Chapter Five focuses on decision-making and the process of the ecology of knowledges presenting a description of the various workshops undertaken by the group in 2017. Next, Chapter Six and Seven focus on capabilities explorations and the use of these capabilities within the participatory process. Chapter Eight reviews the five principles, discusses the theoretical framework and focuses on the challenges and opportunities of the case study.

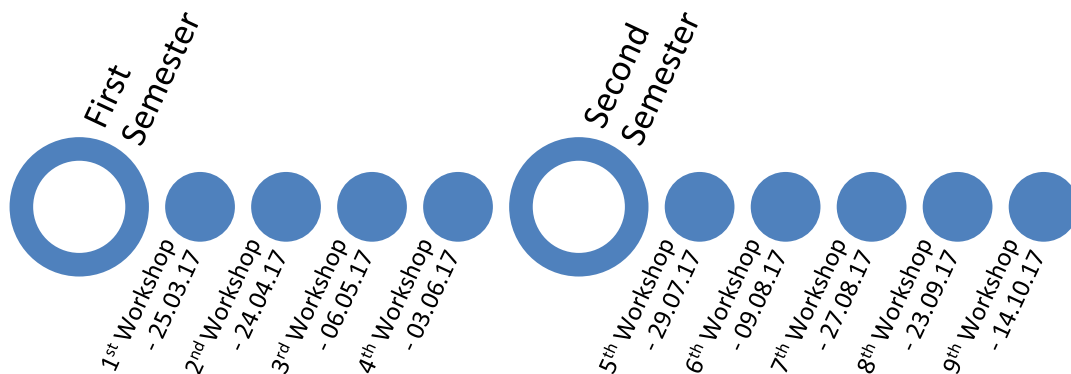
# PART II

## CHAPTER 5: EXPLORING A DCR CASE STUDY

### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the DCR process undertaken by twelve undergraduate students at the University of the Free State in 2017. Various sources of data are displayed here, such as the second and third phases of interviews, reports on participant observation and my individual journal. The text not only provides a comprehensive account of the activities carried out by the group, but also highlights the collaborative decision-making during the process, together with the platform for the ecology of knowledges. Thus, the case study here presented is not only the application of DCR, but its production throughout the case study as a research outcome. The chapter focuses on the first research question, ‘How a participatory capabilities-based research project can be conceptualised and implemented in the light of the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches?’

First of all, a total of nine workshops took place between March–October 2017.



*Figure 9: Workshops schedule*

Below is a brief overview of some of the common features of the workshops. The team usually met once a month; however, at times, the group met more than once, as in the sixth and seventh workshops or during our informal meetings, which are displayed in the last section of the chapter. Except for the first workshop and part of the second, which were designed by the researcher, all the meetings finished by collaboratively discussing the agenda for the following meeting. This meant that the members were actively involved in the creation and implementation of the process from the very beginning of the project. The working periods were variable; however, most of them took place from 9 am to 5 pm. The group usually had breakfast together, normally at 8 am, and a break for lunch at around 12:30 pm, together with small breaks in between. These periods were mostly used to have informal conversations and engage with each other. Some days were

especially significant, when the group stayed talking until late, well after the workshops had concluded, and went back home together. In addition, transport was provided to some of the members who lived off-campus. The form of compensation was discussed and agreed by the group during the first workshop; it would be in the form of a voucher for the local shopping mall for each workshop attended. Moreover, due to the nature of the project and the need to access online information and work with diverse programmes, members who did not have a personal laptop were lent one for the duration of the project. In total, seven of the twelve members enjoyed the use of a laptop during the project at different stages of the research process.

On the other hand, to broadly analyse this case study, the DCR project with undergraduate students had two different thinking processes that interacted during the project at different stages, in a reciprocal conversation, creating an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015). These two processes were; (1) a scientific research process, which was based on academic knowledge; and a second process, (2) a plural learning process, which was composed of personal and collective experiential knowledge, local knowledges, intuitive knowledge and cultural knowledge through oral traditions.

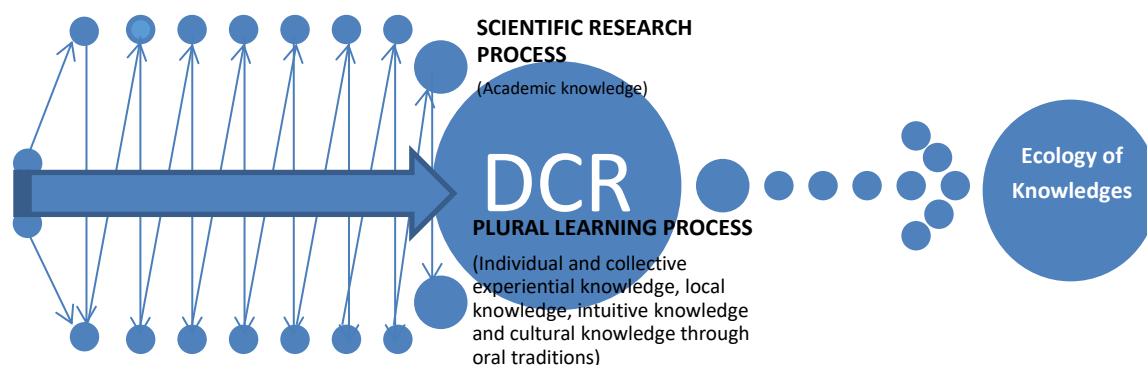


Figure 10: Ecology of knowledges throughout the process

The combination of both processes, together with their continuous interactions, allowed the project not only to provide the members with epistemic access to scientific knowledge—with the aim of a democratisation of knowledge—but also allowed the epistemic ground of the project to be ‘imperfectly’ diversified. As subsequent sections will highlight, the process of ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015) is not perfect when it is down-to-earth; it is a continuum where spaces for other knowledge systems are opened and debated. Therefore, it is a process that requires flexibility for the diverse tempos of learning among different individuals. In conclusion, respecting these individual learning processes, while at the same time promoting a diverse epistemological base, seems to be the right path to take towards an ecology of knowledges in a project like DCR.

In the following sections, each workshop is described and explored, highlighting the different activities of the day and the decisions taken by the group.

## 5.2. FIRST WORKSHOP: CREATING A TEAM

The first workshop was the only one where I, as a facilitator, was fully in charge of the structure, planning, and implementation. The meeting consisted of establishing a first contact between the members. Despite the fact that the students were acquainted with me, and I with them, due to the individual interviews and informal meetings conducted beforehand, the team had not yet had the

chance to get to know each other properly. For this reason, the first activity of the day was for the members to prepare a brief presentation, a maximum of fifteen minutes each, to introduce themselves. They could talk, sing, show a piece of art, or a conventional PowerPoint presentation. It was up to them to think about how to introduce themselves to the group. Two formats were used most: oral presentations and PowerPoint presentations. Some of them talked about their friends, their families, their hobbies and/or their cultures. For instance, the in-depth explanation of her family name and family tree that one member gave were particularly significant. During the final interview, this member expressed how important this moment had been for her, and the significance of having the space to talk about herself and her family in her own way.

Following the presentations, the group discussed what our lunch would be during the workshops. We all debated together about various options, and a decision was made by consensus to order delivery pizza. For every workshop a different member would be in charge of this task, asking the members for the preferences of the group and taking the order.

The second activity of the day was to discuss justice and injustice. The activity started with a brainstorming session. One of the members volunteered to write on the flipchart for the group, featuring words such as 'circumstances', 'moral', 'government' (positive/negative role), 'power', 'ignorance', 'hierarchy', 'centralism/localism' and 'competition', which would form the core of our debates. The group discussed these points enthusiastically, relating the words to their experiences and the experiences of others they knew. After a while, one of the members proposed watching a video together about social justice (from TED talks online) that was relevant to the debate the group was having. Thus, the group watched the video together and this helped to increase the number of ideas and concepts related to the debate about justice. Therefore, more words were added to our list, such as 'knowledge', 'conscience', 'proactive/action' and 'social classification' (positive or negative).

After debating for a long time, I proposed a practical activity to better understand our different perspectives on justice. The group was divided into four small teams composed of 2 to 3 people each. All the teams were given the same issue and they needed to look for the most just solution and present it back to the group as a whole at the end. The activity helped the group to continue thinking about justice/injustice, providing the big group with different solutions based on diverse criteria of justice. Therefore, the whole group concluded the activity by understanding that justice can be assessed differently by diverse criteria, such as values, for example. However, it is important to investigate the circumstances surrounding that situation as a way to have a better-informed choice. One of the students commented on this activity in the second interview:

'I got to understand social injustice. I never really understood it. It was just a word which I never really understood. But the first workshop... it just, it just helped me. What social injustice is... The little things that we don't think they... they are social injustices. That social injustice begins at home, academically here in varsity... It just helped me. It's just... It made me understand it even more. It, it gave me like a very broad understanding of what it really is. Yeah.' (Bokamoso, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 17).

This activity was designed according to the literature and the DCR principle of starting a research process with a common concern about injustices. Despite identifying which injustices were important for us as a group, it was necessary to grasp what justice meant for us in a certain way and what we would use as an evaluative space to assess unjust situations. This not only helped the group to expand their own understanding of justice, but also to find the common values that they

had in order to approach the topic. Thus, bringing new or additional perspectives to the group was an important practice.

The following activity of the day was to agree on what injustices we were interested in, which injustices the group wanted to explore together. Writing on the flipchart, the members wrote about various issues, mostly related to their lives, such as racism, social privilege, social classes, power, gender and sexual orientation. As the group was composed of twelve members it could be divided into smaller working groups. Thus, the members agreed on three topics to be researched by three small groups: racism, gender inequalities, and social inequalities/power imbalances.

In this exploration about the specific concerns of the group, the agency of the individuals was at the fore of the process. One member gratefully expresses what this space for agency meant for her:

‘It feels amazing because at first you sort of think that... agghh... it is just some volunteering stuff... it’s nothing, but becoming part of the project. It’s... it feels more like, it feels more personal than just being a participant. [...] Personal in the sense of... that, for example, talking about certain topics, such as race, issues that we actually experience on a day-to-day basis, that we live... so... that’s why I say it feels personal, it’s like things we experience sometimes and issues that need to be tackled. And having the platform to do so, it’s... it’s just amazing’. (Minenhle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

To finish the day, the last activity aimed to explore what the research meant for the members, and which options the groups had for exploring their topics. Therefore, as in the previous activity, the session began with a member writing on the flipchart and brainstorming possible research avenues. Ideas such as actively answering questions, collection of data/different means, searching for information, objectivity vs subjectivity, reading, surveying, theory and practice, science, mythology, evidence, quantitative or qualitative research, were discussed among the group.

The group continued talking about different methodologies, and the various ways to understand reality and knowledge. Although these concepts were unknown for the group they proved to be not only helpful for the development of the project, but also for their studies in general, as the following sections will highlight. One of the members expressed how this workshop was significant for her in terms of enhancing her vocabulary:

‘Specifically... The first one it was... enhancing my vocabulary, I was like... I am used to natural science and biochemistry terms... so in terms of humanities... like... those definitions, it was something actually new for me. [...] It introduced us to the different terms: Capabilities Approach, methodology and epistemology and ontology, so yeah... those two were really insightful. (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

The team closed the workshop by agreeing on the date of the next meeting and individually exploring the ideas that we had been debating that day.

### 5.3. SECOND WORKSHOP: TRANSFERRING RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPLORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The second workshop was intended to have two major functions: to progressively transfer the responsibilities of the project to the members, and to start the process of ecologies of knowledges, in terms of providing a diversification of knowledges internally.



In order to transfer the ownership of the project to the members of the group, two activities took place at this second workshop. First, as the project initially had a website page for the members to upload videos and information of interest, the group started the day with a website training session. Henceforth, they could not only create a new website for the project or update the current page, but also gain skills and use them for their own benefit (see Chapter Six). In that training session, basic skills about how to create and design a website were taught. At the end of the activity, all of the participants had a basic website and had managed to work with the editing program for a while. However, no decisions about the project website were made at this point, as the group intended to make a collaborative website page at the end of the project (see Workshop Nine).

Secondly, one of the strategies to transfer the ownership was to start designing the following workshops by consensus with the whole group. What did the group want to do next? When? How? And who would be responsible for each activity? This helped to create a culture of communal decision-making, which was present until the end of the project, although not without challenges. One of the members said:

‘I was telling Rethabile that Carmen gives us so much rooming space... like... there is the world, run wild... yeah... so I was telling her, Carmen gives us so much... how can I put it? Free... freedom in terms of getting there. She doesn’t tell us no, you have to do this and think about this alone... So you actually get to expand your thinking... like... OK... So, I don’t have to think in a little box.’ (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Nevertheless, she continues by saying how difficult this was for her when she was used to being given the exact work to be done and told how to do it:

‘Mmm... I feel like, because we are so used to being given... like...this is the work...you’re gonna write about it. That is what we are used to.’ (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

This was definitely not the only comment about this matter; the transfer of responsibilities was not easy at all. Members mentioned several times that it was confusing to have the freedom to decide because they had spent more than twelve years in an authoritarian educational system that told them how and when to think. However, this structural conversion factor and its relation with the members’ functionings will be explored in the following chapter. This section will focus on the exploration of the activities carried out by each workshop.

The group agreed that they wanted to meet with individuals who might know about the topics they were interested in. Two groups were proposed: more students from the university, who could bring radical perspectives on the different issues under research; and scholars, who could give us a scientific perspective. A table was designed by the group with the individuals they wanted to invite and who was responsible for informing the person and ensuring that they would come to our next meeting. Initially, the third workshop was designed with three activities. First, jointly planning the next workshop; second, the scholars’ meeting; and third, the students’ meeting. However, the scholars’ meeting was postponed until the fourth meeting, due to the individuals invited to attend being unavailable on that day. The idea was to prepare relevant questions to be asked at each of the meetings relating to our three different themes and appoint a member of the group to be responsible for coordinating and facilitating the collective dialogue.

Furthermore, these strategies of inviting different groups to speak to us was part of the aim of the collaborative research to promote ecologies of knowledge (De Sousa Santos, 2015). Only one decision was initially taken by the researcher, that of inviting various social movements to talk to

us about the issues of concern to the group. This idea, however, was not solely given or pre-designed by the researcher alone, as one of the members of the group was actively involved with several of these groups and helped to select the groups, structure the dialogue, and facilitate the discussion that day. Thus, the second part of the workshop was planned and scheduled with this member, who was in charge of contacting the pertinent organisations and arranging a meeting to explain the project to them and how they could help to enhance our knowledge about the issues the group was exploring. Three organisations were invited to this workshop for an open dialogue: 'Embrace a Sister'<sup>27</sup> (a feminist student organisation on campus) to talk to us about gender inequalities and racism; together with 'Unsilenced UFS'<sup>28</sup> and the Transformation office of the Student Representative Council of the university, to debate inequalities and power struggle.

For all the groups invited, the debate started with a brief explanation of the organisation, who they were and what they did, followed by questions from the members and an open debate about the ideas on the table. As all the debates were rich and extensive covering a wide range of challenges, this section will focus on the feedback from the students about these conversations.

Undoubtedly, this workshop was one of the most significant for the members. During the interviews, they referred to the second and third workshops as the most significant ones in the whole project. This section will provide some examples to explore the causes behind this overwhelming opinion among the members.

Iminathi mentioned the language policy and how different conversations on that day changed the way she thought about these issues:

'Remember when the SRC were here... and they started to touch... based on what is happening on campus, in terms of the language policy<sup>29</sup>... what did they talk about again? I don't remember now but I remember they spoke about a lot of things, we spoke to Embrace a Sister... and... it literally... it changes you, because you have different perspectives like... even if I talk to somebody maybe before we met with the SCR and what not, and then we talked about the same issues after. I think, my opinion would be so, so, so different because now you hear different perspectives... so you understand... So, ok, this is how this person thinks. [...] It was very enlightening to hear other people thoughts

---

<sup>27</sup> Embrace a sister is a feminist student organisation founded at the University of the Free State on May 2012. Its aim is to focus on all issues pertaining black woman and other minority groups. They challenge the set status quo that they are subjected daily through oppression. Their activities are diverse, from the promotion of gender dialogues on campus, protest against rape culture and support to victims among others.

<sup>28</sup> Unsilenced UFS was born as a student organisation claiming for justice after the Shimla Park incident at the UFS in February 2016 (see link for more information [https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report\\_27-february-2017.pdf](https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report_27-february-2017.pdf) [25.06.18 09:19]). The organisation focuses on the unequal and constrained situation of black students on campus, performing artistic protests to highlight their demands (see the link for more information <http://www.thejournalist.org.za/art/unsilencing-ufs> [25.06.18 09:21]).

<sup>29</sup> The UFS was initially a bilingual institution with two main languages of instruction: English and Afrikaans. Programmes were offered in both languages; however, some questioned the equal conditions for students when attending different classes given in different languages, claiming that white students attending Afrikaans classes were benefited (see the link for more information about the language policy <https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/policy-institutional-documents/language-policy.pdf?sfvrsn=0> [25.06.18 09:27]). This is not an isolated case, as this claim has been voiced in other traditionally Afrikaans universities in the country. Especially relevant is the case of Stellenbosch University and the viral video "Luister" (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4> [25.06.18 09:31]).

about certain topics as well... yeah. [...] It was actually an eye-opener for me, really an eye-opener... if I can put it that way.' (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Another member, Siyabonga, uses similar words to refer to those conversations, 'Just hearing what they have to say... from a leadership point of view... it was... it was... enlightening...' (Siyabonga, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017). Or Khayone, for instance, who highlighted his learning regarding gender issues, 'I learned a lot of kinds of things, like that day when... it was those other people from Embrace a Sister... like we were having a debate about... the issues that women are facing and that those issues are not being addressed then.' (Khayone, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Rethabile talked about how much she learned during these conversations because she was not aware of some of the issues that were discussed: 'The Embrace... and the SRC transformation office showed me a lot of things that I never thought about. Like... there... she... she... in a sense, like she opened my mind because there are a lot of things that you as a person, as a student, you are being ignorant to.' (Rethabile, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017). Thato explained in the interview that listening to the SRC members was really interesting for him, 'The SRC members... because... the SRC... so... hearing the things that came out from them... was really interesting [...] Yes... yeah... the things that she talked about, was really interesting about culture... how the way they do things in the country... it was really interesting, so for me it was really interesting... that one [the workshop].' (Thato, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Amahle, equally, highlights this workshop as the most relevant for her, due to the really rich and open dialogue. For her, the group discussed things that she was not aware of, as other members expressed previously. She said in the interview how this conversation even had an impact on her and on her way of being:

'That... it kind of changes my perspective at it... mmm... the last talk that we had... I think... yeah... it was like different people there... it was actually after that... that I left my hair in an Afro<sup>30</sup>... and [her friend]... was like "Oh no... it's actually really nice!" And I was like what?... Like how?... and then for once, it was just fine with my other black friends... "That looks nice"... I remember like those things... that's like... you are valid as well, even if like... It makes you feel that way and... that was the first time in my entire life that I ever just walked around with my Afro... it was so weird... but I also like it... I understand that it doesn't have to feel that way... that I must feel a little bit uncomfortable... but I was happy... that was a big, big thing.' (Amahle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

This workshop was relevant for many of the members, not only because of the diverse perspectives presented in the dialogues, expressed above, but also due to the safe and open space to talk about sensitive issues. This was especially visible in this workshop and in the following one, in which racism and other delicate issues were discussed. The members stated that spaces where they could feel safe and comfortable to participate are scarce on campus; sometimes they even referred to classrooms as being challenging spaces in which to participate openly:

---

<sup>30</sup> Afro refers to when a black person wears her/his hair in its own natural state. This, to a certain extent, is a political feminist symbol which highlights the oppression of black women through hairstyles, due to the prevalence of white standards of beauty. See link for more information <https://www.newstatesman.com/media/2014/01/politics-black-hair> [25.06.18 9:43].

‘I have never in my three years of being here, I’ve never raised my hand in class to give a view about something or to ask a question... yeah... I’ve never... they are very different, in that sense. In the sessions [workshops] I am able to say something I have the confidence to say something and the environment allows me to say something, and in classes, there are a lot of people and most of them are not... so... they are very different from the normal setting that we have in the normal sessions.’ (Minenhle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May, 2017).

However, this social conversion factor does not act in isolation. As the chapter will highlight, for many of the members, especially female members, this social conversion factor was most often linked to personal conversion factors. Combined, they greatly inhibited their active participation, especially in the early stages of the project. Nevertheless, the transition seen from the beginning of the project to the end was remarkable for some of these members (see Chapter Seven).

#### 5.4. THIRD WORKSHOP: EXPLORING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES PART II

As the collaboratively pre-designed first part of the workshop (the scholars’ meeting) had been delayed until the fourth workshop, the group used the first part of the morning to talk about the research project and the next steps to take in the future. The group talked for hours about what kind of research they wanted to undertake, how, and in which phases. Questions were asked about what academic research looked like and ideas previously explained at the first workshop came back to the discussion. The topics of research, paradigms, and diverse methodologies were among the wide compendium of ideas debated that morning.

Finally, the group agreed to work in three small groups according to their own interests, based on the initial divisions of gender inequalities, racism, and social inequalities/power. For a few weeks, each group worked on a document that summarised their aims and research questions together with a methodology plan. The three teams were to meet at the next workshop in order to have the opportunity to get feedback and advice on their research document.

The second part of the day was dedicated to a dialogue with different students about the topics of interest to the group. Five students from different faculties and levels joined the meeting. All of them had been invited to the workshop by the members of the group, due to their different perspectives. One member, as usual, directed the conversation and acted as facilitator of the day, explaining to the guests what the group was interested in and opening the space for the joint debate.

The dialogue focused on racism and inequalities, although there was a residual discussion on gender. Racist issues at university occupied most of the discussion. The various guests presented their own perspectives and experiences regarding racist issues and discussed them with the members of the group. General topics such as white privilege, colour culture, black tribalism, university racist issues (such as the Shimla Park incident)<sup>31</sup>, gender-cultural traditions, oral history, oral knowledge, and inequalities (in general), were debated.

This debate, together with the previous one, were those most frequently cited by the members as being significant moments in the whole project. For instance, Siyabonga said it was important due to the different points of view we heard that day. He explains how this conversation was an eye-opener for him. Another member, Khayone, said this meeting was the most relevant one for him,

---

<sup>31</sup> For more information see [https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report\\_27-february-2017.pdf](https://www.ufs.ac.za/docs/default-source/all-documents/ufs-shimla-park-report_27-february-2017.pdf) [25.06.18 09:51]

due to the conversations we had about different cultures, gender, and politics in general; he said: 'I learned a lot from them' (Khayone, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017). Equally, he confirmed this in the last interview by saying that it had, in fact, been the most significant moment. He said: 'I feel like it's umm... one of the things that is gonna remain in my memory, I don't know until when, as far as I am concerned... that was the best moment ever, yeah.' (Khayone, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Furthermore, Karabo said this workshop had been important because she started applying the things she had learned in previous meetings, referring to the first part of the day and the discussion about research and our following steps. Additionally, Kungawo talked about how powerful it had been to hear, for the first time, a white person recognise their own white privilege: 'It's, it's very new to me to hear like a white person confesses white privilege and white... and all of these other things... It's... it was absolutely weird it was like... it just blew me away.' (Kungawo, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017). The same member reaffirmed in the last interview that, effectively, this conversation had been the most important for him. He added to his previous argument by saying that it was also important due to the fact that we were able to bring diverse individuals together to talk in one place:

'It was important for me because first of all... I've never seen that in my life, all those kinds of people in one area, like I always told you that... you know... since I got here, to this university... I encountered racism and I know that I've been always told about it... but when I got here and I saw that was actually real... and... we spend too much time through this activism thing, we spend so much time trying to... to spend time to speak up about it, I told you that I'm from Unsilenced UFS and stuff... umm... and generally people, student leaders on campus and student activists try so much, so many times to put together people of these different kinds of thought to come together and talk about a solution... so the fact that we were... able to do it, it was amazing... and that's why we were even planning to continue the conversation to a larger audience, to other students. [...] Umm... for me that felt like a milestone... we were able to do that... and you know... them after the conversation, the people saying that... it was so useful... you know that we were doing something great... you know... I'm still meeting people around campus who ask me... are you still debating that stuff? People wanted to become, to join us and to do research stuff... it was amazing... because they think that... you know such a platform needs to... be created and... the solutions need to come from us because... you can say that the university... has... has... or it's institutionally racist... umm... but it is at the end of the day us because we are the ones, we have to deal with it on a daily basis, we are the subjects... you know of racism... on the daily basis, but... we... the students, both blacks and whites, we are part of the solution. [...] If... we as students... we just become independent and do our own stuff, and I almost swore then, but if we do our own things... you know be... outside management, outside of the institution management, we can go somewhere. [...] For me it was like a milestone, it was really important, especially because racism is important to all of us... and a lot of us had been subjected to it, so to hear white people speak like that... and actually confess that racism it's, it's, there is racism here... yeah, that was... yeah... that was, yeah.' (Kungawo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

On the other hand, Lethabo referred to this moment as being important, not only because it was an eye-opener for many of us, but also because it helped to solidify the group identity. He said:

'In one moment it gave us like a group identity, I guess, and the fact that the people we brought in were very... umm... well-spoken in terms of, the things that we wanted to talk about, you know, Mo-Africa, and the coloured lady, umm... yeah... I think specifically, the people we brought in... they really brought a whole new eye-opening dynamic to it all.' (Lethabo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Or Iminathi, who explains how important it was because this debate was a revelation for her:

'The first one, because I remember that girl saying... about being coloured and people think... ummm... sorry... people thinking that being coloured, you don't have a culture and they were then like... nooo, we do have a culture... it was actually ahh... a life-boom moment... (Iminathi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Finally, Kungawo stated that although it was important to listen to the students that came to talk to us, to listen to other members of the group was also great. In his own words:

'Like I said again like... hearing like what people have experienced, yeah it's really, it's really interesting to me I don't know how to put it. Now it leaves me like... enlightened me to things like things I have never heard of before. And I know that the other guy, [referring to Khayone]. It's amazing when he talks like how he speaks of like South African history like that like for me... I need to shut up and listen to him speak because he knows a lot about African history. And then you get Lethabo who speaks about his Afrikaner experience and then you get someone like Rethabile.' (Kungawo, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

In conclusion, according to the data, including the interviews and the journal, the second and third workshops were the most significant for the members. Firstly, due to the fact that they were discussing issues that were relevant to them personally, but which they did not have available platforms to discuss, especially with the sensitive topic of racist incidents happening at the university; secondly, because of the information provided there, and the different perspectives revealed during the dialogue. This was, in fact, a space of plural learning, where different perspectives were displayed and scrutinised by the members in an open and safe platform.

## 5.5. FOURTH WORKSHOP: RE-POSITIONING SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

The fourth workshop was designed with two main parts. A first part dedicated to the discussion with scholars to talk about the topics we were researching, and a second part to explore the work done so far by the small groups over a few weeks, creating a document with research aims and questions, together with a methodology plan.

Surprisingly, after a really enthusiastic and active conversation with both of the scholars<sup>32</sup> who visited us that day talking to us about the issues under research, none of the members referred to them during the interview as being relevant or significant during the project. Furthermore, the second part of the workshop seemed to be difficult and overly technical for them, as it was based on exploring the different phases of research.

---

<sup>32</sup> Two scholars working on campus visited us that day as guests. Both of them specialised in inequalities and race issues. Firstly, Dr Marthinus Conradie from the Department of English, who has several publications related to critical race theory and social inequalities using discourse analysis. Secondly, Dr Luis Escobedo, who is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Reconciliation and Social justice and whose research focuses on whiteness and systemic racism.

An interesting reflection was made by one of the students about this central phase, where much of the scientific knowledge was used, through conversations with scholars and the use of scientific research as a way to continue our research process:

‘It’s a debating context... you... know... but at the end of the day, I don’t want us to lose that element of being like an informal settlement because if we go too formal it’s gonna end up being back to that, it is not a space anymore... because now people are trying to really ... ummm... impress their ideas... and instead of us talking about it and developing new thought, changing or not changing, or just being exposed to new thoughts... if we make it... too... formal. I feel like it will lose its safeness.’ (Siyabonga, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

The member was here referring to how an informal space, where everyone had a say, a safe space for expressing themselves in their own ways, was somehow being transformed into a formal space. This formal space that started with scientific concepts and ideas about research, together with complicated conversations about theory, made the members feel uncomfortable and, at times, lost. Lesedi said during the second interview:

‘Let me tell you something. (Laughs) Well while I was like... umm... there were a few words there. There were like D-whatever... I cannot even pronounce them right I was like... “Oh my God these terms are so big, I am so lost”, so I am like, “Oh God, okay! Calm down Lesedi, you got this.”’ (Lesedi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Their distance from these ideas and terms, their unfamiliarity, were not bad in themselves. The process was a space for learning, and this learning combined their knowledge and other knowledges expressed in different ways, such as scientific theories, for instance. Their combination is what allowed ecology of knowledges to be present in the process of learning and exploring together. Therefore, it was important to investigate new ideas and concepts in order to allow the team to expand its informational basis (Appadurai, 2006). Members decided that this kind of scientific knowledge production was important for them, after all, they were all students at the university and this institution used these frames to produce knowledge. Therefore, they decided to explore these ways of knowledge production to an extent that they could understand and manage from their undergraduate level. Some evidence of this learning and the benefits of being exposed to this knowledge will be shown in the following sections.

On the other hand, during this workshop, one of the members mentioned being confused about how to reference and access reliable scientific information. Furthermore, other members were interested in learning more about it, as they did not yet have research courses, or if they did, they did not have much information about it. Thus, part of the workshop was used to talk about scientific sources of information and academic reference systems. Members mentioned during the interviews how beneficial this was for them, not only for the project, but beyond it. For instance, Siyabonga mentioned how this helped him to look for reliable scientific information:

‘I used it a lot to get articles and information, to do that... so I learned how to use Google Scholar... I learned now where to go if I need some information, yeah... from actual academics, not just Wikipedia... like everybody resorts to... like Google... yeah.’ (Siyabonga, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Similarly, other students stated how this helped them in their academic work. Minenhle said:



‘Google Scholar as well, it makes things so much easier for me actually... because normally... I... I... normally took my information for my assignments... from... mmm... not so... umm... how do they say? I took it... from maybe blogs... I didn’t know that I should not take information from blogs... and that doesn’t mean that whatever they mean... is the right information... or... taking them from websites... or Wikipedia actually... so... and also... it is easier for me... in terms of the referencing, bibliography-wise... it really helped me... it made things so much easier for me... yeah.’ (Minenhle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

And Lesedi corroborated:

‘It helped us a lot, it helped with Google Scholar, you can use it for your academic work and it’s something that nobody would be... you know... you are not taught in class, your lecture or your facilitator... who knows? They don’t come to you and tell you “Hi, with Google Scholar if you need help with that and that and that”. I did... I did more than four assignments with Google Scholar and I did very well with them so... it helped me that way... in my academic work and when I see that... I did perform well and it’s something that it didn’t take so much time to learn, and I didn’t have to pay for it, because you have to pay for everything these days.’ (Lesedi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Certainly, the group talked about these sources of information and gained certain skills on this day, but the learning was an ongoing process throughout the project. Members were always able to contact the group by WhatsApp<sup>33</sup> or email at any time for questions, whether they were related to the project or not, due to the fact that the group was also a supportive space for personal issues. Therefore, this continuous contact between the members made the group a source of continual learning and capabilities enhancement among us all (see Chapter Seven).

## 5.6. FIFTH WORKSHOP: DEBATING OUR LEARNING

The interviews, especially those in the second phase of data collection, were sources of evaluation in terms of providing an individual perspective in the midst of the process. They were not only substantial in identifying difficulties and challenges for the group, but also in making these issues available to the group in order to debate them together to find a suitable solution. These tensions, such as the issue of punctuality or power imbalances in the group, were mostly debated between the fourth and the fifth workshops.

Firstly, during the second interview, I asked the members individually what they would change about the project. One of the participants mentioned punctuality and how that affected participation in the group. He said:

‘Because sometimes people come late, and when they come late... they just sit... they don’t even have an idea of what is really going on. [...] We have to be time conscious, when... when we say 9:30, make sure that we are here at 9:30, 9:45 at the latest, and then we start with everything.’ (Khayone, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Naturally, as this member observed, some of these delays were registered in my personal journal and the participant observation reports. One of the journal entries debated whether it was pertinent

---

<sup>33</sup> A WhatsApp group was created before our first workshop. The group used this communication channel for various reasons, from project-related issues to personal ones.

to initiate a debate with the whole group when it was only one member who was identifying this as a limitation. Nevertheless, the participant observation showed that this was in reality also a problem of active participation; thus, we dedicated some time to talk about it on this day.

The debate was started by Rethabile, who told us that we did not have a good excuse to be late and that it was not a question of meeting an hour later, but of being conscious of our responsibility to be on time. She also proposed that members always arrive an hour early in order to be able to start on time and allocate responsibilities among the members such as taking care of arranging the chairs and tables in the room, preparing breakfast, or setting up the laptop and projector. On the other hand, Lesedi proposed creating a punishment system; latecomers would not get the voucher for that workshop. This idea was not really supported by the rest of the group, so it was agreed to be responsible to be on time for the next workshop and that the last person to arrive, together with her/his respective group, would be responsible for setting up the room the next day.

Secondly, equal participation was mentioned by the same member who highlighted the problem of punctuality, who claimed that not everyone was contributing or participating equally. He highlighted that something which had to change during the workshops was ‘contributions... it’s contribution... everyone has to contribute.’ (Khayone, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

This response was quite surprising, as one of the questions everyone was asked at the second interview was if they were aware of power imbalances, or if they were provided with an adequate space to participate actively. Members mainly attested that the research project helped them to be more secure about their opinions and to express their opinions in public more easily. However, the researcher journal and participant observation also recorded some observations regarding some members being more talkative than others, or dominating certain spaces during the meetings. In this case, the interviews helped to investigate this matter from an individual perspective, highlighting that individual conversion factors were taking part in these divisions of active participation. For instance, some examples are provided below:

‘Because in a sense... that... you’re still scared, that if I say this it might be wrong. Or, because in your mind it’s always... I don’t know, we have this mentality that “your answer is always wrong”. So and then you know when you meet new people you’re scared to share a lot of things.’ (Rethabile, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

‘For me, I am always that person who sits at the back. I just sit and listen to people talk. And then I agree. I am like... ok, ok.’ (Bokamoso, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

‘I wasn’t so vocal. I know... I know that I am... ummm... I’m opinionated but most of the time, I keep it to myself... I felt... felt... something about certain issues... I just keep it to myself or I just tell a close friend.’ (Minenhle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

‘I think... you remember... I was quiet at the beginning and I didn’t really feel, like, valid to contribute and stuff.’ (Amahle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

In addition, Iminathi said that she did not like to talk and that she told to her group that she preferred to do other kinds of work to contribute to the group, such as reading the material. She said ‘I don’t like approaching people, I tend to be like, I am angry when I am not, so I am like OK... I prefer to be reading.’ (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Interestingly, this viewpoint was mentioned by six of the seven female members of the group, which clarifies that there is one or more structural/social variant interacting across individual conversation factors. A good example of this interaction is shown in the following quote by one of the (female) members, who said:

‘Yeah. Yeah, I do actually because I don’t know, a friend of mine always says I suffer from insecurity, I don’t really trust myself in terms of talking about your... sharing my thoughts... about maybe social injustices or maybe LBGTQI community and which is true because most of the time, when you come to varsity, when you come from a state school and you come to varsity, you feel like... no... uhh... Carmen is smarter than me, and that [another person] is smarter than me, so I don’t want to say anything because what if I say something stupid, something that might be stupid.’ (Minenhle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

This is a clear example of how social and personal conversion factors connect, inhibiting the functioning of voice. Nevertheless, as the following chapter will highlight, these conversion factors were challenged by the project, especially by females, who noticed the expansion of capabilities and actual functionings in participation and voice towards the middle and end of the project (see Chapter Seven).

The fifth workshop was right after the winter holidays, in July. This was a special opportunity to collect knowledge and perceptions from their own families, friends, and communities and be able to share them with the rest of the group. Thus, the group dedicated the second part of the day to sharing their knowledge of gender inequalities, racism, and inequalities in general with the group. Members collaborated in a broad discussion about the validity—or not—of this knowledge, and how different values guide the assessment of these ideas. Equally, the ideas discussed previously in other sessions were raised and scrutinised by the group.

The group concluded the workshop by distributing the responsibilities and tasks for each group to bring to the following workshop. Each group was responsible for conducting a brief academic literature review about their topic and exploring the different theories and approaches able to accommodate their object of study. The team also agreed on a more creative way to work on our individual journals, allocating time in the next workshop to present a creative piece of art, drawing, composition, or collage, to talk about the project, our own personal perspectives about it, and the issues explored.

## 5.7. SIXTH WORKSHOP: UNDERSTANDING THEORY AND CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The members of each small group prepared a document which contained a brief proposal, with different parts, such as a literature review, theoretical framework, and methodology. The three research proposals from each group were printed and given to each of the members to read before the presentation. They had fifteen minutes to read the document before the group presented it to the plenary, and after every presentation, there was a critical space to debate the various points of the research, to propose changes or improvements, and also to resolve doubts.

This practical activity was beneficial for them in terms of understanding what scientific research is, how to implement it and to get a sense of the different theories available to understand the social issues the team was exploring. Some of the students mentioned these activities during the interviews:

'I feel that because they did not teach us in how to do research probably we end up not being able to take up the right information. It ends up... with this research process... it's teaching me to work through information and... yeah... it's quite beneficial for me. Because in my course they don't teach us *unless* you do your honours, but *when* you do your honours... but it is not really guaranteed that you are going to do your honours because you need like a specific average, to qualify to do your honours, so it's quite difficult. Now you must wait for honours to do research and what not... but yeah... I think it is so beneficial to me... umm... yeah.' (Iminathi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Minenhle, Lesedi, and Rethabile explained how they benefited in academic terms, saying:

'It was very important for me, to know that... because I've been failing my assignments, so it was really important for me. Because it really helped me a lot. It helped me a lot with my assignments because I always failed my assignments and for the first time I got above 60%. So it was very important for me.' (Minenhle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

'I actually got 42 out of 50 just by doing that, and I was so proud of myself, so I was like... ok... this is new... I was sooo happy. [...] When that came in my academic work I knew... I knew what I had to do, so it made everything much easier, I'm sure of it.' (Lesedi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

'I would pass all my tests, but when it came to assignments I was always lucky... but then, this also gave me a way to... like... a way of how I do my assignments... in order to... I could even show you my marks, I even got 100% for this assignment that... yes... I never thought that I was really good at that... but now I can show that this research project really helped me a lot, I didn't expect that kind of mark for my assignment, which I thought I was struggling a bit with it. So it really, it really helped me, I could say it really did.' (Rethabile, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Amahle stated that, although she knew about research, she had learned more from the project than from her actual research module at her faculty:

'We did like a research module... first and second year... like... we do a project but I think in the past months, I feel like I've learned more about research than in those past two years... that... we used marks... and I did the test on it... and all those things.' (Amahle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

Despite these clear benefits, the knowledge and practice of scientific research were limited in this specific DCR project with undergraduate students. To bring about an ecology of knowledges (De Sousa Santos, 2015) is also to understand the different rhythms and learning processes that diverse individuals undertake. In this regard, it provided epistemic access to academic knowledge 'imperfectly', but equally, it provided space to explore and investigate other knowledge systems in the same context in order to scrutinise them. The members confronted how to propose a research project, how to look for academic and non-academic information, and how to implement a research project in a broad sense, according to their personal interests. Moreover, as Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon assess, 'The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully, but whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understanding of their practices, and the situations in which they

practice' (2013, p.19). In a DCR process, it will be said that this 'strong and authentic sense of development' is assessed by the expansion of freedoms (Capabilities) that these individuals have reason to value, moreover, providing the adequate platform for their achievement (functionings) (see Chapter Seven).

Nevertheless, returning to the activities undertaken by the team in this workshop, the group discussed whether to continue collecting data and analysing it in a conventional scientific way or whether to use an alternative way, one using their own experiences and knowledge gained through the process as a way to produce an alternative research outcome. Together, the group analysed the viability of such a project, with two main considerations forming the core of this discussion. Firstly, the second semester is usually a really dense and short period of the year, which, in many ways, considerably reduces the free time available for students; in this case it reduced the availability of the team members. On the other hand, two members of the gender group dropped out at this stage of the project, due to academic-related issues. Their leaving implied a redistribution of the members of that group into the other two groups—racism and inequalities—which affected the original distribution of the team.

The final decision, therefore, was to examine the knowledge gained from the project and our own experiential knowledge, in order to provide possible ideas/actions to use as a way to create an alternative research outcome. Thus, the group closed the first half of the day with the responsibility to think about possible ideas to contribute to the next workshop.

Another agenda point for the day was the discussion of a project T-Shirt, which a few members had proposed in the previous workshop. One member brought a photo with a possible design for the T-shirt. This consisted of a front part with the logo of the project and a back part with a slogan and the name of the person together with the words 'Researcher in action'. The whole group was enthusiastic about the design. Thus, some members took on the responsibility of obtaining price quotations for the T-shirts, in order to have them as soon as possible.

The last part of the workshop was mainly dedicated to the creative activity discussed in our previous workshop. This activity aimed to expand the students' work on their personal journals, as they had not worked on them very much during the first semester. The aim was to increase critical thinking about the project and create more journal entries. Thus, this activity, which I proposed personally, consisted in presenting an individual artistic creation to the group in order for them to reflect about the project, the ideas we were debating, and the learning process, just as they were expected to do in their journals. Thus, we sat together on the floor to listen to each other while enjoying some traditional Spanish food I had cooked for the group. The presentations were diverse and heterogeneous, with some members presenting a PowerPoint with images, others bringing symbolic objects, a drawing, or explaining videos or songs and their parallels with the project and the issues investigated. During the third interview, one of the members mentioned this activity as being really significant for her, saying:

'Like I said, maybe you can ask like in each workshop, but over the whole thing... ummmm... sure... when we sat down, the day that you made us *paprajotes*<sup>34</sup>... and everyone had their different... ummm... I don't know why, but I thought that was... yeah... because it's not like a... I don't know... It really stood out for me because it wasn't something that you just said like you go to this specific thing, but I thought that everyone

---

<sup>34</sup> Traditional Spanish food from the south of Spain that I prepared for that day and we ate together.

took their initiative to show themselves differently and that for me was the essence of the whole thing. [...] I enjoyed that... like I'll always remember that... yeah.' (Amahle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

All these kind of activities helped the group to create an environment of respect, listening and learning from each other, which was present throughout the project. Nevertheless, this activity that I had proposed was unsuccessful in encouraging students to work on their journals, as Chapter Nine will explore.

## 5.8. SEVENTH WORKSHOP: PROJECT OUTCOMES

The first part of the day was dedicated to brainstorming the ideas we had thought of. The group opened a discussion about which activities/projects could be implemented and what the related responsibilities and time needed would be. Ideas such as undertaking a participatory video project or a collaborative book were discussed, along with the creation of a website for its dissemination. Responsibilities were allocated and a schedule designed to accomplish the deadlines and task before the end of the project. Some of the tasks were, for example, that one of the members was in charge of the creation and design of the website, all members had to work collaboratively online with Google Docs for their contributions to the book—according to the three main sections agreed upon—and finally, the group would partly use the second half of the workshop to start on their videos.

Thus, the group continued the workshop by exploring how to use Google Docs and how to work collaboratively on an online document. This program was necessary for us to be able to work easily together on our book. This online software is available for free, with just an internet connection, but only two of the members had heard about it before the project, although they did not know how to use it. As the members wanted to work on the book collaboratively, a document was created and all the members were added as editors. The program was displayed on the big screen, and a brief explanation about its use and features was provided. Members of the group mentioned the benefits of using this program during the interviews. For instance, Kungawo said:

'Obviously for my academic work, my assignments, my... like a lot of stuff I do for school but also informally. I think in future when I want... when I want to send someone files, I will probably use that thing because it's more beneficial than just sending stuff... umm... you can also keep your stuff in that thing.' (Kungawo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Furthermore, Siyabonga stated:

'It was something I was told about but never really understood the way to use it. [...] It's something, I think, it could really benefit me in the future, because now I've learned... how to work with people like I said... on an assignment, now it is not really an inconvenience anymore, as long as we can access Google Docs, we could get some movement on whatever project, or whatever we have to do... yeah.' (Siyabonga, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

Indeed, the project not only aimed to expand knowledge, but also skills that might expand valuable capabilities for the members in the present and future (see Chapter Six). As has been mentioned, training in basic programs such as Google Docs, Google Academics or website design programs were provided at different stages of the project, together with some video editing software in our last workshop, representing important benefits for the members, as the chapter has explored.

The group dedicated the last part of the workshop to designing different storyboards among the two small groups. The idea was to design one storyline talking about racism on campus and another about inequalities and power imbalances, bringing into it the knowledge gained with the project and new sources of information, if necessary. The workshop concluded by arranging the agenda of our next meeting and the responsibilities for each member until then, deciding that the eighth workshop would be mainly used to produce the clips and edit the videos. To this end, the team ensured that all the members would have the video software installed on their personal laptops before then.

## 5.9. EIGHTH WORKSHOP: WORKING ON OUR VIDEOS

The storyboards were ready and the groups only needed some basic training on how to produce videos, taking into consideration lighting, framing, and sound. This basic training was provided, together with an explanation on the basic use of the video camera and voice recorder. The groups had some time available before recording began, so they practiced in the room. Once roles had been allocated among the members, agreeing who would take care of the video camera and who the recorder, the members were ready. Then, they went out to produce their videos during the first half of the day.

The team returned after a few hours to continue the activity by editing their videos. As everyone had the video software, a brief training session was provided using some of the material taken by the members, both video and audio. Basics skills such as clipping footage, the introduction of layouts and text, or adding audio to the video were provided. Thus, the groups used the rest of the day to edit the videos according to their storyboards, and received continuous help during the workshop.

Members mentioned this day during the interviews, some of them highlighting the benefits for the future in terms of their curriculum, or potentially doing work for someone else, or just as a way of expressing their agency and raising their voices about social concerns in the future. These are some examples:

‘I think I’ve benefited from that, now you know... some people... they don’t know about technology, they just tell someone, come and do this and do this, and you know that person... you can just do it for them... so I feel like that is one of the skills that... it did help me a lot... like, I think I can also... be able to do like a proper presentation... through that, you know sometimes... in a presentation you have to put a video there... let’s say, it’s a long video... do you know... it is like a really important part like it’s very important... so now you can be able to combine them... you just cut it short, just one minute... umm... or just two... so... I think that... in terms of skills, I learned something that I didn’t know... editing a video. [...] So... I feel like in terms of... video... doing the video thing, I did learn so much about that.’ (Khayone, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

‘This one didn’t help me academically... but... umm... I’m gonna need it sometime in the future... the video editing thing... program [...] that was really helpful.’ (Karabo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

‘That might be helpful... so yeah... I’m considering putting them on my CV.’ (Minenhle, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).



‘Yeah... yeah... actually, I thought that was cool, yeah I would like to use that again in future, ok... like... yeah... probably make like documentaries and stuff... you know I’m talkative so... I’m joking... but yeah... that was very useful as well, I see myself definitely using that in the future.’ (Kungawo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

‘No I didn’t... and I didn’t know much about that video thing that you told us... so that was really cool... because when you see those things, it’s something... it’s a skill that nobody will ever take away from you, it will be very surprised that... ehh... you don’t even have to pay for this.’ (Lesedi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

In fact, the editing of the video took a long time, which is why the group decided to meet informally on another day to conclude the video, setting aside the last workshop to focus on the book and the website. Thus, the team met the following week, during a public holiday, to finish the editing of both videos, working on them for the entire day.

## 5.10. NINTH WORKSHOP: LOOKING FORWARDS

This day was mostly used to work on the book and review the website together. The team worked on the book from morning to evening, using Google Docs on our laptops and reviewing the website together to add or delete the things that we wanted to be there. Siyabonga, the member in charge of the website, said during the interview that it had been a great experience to take on that responsibility:

‘I learned how to make a website, which is quite great... I mean... the time might come when I need a website myself, and then it’s really gonna help me.’ (Siyabonga, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

However, this viewpoint was not restricted to him, other members of the group valued the opportunity of learning how to set up and design a website for free with the program that was shown at the beginning of the project. Lesedi said:

‘I was... I was... we learned how to open up a website... it’s great because when you think of a website you think... oh... I have to pay for that... like every month... or something and I just want to stay away from those things until you have your own job or what not, but you helped us, like... it’s ok... it’s not like that... you can just... learn and here is how... it was amazing.’ (Lesedi, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview, Oct 2017).

As Lesedi said, this program is freely available to use and allowed the members to not only create a project website, but also gave them the skills to be able to create their own websites, or use it for professional matters in the future, without any additional cost.

Nevertheless, the book was not finalised in this workshop, but was agreed to continue working on it during 2018, in order to have a public event on campus (2018) in which to engage with other students about the issues explored and the possible solutions on campus. The book was structured into four main parts: the first, in which students wrote about the DCR project; the second, about racism, speaking about their experiences and personal narratives; the third, about gender inequalities, similarly focusing on personal narratives; and the fourth and final part, with reflections on social inequalities and power imbalances. Furthermore, the book was written in a variety of different languages, from English to isi-Shoto, isi-Zulu, Afrikaans, and isi-Xhosa. The idea was that, although the major part of the text was in English, other languages were given space

to be present in the book, reflecting the linguistic diversity of the group. Moreover, once finished, the agreement was to upload it to the website so people could obtain copies of it for free.

Certainly, despite this being the last workshop of the project, the team knew that this was not the end. The project had perhaps concluded, but the group had ideas to continue working together informally, at least for the following year (2018). Some of these ideas were to have a book launch at the university the following year, or to continue as a group of activists, providing platforms at the university for different groups to discuss these issues together, or to use social networks to create awareness. The team continues to have informal meetings today (2018), working jointly and creating actions that can raise awareness of the challenges we investigated together throughout the project, especially on racist issues on campus.

### 5.3.10. INFORMAL TEAM MEETINGS

Despite this chapter focusing on the formal workshops carried out by the group, the team had several contacts outside the project, which were sometimes related to the project and at other times were not. Therefore, this section acknowledges the various encounters outside the project, that were not workshops per se.

Firstly, members frequently met to attend seminars, university meetings or art exhibitions, which were more or less related with the project in some way. For instance, we attended the Africa Day Memorial Lecture (2017) given by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza at the Centre for African Studies at the University, along with multiple meetings convened by the SRC to update information on the de-registration issue on campus, which some of the group members were affected by. The team also participated in general assemblies convened by the university to provide information on the Shimla Park incident. Similarly, some members attended an art exhibition on campus related to LGBTQI rights. This was of interest as LGBTQI inequalities were raised at an early stage in the project as being a form of inequality on campus.

Secondly, the group even met for more informal meetings, such as watching a movie together or having informal meetings just to catch up or help with personal matters. These spaces were relevant in that they provided a sense of belonging and family environment, a topic which will be discussed in the following chapters.

### 5.11. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a comprehensive review of the activities undertaken by the group during each of the workshops that composed this DCR case study project. It has identified two processes, which interwove and developed throughout the nine workshops, as presented in Figure Fifteen in the introduction: (1) a scientific research project, and (2) a plural learning process. The combination of both processes made the promotion of ecology of knowledges possible (De Sousa Santos, 2015), bringing different sources into a common space for self-investigation and scrutiny. In this investigative space, research is thought of as a capacity in which individuals expand their own knowledge horizons about a matter that is important to them (Appadurai, 2006). This is the way in which this research process has mixed knowledges coming from different sources and adapting the process of research according to the participants' aims and capacities.

Furthermore, the ten sections have revealed how decisions were taken throughout the process, and the importance of the members' agency, situating them as the directors and owners of the project (see Chapter Three and Eight). This process has not been easy, and a variety of challenges have

been highlighted in order to learn from them, which will be further explored in Chapter Eight. In addition, the data have shown how the members have benefited from the project, and how significant some of the activities have been for the group. However, this analysis is incomplete; thus, the following chapters will focus on the individuals' valuable capabilities and their expansion through the project.

## CHAPTER 6: A PARTICIPATORY CAPABILITIES PRE-DESIGN TO GUIDE OUR PRACTICES

### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the prospective frame (See below) that the Capabilities Approach is able to provide for our participatory practices. Focusing on the DCR case study, the chapter highlights the analysis carried out at the beginning of the project—by the facilitator—in order to identify the individual valuable capabilities for the group and, therefore, design a strategy to be applied throughout the participatory process. Thus, the chapter focuses on answering the third research question: Which capabilities do these undergraduate students have reason to value and why? The chapter not only responds to the question empirically, but claims that the identification of capabilities is highly substantial for guiding a DCR participatory project. It argues that contextual capabilities are necessary for the project implementation, as well as presenting the actual use of these valued capabilities in this DCR project. Therefore, the empirical evidence is interwoven with theoretical ideas developed in Chapter Three, in addition to proposing the use of this empirical data to implement the role of the facilitator in a DCR process.

To this end, the chapter begins by exploring the prospective approach from a capabilities perspective by looking for capabilities-related recommendations that were investigated prior to undertaking our participatory project. This section concludes with a methodological question: Should we or should we not use a pre-designed capabilities list for our prospective frame? Therefore, the third section elaborates on the DCR group capabilities as a way to contextualise our prospective plan. First, it highlights that what we are looking for in our analysis are the most valuable capabilities among all the participants, and furthermore, whether these capabilities have a dynamic and contextual dimension. A comparison with Nussbaum's central capabilities is presented to argue that Nussbaum's list is not incommensurable (See below); we actually have good reasons to analyse individual-group capabilities, due to the richness of contextual features and their variation from the pre-designed list.

The fourth section focuses on the actual prospective frame designed prior to the participatory project in this DCR case study. The frame highlights the strategies drafted according to the most valuable capabilities among the group of participants. Moreover, an exploration of the actual application of these strategies is presented in order to show the reader how I—as a facilitator—applied the different recommendations from the prospective plan during the DCR project. The chapter concludes with some final remarks on how to analyse and design the prospective capabilities frame for our participatory practices as a facilitator, highlighting its benefits.

### 6.2. THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH AS A PROSPECTIVE FRAME

The Capabilities Approach can be used not only as an evaluative frame (see Chapter Seven), but also as a prospective approach. Comim, Qizilbash, and Alkire (2008) claim that:

A prospective application of the Capabilities Approach, in contrast [to the evaluative application], is a working set of the policies, activities and recommendations that are considered, at any given time, most likely to generate considerable capability expansion—together with the processes by which these policies/activities/recommendations are generated and the contexts in which they will be more likely to deliver these benefits (2008, p. 30)

Therefore, a prospective application of the Capabilities Approach to our participatory practice can provide us with a set of recommendations for enhancing capabilities expansion in our participants. In this case, I am not considering this prospective perspective to answer the question of how and why capabilities are being expanded, but as a way to produce a set of group-related recommendations prior to our participatory project. Using the Capabilities Approach as a prospective way to guide our participatory practices, we ask what capabilities are valuable for these participants, and what strategies can be designed prior to our participatory project to enhance them. Once again citing Comim, Qizilbash and Alkire (2008), the aim of this prospective approach is to find, ‘which prospective recommendations could or should arise from the capability approach’ (2008, p. 32). However, these affirmations lead us to other questions such as, are these recommendations based on capabilities? And if so, which capabilities? Are we to use a pre-designed capabilities list or not? And why? Therefore, before addressing the details from the DCR project, building from the theoretical framework, I will argue for the use of a contextual capabilities list in order to use the grassroots potential of the Capabilities Approach as a prospective frame prior to this participatory DCR project.

### 6.3. USING A PRE-DESIGNED CAPABILITIES LIST OR CREATING A CONTEXTUAL CAPABILITIES LIST?

As the questions above have highlighted, one of the main points to consider after having proposed this prospective use of the CA is to ask what the focus of our analysis is. Also, if we are using capabilities, which capabilities shall we use? A pre-designed list or a contextual list?

On the one hand, pre-designed capabilities lists are available within the capabilities literature. Some of them focus on a specific context, others are more generic, such as Nussbaum’s central capabilities list (Nussbaum, 2011). Nevertheless, building from the argument put forward in the theoretical framework, we have good reasons to design our own contextual list in order to offer contextual recommendations for our DCR participatory practice. Indeed, Spreafico (2016) argues that despite the time-consuming and elevated cost of some participatory practices:

Deliberative or participatory exercises are more coherent with the Capabilities Approach as put forwards by Sen (1999). It requires engaging representative samples of stakeholders as reflexive agents in order to capture their considerations over which capabilities matter most. (2016, p. 10).

The theoretical framework required this open-ended version of the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999). I defended, as Hoffman and Metz clearly state, that in Sen’s version of the Capabilities Approach, ‘capabilities cannot freeze a list of capabilities for all societies, for all times to come, irrespective of what the citizens come to understand and value’ (Hoffman & Metz, 2017, p. 2). In addition, I demonstrated, in line with Bonvin, Loruffa, and Rosenstein (2017), that the idea of ‘reason to value’ for Sen transcends the universalistic misrepresentation of rationality. Therefore, from both perspectives what we need within the Capabilities Approach literature is a more dynamic model able to embrace our cultural and contextual specificities, beyond universal aggregations, which are overwhelming used in the field. Therefore, to further elaborate on these ideas, in the following section I explore the group capabilities list from the DCR participants in comparison to Nussbaum’s capabilities list. I argue that despite there being some commonalities between these valuable capabilities and elements from Nussbaum, some elements are missing or are presented from different perspectives, in addition to how Nussbaum’s list appears to be not incommensurable. Thus, a contextual analysis can greatly expand our available information about

what exactly these capabilities mean for this specific group. Moreover, it substantially helps us in the subsequent process of designing our prospective capability plan.

### 6.3.1. UNDERSTANDING DCR VALUABLE CAPABILITIES AS DYNAMIC AND CONTEXTUAL

Prior to the participatory project, I conducted an individual interview with each of the potential participants. This first interview—as part of the first phase of data collection—aimed to identify the valuable capabilities for these participants (see Chapter Four). Following the interview, I dedicated time to designing an individual capabilities list for each of them; basically, by giving each valuable capability a title followed by a brief definition. Moreover, I decided to meet with each of the participants again in order to jointly discuss their individual list, in case any changes were required. As a final step, I aggregated all the individual lists into a single common list. Despite the difficulties involved in pulling them together, due to the differences in their lives (see Chapter Seven), some definite categories arose from the data, constituting five general valuable capabilities among the members. Table One presents the outcome of this analysis in terms of capabilities preferences among the members, highlighting exactly which capabilities were very important for them at the time of the interview.

VALUABLE CAPABILITIES PRE-PROJECT						
	Self-Development	Knowledge	Human recognition	Ubuntu	Health	Free time & leisure
Member 1	X	X	X	X		
Member 2	X	X	X	X		
Member 3	X	X	X	X		
Member 4	X	X	X	X	X	
Member 5		X	X	X	X	X
Member 6	X	X		X	X	
Member 7	X	X	X	X		
Member 8	X	X	X	X		
Member 9	X	X		X		
Member 10	X	X	X	X		
Member 11		X	X	X		X
Member 12	X	X	X	X		
	10	12	10	12	3	2

Table 17: DCR group valuable capabilities

Among the twelve participants, a total of six valuable capabilities were detected: (1) Self-determination, (2) Knowledge, (3) Human recognition, (4) Ubuntu<sup>35</sup>, (5) Health and (6) Free time and leisure. However, various questions can arise from looking at this table; e.g. why these capabilities and not others? Or, why was health only valuable for three of the participants?

To a certain extent, the data collection focused on capabilities that they valued highly at a specific time, more than a generic perspective. This reduced the list to a more focused one; it missed some

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter Eight for more information about this capabilities and its limitations.



essential capabilities due to them being valued to a lesser degree at that time, or due to adaptive preferences interacting with their choices (Teschl & Comim, 2005). Therefore, I identified that in cases like this study we can observe active capabilities—capabilities that are highly relevant at the time and in the context in which the person is assessing her/his choices. All these capabilities seem to be located inside a continuum from ‘more active’ (highly relevant) to ‘less active’ (less relevant). The entire continuum is divided by a threshold that allows the capabilities to become visible when analysing the data. For instance, in the top part, we can discern the capabilities that were visible at the time of the interview due to the circumstances in their lives—positive or negative conversion factors—and which affected their choices. In the DCR group, it seems that self-development, knowledge, and Ubuntu were closely related to their age and their situation as undergraduate students working towards their future, and how important these three aspects were in allowing them to lead their life in the way they wanted (Sen, 1999). On the other hand, human recognition was mostly linked to negative conversion factors, in terms of racial structures, which activated or increased the value of this capability for many of them.

In contrast to the active space, the threshold can indicate capabilities that are less important due to the circumstances surrounding the individual or due to adaptive preferences (Teschl & Comim, 2005). Although all the capabilities identified in this table are open to a more thorough analysis from a capabilities perspective, I focus here only on those classified above the threshold. This is sufficient for our purpose as the process allows us to easily identify the capabilities active at the time of our participatory project in order to design the prospective plan. Figure Two presents a graphic explanation of this understanding of valued capabilities as dynamic and contextual, across a continuum from active to passive capabilities.

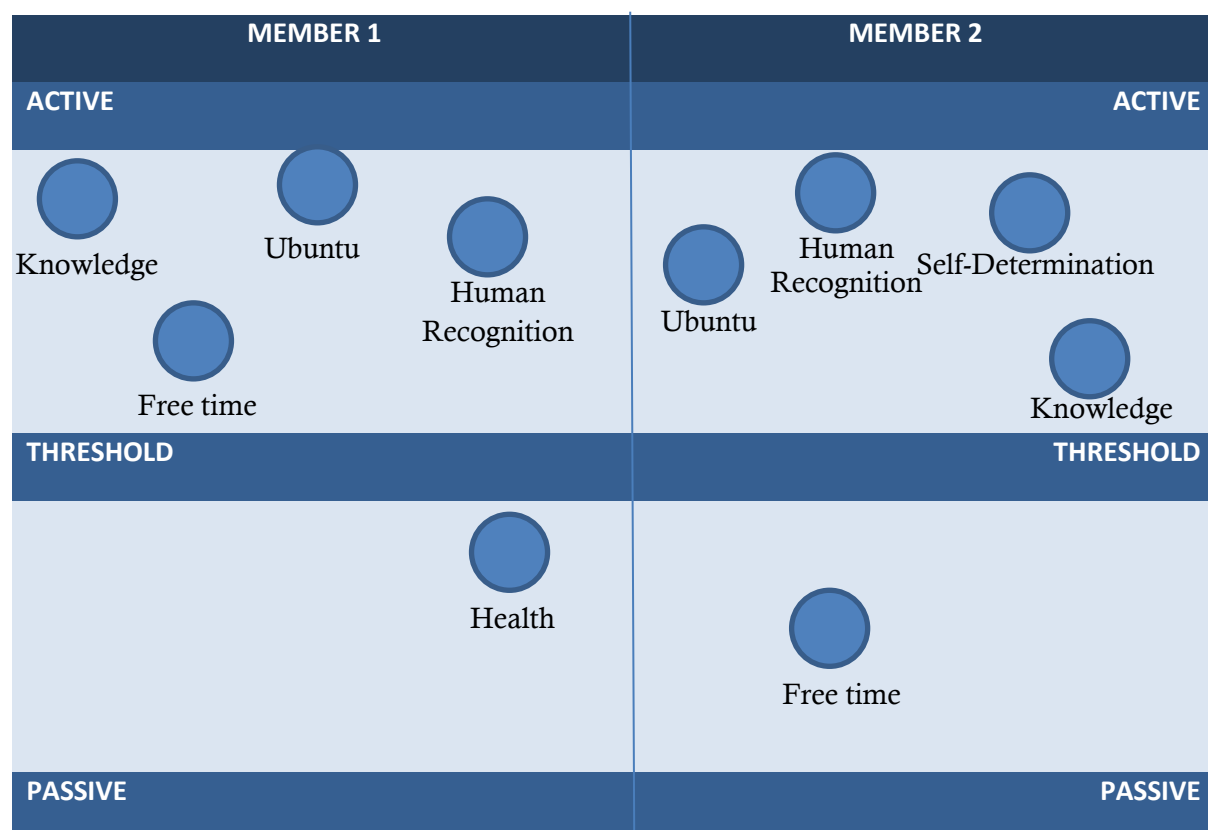


Figure 11: Dynamic and contextual model of valuable capabilities



Therefore, by understanding valued capabilities within a continuum, we can acknowledge the incompleteness of the analysis in terms of choices being adapted to the individual's circumstances (Teschl & Comim, 2005). However, at the same time, we can simplify the complex process of selecting valuable capabilities, taking into account adaptations, focusing on those that are situated in the active area of each individual.

Furthermore, this frame provides a pragmatic approach to easily access categories in terms of designing our prospective framework for our participatory practices, as will be presented in the following section. In order to do this, what is required is not to exactly and precisely evaluate whether these or other capabilities are valuable for a specific individual, but to generate recommendations (strategies) to enhance some of the capabilities identified as central at the time of the data collection through the DCR participatory project.

### 6.3.2. COMPARING DCR VALUABLE CAPABILITIES WITH NUSSBAUM'S CENTRAL CAPABILITIES

This analysis classifies capabilities according to different degrees—from active to passive—which makes active capabilities more dependent on the particular circumstances and lives of the individuals. From a capabilities perspective, scholars may ask why we do not use a pre-designed list, such as Nussbaum's capabilities list<sup>36</sup>. This decision would simplify our work and be extremely time efficient. However, I want to argue that there are very good reasons to pay attention to the specificities of our participatory groups, due to the fact that a single list might not be suitable for all contexts and all cases (Hoffman & Metz, 2017). In this matter, Nussbaum acknowledges that her formulation of central capabilities is abstract in order to facilitate its translation to implementation contextually (Nussbaum, 2012)<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, it is not only its level of abstraction and intended universalisation, but its own categories and incommensurability that it makes it problematic.

Hence, in order to illustrate this debate, this section compares Nussbaum's capabilities with the DCR identified valuable capabilities. The text will then highlight the potential of capabilities to be used as a cultural translation—as highlighted in the theoretical framework—due to the fact that active capabilities are dependent on the context, culture and moment of life of the individuals; therefore, they are not static, but on the contrary dynamic and not incommensurable (as presented above), and can be compared with other capabilities lists created in another context. Therefore, it is crucial for us to understand the valuable capabilities of the group before working with them in order to design an appropriate prospective frame that relates to their experiences and the lives they want to lead (Sen, 1999).

---

<sup>36</sup> Nussbaum's capabilities list has been chosen for its pretension to be universal, and the argument of this study is to acknowledge the cultural differences among capabilities preferences and conceptualisations. To a certain degree, this study could have employed a particular capabilities list, such as some proposed in the area of higher education (see Walker, 2005; Wilson-Strydom, 2016 for more information). Nevertheless, the argument of the text seeks to highlight the inconsistencies of using a universal list, such as Nussbaum's list, over and above other contextual related lists (e.g. some lists in the higher education context) and the importance of agency in capabilities choices.

<sup>37</sup> Nussbaum's perspective on the capabilities approach is slightly different from Amartya Sen. The aim of her intellectual project is the creation of a universal theory, and thereof a universal capabilities list, that can operationalise these capabilities as rights for all human beings.

## KNOWLEDGE

Although it seems simplistic to reduce twelve different understandings of the capability of knowledge into one single meaning, there are some fundamental ideas that are common to the group of participants. There were two main ways in which this capability was important for them. Firstly, as an end, mostly related to better understanding the world and the challenges surrounding them. Secondly, as a means to achieve (mainly) financial freedom. Therefore, two contextual claims can be made regarding these two important ways of considering active capabilities as dynamic and contextual.

Although both the ends and means can be related and interwoven, the emphasis on using processes of learning and diverse sources of knowledge to better understand their context and expand their informational basis to make better choices, seems crucial and substantial in the South African, post-1994 academic context, and given the age of the members. For instance, I suspect that this social conversion factor would not affect another undergraduate student in an affluent European country to the same extent, nor would their understanding of this capability be similar. For these students, it is of paramount importance to be able to reason critically and think about the circumstances and the injustices surrounding them.

Furthermore, this capability seems to have a direct connection with access to resources, especially in terms of job access and, therefore, financial freedom. While three of the twelve students enjoyed a relatively good financial situation, nine of them did not. Nevertheless, they all considered that it was important and necessary to succeed in their undergraduate programmes in terms of accessing a dignified job and thereby achieve financial stability. To a certain extent, these students had a really clear understanding of how the skills and learning they acquired during their higher education would be able to provide for their families, extended families, friends in need, and themselves in the future. For instance, it would be difficult to see this situation in a context of Sweden in 2018, in the sense that the individuals' enjoyment of capabilities would not be the same, nor would the conversion factors that impeded their expansion. Therefore, succeeding in higher education in the Swedish context would not be so related to financial freedom, due to the various other available options outside of higher education to achieve this same end, including the Swedish welfare state. Hence, although money is here not considered to be a capability, but a resource, this good is intimately related to the capability of knowledge for these students. Thus, for them, the capability of knowledge acts as a fertile capability (Nussbaum, 2012; Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007) providing access to resources and thus, other capabilities.

On the other hand, when comparing this valuable capability for the DCR group to Nussbaum's capabilities list, although some similarities can be found, they can by no means be regarded to be the same. The capability of knowledge in this group could be linked to one of Nussbaum's central capabilities, the capability of *sense, imagination and thought*. *Sense, imagination, and thought* is defined by Nussbaum (2011) as:

**'Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason**—and to do these things in a “truly human” way, **a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education**, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. ~~Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain~~' (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 53).

Only the parts that match with the knowledge capability of the group are marked in bold. In this case, the second part of this capability (struck-through) falls into the *human recognition* capability of this group, not their *knowledge* capability (see *human recognition capability* below). Moreover, there is an instrumental value of this capability for this group that is missed by Nussbaum's classification. In this case, an appropriate definition for this capability will be:

‘Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason and to do these things in a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education including formal and informal education. Being able to use this knowledge and learning to advance economic freedom through an adequately remunerated job’.

Hence, as presented above, for these students, succeeding in higher education in terms of gaining knowledge and skills that can help them to achieve financial freedom through employment is substantial to them, not only in terms of leading their own lives, but to also help others. The context of where they live forces them to strongly link knowledge and financial freedom. Therefore, although a few of Nussbaum's elements are present in this case, others can be related to the DCR group's *knowledge capability* through different capabilities from her list, whereas others are missing entirely.

### UBUNTU

*Ubuntu* is perhaps the most interesting case among the six capabilities discussed here. Twelve of the students valued *Ubuntu* in terms of helping/supporting others and being helped/supported. However, for eleven of the twelve participants, this Ubuntu perspective went beyond the idea of support, help or affiliation. For them, this capability was framed to some extent, greater or lesser, by the African idea of *Ubuntu*: ‘A person is a person through other persons’. This concept, which may in some ways be romanticised and exoticised, profoundly shapes this particular understanding of this capability. For this group, the capability of Ubuntu meant or represented a particular ontological position in which reality is conceptualised through our human interactions by highlighting the importance of ‘we’ over ‘I’. As Hoffman and Metz acknowledge, Ubuntu ‘is the idea that we cannot survive on our own, that we are vulnerable creatures in need of others to exist and to become who we are’ (2017, p.5). Hence, this not only expands or contextualises this capability in comparison with Nussbaum's list but expands our cultural understanding of it.<sup>38</sup>

For this case, two of Nussbaum's capabilities can be considered to fall under this category of *Ubuntu* in the group; namely those of *emotions* and *affiliation* (but only the first point). Nussbaum defines the central capability of *emotions* as:

‘Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development)’ (2011, p. 54).

Equally, she defines *affiliation*—only the first point—as:

‘Being able to live with and towards others, to recognise and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation

---

<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, see Chapter Eight for some details about the limitation of this capability and a deeper discussion of the consequences of these ideas, not only in this capability, but beyond.

of another. ~~Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech~~' (2011, p. 54).

Therefore, in this case, we would need to aggregate two of the capabilities from Nussbaum's list; however, we would still be lacking the cultural understanding of affiliation and connection with other human beings, mediated by a strong ontological position. Accordingly, this not only entails considering it important to be affiliated with and assertive to others, but also to be able to understand reality as a continuous interaction between humans—a fully relational reality. A definition for this group is:

'Being able to live with and towards others, to recognise our connections with other human beings and our inseparable condition. Being able to love and care for others, just as we are loved and cared for by others'.

This cooperative and culturally related perspective might clash with many of the conceptualisations of capabilities produced or influenced by scholars from the Global North, thus influencing how we have been framing this and other capabilities. Nevertheless, this perspective does not call for another universal way of understanding this or other capabilities, but to recognise the relevance of contextual and cultural features in the way we conceptualise valuable capabilities for individuals.

#### *HUMAN RECOGNITION*

*Human recognition* was one of the most highly valued capabilities within the group. Nevertheless, this capability was closely linked to conversion factors of their context and how these influenced each of their lives; for instance, issues such as racism, gender inequalities or endemic financial poverty. Therefore, in many from the group, this absence of *human recognition* disabled their active political participation in a variety of ways. Moreover, it seems that *human recognition*, in this case, was linked with voice and political participation, whereas in Nussbaum's case it is not. Two different capabilities from Nussbaum's list are needed in order to frame the human recognition capability for this group. On the one hand, the capability of *affiliation*—but only the second point:

~~'Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin, and species'~~ (2011, p. 54).

Moreover, it is necessary to include another capability from her list, that of having *control over one's environment*—but only the political part:

'Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association' (2011, p. 54).

In the DCR case, *control over one's environment* (political) was not a separate capability from *affiliation* (Second point). Moreover, using *affiliation* as the concept that summarises the capability seems to miss the central point in this group. Therefore, *human recognition* is able to embrace the freedom of being recognised and, therefore, being able to participate in political spheres. Thus, the DCR capability would look like:

‘Being able to be treated as a dignified human being whose worth is equal to that of others, not being discriminated against on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Being able to participate actively and equally’.

### SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Although the capability of *practical reason* on Nussbaum’s list can be associated with this group’s valuable capability, the *self-development* capability is broader and at the same time more specific to the group. Nussbaum defines practical reason as:

‘Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance)’ (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 54).

In this case, it is correct in the way it is presented, although perhaps it could be rephrased into a more detailed view for this group as:

‘Being able to form a conception of the good through life learning and experiences to lead your own life. Being able to do so in a reflective way, critically assessing the social stereotypes and labels that surround you. Being able to make active decisions about your life in order to lead it in the way you have reason to value. Being able to do so with acceptance, resilience, and optimism. Being able to understand the diverse factors that impede you from leading your life, and to create new forms of resistance with a positive and optimistic attitude’.

This definition is closely related to the group of individuals. It highlights that, beyond the generic understanding given by Nussbaum, there are actually three main constitutive elements for this capability in this case: first, being able to reflect critically about the life you want to lead, understanding the contextual factors surrounding you, and learning from your life experiences; second, being able to take decisions that are directly involved with leading the life you want to have; and third, to do so with acceptance, resilience and optimism. The first may be just an expansion of Nussbaum’s conceptualisation, however, the second is more oriented to the freedom to take decisions, to take action on one’s personal project, which is absent from Nussbaum’s frame but highlighted under her capability of *practical reason*. Moreover, the third is culturally related, in the sense of having to do it, doing it with a specific perspective, as defined by the students with an optimistic and positive attitude. In brief, as well as in other capabilities, self-development needs the incorporation of other cultural elements, in order to better represent the perspectives of this group.

### HEALTH

Although this capability was not presented as an active valuable capability for all the students. I will build the case for how this and other secondary capabilities for the group match—or do not match—Nussbaum’s capabilities list.

For the group members for whom this capability was central, it was due to the personal challenges in their lives. Interestingly enough, two of the three who considered this to be an important capability referred to it as being able to enjoy physical as well as mental health, which is related to two of Nussbaum’s capabilities. First, Nussbaum (2011) talks about *bodily health* as:

‘Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter’ (2011, p. 53).



In this case, although Nussbaum may consider ‘to have a good health’ to refer to body-mind health, she does not explicitly make the case. Moreover, her points about food security and shelter—which are substantial for these students—are not a matter of health for them. The students presented shelter and food as resources, goods that were as strongly linked with their *knowledge capability* as accessing financial freedom. Furthermore, Nussbaum talks about the capability of *emotions*; however, she does not refer to it as emotional health, but as emotional attachment, missing the sense by which these students refer to it in terms of physical-emotional health. Therefore, a definition for these students would be, ‘Being able to have good health physically as well as emotionally’.

### FREE TIME AND LEISURE

Free time and leisure was not an extended active valuable capability among the group either. This capability was important for three of the twelve participants. However, as it was important for some of them, this section explores to what extent this related capability (for these members) matches those on Nussbaum’s list. First of all, Nussbaum conceptualises a fairly similar capability as play, she defines it as, ‘Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities’ (2011, p. 54). In this instance, the definition is broad enough to embrace the case presented here. However, as the age of the students also determines their choices and preferences, this group had reason to understand these play and recreational activities from a different perspective to adults or individuals from any other age range. For instance, when talking about free time and leisure, although they were mainly referring to spending time with friends, they also meant having time to enjoy participating in various physical activities, such as sports. Therefore, although the similarities are fairly close in this case—going above and beyond the definition for this group—it might be interesting to question this type of capability in contexts where work and leisure are not separate, culturally speaking. For instance, communities that are not immersed in the Western labour market and that have their own internal distribution and organisation.

### 6.3.3. DEFENDING A CONTEXTUAL CAPABILITIES LIST FOR PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS

In summary, Nussbaum’s central capabilities list can be used to explore whether our group’s preferences match them (or not), and perhaps to further understand ‘passive’ capabilities for a more detailed or precise way of analysing valuable capabilities. This is due to the fact that capabilities—as argued in the theoretical framework—can be used as part of diatopic hermeneutics<sup>39</sup> (De Sousa Santos, 2006). Hence, capabilities can be used as a way to translate different cultures, for example, in the case of the *Ubuntu* capability and its comparison with Nussbaum capabilities of *affiliation* or *emotions*. This does not aim to unify; conversely, it is more a question of looking for isomorphic elements—elements that are similar or different and can explain their meaning—as I do in this section. Which elements relate to another, and which do not? Moreover, this analysis expands our informational basis for each capability and incorporates different cultural and contextual specificities that are missed when using universal lists.

NUSSBAUM’S CENTRAL CAPABILITIES	DCR GROUP VALUABLE CAPABILITIES
Sense, imagination, and thought Control over one’s environment (material)	Knowledge (End and as instrumental to financial freedom)
Emotions affiliation (1)	Ubuntu ( <i>Ubuntu</i> perspective)

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter Three for more information.

Control over one's environment (Political Affiliation (2)	Human recognition (Respect and voice/participation)
Practical reason	Self-Development (Resilience and positive attitude)
Bodily Health Emotions	Health (Physical-emotional)
Play	Free time and leisure (Friendships and sports)

Table 18: Comparison of Nussbaum's central capabilities list vs. the DCR group's valuable capabilities

Therefore, although there are similar elements between the two lists (as highlighted in this section and summarised in Table Eighteen), there are some specificities that can be lost if we design our prospective plan under a general list. Therefore, I defend the benefits of using a specific list to construct our prospective frame.

## 6.4. DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME: THEORY IN PRACTICE

Once the argument to defend a group capabilities list has been given, the next step is to understand how a prospective frame can be designed following the identification of our active capabilities, how this specific frame for the DCR project looked, and how it was implemented. Therefore, the first section explores the DCR frame, which is divided into three categories: (1) valuable active capabilities, (2) main consideration for that specific capability, and (3) strategies to be implemented during the project.

### 6.4.1. DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME

From the six active capabilities that arose from the data, only the capabilities that were relevant for six or more of the members were selected to construct the prospective frame of the project. The prospective capabilities plan was built over three categories in a deductive thinking process. First, the active valuable capabilities were selected—those considered as highly important by six or more members of the group—as being central to the strategy. Second, these capabilities were divided into the main considerations the students made when referring to them. For instance, in terms of the constitutive sub-freedoms that arose from the main capability. And third, specific strategies were considered that might enhance or 'imperfectly' achieve that freedom throughout the process. These strategies were especially guided toward actions that the researcher—facilitator—could realistically undertake when together as a group. Table Three presents the detailed prospective frame for the DCR project according to the group's valuable capabilities.

VALUABLE CAPABILITY	MAIN CONSIDERATIONS	STRATEGY
1. KNOWLEDGE	1.1. Formal knowledge	1.1.1. To provide spaces to explore together how scientific knowledge is produced.
		1.1.2. To use the project to enhance useful skills for their academic degrees.
	1.2. Employability (Financial access)	1.2.1. To provide training in skills that might assist their prospects of employment
		1.2.2. To provide proof of participation at the end of the project that can be attached to their CV.
		1.3.1. To give value to other types of knowledges



	1.3. Learning beyond formal knowledge	1.3.2. To use spaces in the project to apply these knowledges in relation to others and understand their relation with theories.
2. HUMAN RECOGNITION	2.1. Respect	2.1.1. To balance power structures within the group, enabling the participation of those who are less talkative.
		2.1.2. To value every opinion provided and to use the project as a space to assess these opinions together with respect and love.
	2.2. Voice/Participation	2.2.1. To use positive reinforcement for those who tend to participate less.
		2.2.2. To give roles of responsibility to those participants who are less active.
3. UBUNTU	3.1. Networks (Emotional support)	3.1.1. To meet with the members outside of the project, in order to create spaces for friendships and emotional support beyond the project meetings.
		3.1.2. To allow conversations about personal issues to be taken into account for the group and to work together towards a solution.
	3.2. Networks (Information)	3.2.1. To use emails and messages as a way for the members of the group to connect with each other and share information, especially about job opportunities and bursaries.
4. SELF-DEVELOPMENT	4.1. Critical thinking	4.1.1. To avoid simplistic explanations or the presentation of one unique perspective.
		4.1.2. To allow different perspectives, in order to assess together whether they are appropriate or not.

*Table 19: DCR case study prospective frame*

This table is a practical example of how a prospective pedagogical plan can be designed from a DCR project. This plan can be a key document for the project, in terms of providing guidance for the facilitator in order to achieve the DCR principle number five, in terms of the research as a process for capabilities expansion/enhancement; it can also be used to assess the process during and after the participatory project.<sup>40</sup>

#### 6.4.2. APPLICATION OF THE DCR PROSPECTIVE FRAME

Therefore, the following section highlights how these strategies were chosen, and how they developed during the DCR project as a way of guiding the facilitator role.

##### A. KNOWLEDGE

In the prospective frame, the knowledge capability was divided into three sub-themes representing the major points within the data collected from the participants. Points 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 represent the instrumental use of this capability, while point 1.1.3. expresses this capability as an end, as discussed above.

##### FORMAL KNOWLEDGE

Formal knowledge was composed according to two different strategies. The first (Strategy 1.1.1.) attempted to familiarise undergraduate students with the ways in which scholars produce

<sup>40</sup> For instance, a questionnaire can be produced from this table, in which the participant can rate the extent to which these strategies were accomplished by the project on a scale from 0 to 10. However, I will further elaborate on the evaluative aspect of the Capabilities Approach in the following chapter (Chapter Seven).

knowledge and what we consider knowledge to be. This was important as a way to build on different skills in the second strategy. For instance, it will be difficult to develop certain research skills without knowing how research is conducted at the university and the diverse ways in which knowledge is created. Therefore, the second strategy focused on skills such as researching, and also in terms of allowing them to improve their own learning within an academic context. For these students, it was really important to succeed in higher education and to get a degree.

These two strategies were implemented at different times and stages in the project. Initially, the first workshop focused on how scholars create knowledge. However, these conversations were extended to other workshops, such as the third and fourth, which reflected on the research the students wanted to implement. Although it could be said that not all the students left the project with a perfectly clear idea of knowledge production in a scientific sense, they did expand on the degree of understanding they had prior to the project (see Chapter Five).

Furthermore, throughout the process, I tried to develop skills in the participants that would have a positive effect on their academic performance. For instance, critical thinking—which is advanced under the self-development capability—along with some other practical-oriented skills, such as the use of academic search engines. Academic search engines helped some of them to use more reliable information and therefore, they discerned an increase in their academic performance (see Chapter Five). Equally, academic writing was practiced, especially during the central part of the project, when the three different groups needed to work on their own proposal and submit a written document.

#### EMPLOYABILITY (FINANCIAL FREEDOM)

Employability was a big concern for the group of students. To a certain extent, they wanted to succeed in higher education in order to have more possibilities of attaining a well-paid job. The prospective frame used two strategies. First (1.2.1.), using the project in terms of providing skills that could help them be better prepared to find a job. These skills ranged from more abstract and generic elements, such as timing or responsibility, to more specific ones, such as working with a laptop and the use of different software, as well as team-working (see Chapter Five). Equally, the prospective plan designed a strategy in terms of providing the participants with a proof of participation in order for them to attach it to their CVs in the future.

#### LEARNING BEYOND FORMAL KNOWLEDGE

These students valued formal knowledge in terms of helping them to succeed in higher education. However, they equally wanted to learn from their own experiences and from other individuals in order to help them understand the world around them. Therefore, they valued other spaces for learning beyond the classroom, especially when these spaces allowed them to explore things that were important to them, such as racism, or inequalities. Moreover, this was closely related to the idea of *Ubuntu*, as well as understanding that knowledge is multidirectional, and therefore, they could see any human being as a source of knowledge.

The first strategy (1.3.1.) was related to giving value to different knowledges; the second (1.3.2.) to providing spaces in the project to relate these other knowledges. This process has been well explored in the previous chapter. Various approaches were used in order to achieve both of these aims. For instance, experiential knowledge was valuable in our discussions as a way to reveal our positionalities. In the sense, that most of the time our conversations began with the participants sharing their experiences with the group and trying to link them to scientific theories and debates. To provide an example, this was precisely the case in one of the discussions with the student

organisation 'Embrace a Sister'. The group started discussing their own practices and experiences as located in a specific gender category and from there we elaborated into feminist theories. In these cases, my interaction as a facilitator was to enable a space to talk about experiences and facilitate their connection with various theoretical positions, as well as the other way around; I enabled students to explore theories that could link with their own experiences, or not, and assess them together.

### B. HUMAN RECOGNITION

*Human recognition* was divided into two categories, mutual respect and voice/participation. This capability seemed to be strongly connected to the context of the participants. For instance, while respect appeared to be strongly connected to community values, voice and participation were mostly lacking among the members. In this case, different conversion factors were easily visible in terms of racial structures or gender roles impeding their own participation. Thus, in their context, this led to this capability acquiring a high importance for them, due to its absence.

#### RESPECT

The first strategy (2.1.1.) focused on power structures within the group, not only by enabling participation for those who were less talkative, but also challenging the power imbalance between myself and the group. For instance, I used my personal journal to register these power imbalances, as well as take action on them. For example, one of the members of the group tended to co-opt conversations, so I would try to balance his strong opinions with those of other participants. Strategy 2.1.2. meant that even though some really radical opinions were involved, I always tried to provide the space to explore them carefully together. This allowed the participants not only the space for voice and participation—as the following two strategies will show—but beyond this, also allowed them the space for discussion. For instance, if someone made a sexist comment, I would try to create an open dialogue to discuss whether this comment was appropriate or not and why.

#### VOICE/PARTICIPATION

The voice/participation category did not affect all the members of the group to the same extent, although it did affect some of them, predominantly the female members in the group, due to prevailing gender roles. In this case, I would always be careful with my responses to them, but I would equally try to reinforce the positive aspects of their interactions, opinions and so on (strategy 2.2.1.). Moreover, as strategy 2.2.2. shows, most of the time I would allocate responsibilities to the members that were quieter or more passive within the project. For instance, making them the moderator for the conversation that day, or giving them the task of taking care of lunch for the group.

### C. UBUNTU

*Ubuntu* was one of the most important capabilities among the group. Within this capability, various subcategories were collected, as shown before. Some of them were difficult to implement, as in the way this capability represented an ontological position for many of the students<sup>41</sup>. Nevertheless, I decided to conceptualise it as two categories, as a way of differentiating the two types of support and connectivity that the group could provide to each other, both giving and receiving support, expanding this capability. Therefore, the first one refers to support and care in terms of emotional support, being there for the problems of others; the second, concerns networks in relation to information, in the sense of having access to information.

---

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter Eight for more information about the limitations in this Ubuntu capability.

## NETWORKS (EMOTIONAL SUPPORT)

The first measure for networks in terms of emotional support (3.1.1.) involved creating spaces outside the project to meet with the students individually or as a group. To some degree, these spaces helped reinforce the friendships from the project and strengthen our relationship. As the previous chapter has shown, this was achieved in various ways, such as meeting for conferences, exhibitions, or more personal meetings to catch up or talk about a specific problem.

The second strategy (3.1.2.) concerned allowing conversations about personal issues within the group and helping the group to get involved with the resolution of the issue all together. Usually, this happened when the students were engaged in personal conversation before or after the workshop. At times these conversations lasted a long time; we talked for hours about the worries or issues some of the students were facing.

## NETWORKS (INFORMATION)

In terms of information and resources, the strategy was more directed toward creating open communication channels in the way that the group could be connected and access information quickly (Strategy 3.2.1.). For instance, an email list was created at the beginning of the project and used as a way to inform members, especially about bursaries and job opportunities on campus. On the other hand, a WhatsApp group was created, in this case for more informal information, in terms of reminders and maintaining general contact with the members. However, this group was also used at times to share information about bursaries and job opportunities.

### *D. SELF-DEVELOPMENT*

The self-determination capability was difficult to conceptualise into categories. There were three main points among the members concerning this capability, as discussed in the previous section. First, the importance of acknowledging and thinking critically about the social stereotypes and expectations of society in your life. Second, the opportunities for autonomous decision-making, especially with matters that affect your life and the way you want to lead it. And third, to do so from a perspective of acceptance, reliance, and optimism. These three sub-categories were difficult to separate into different strategies, therefore, I decided to use only one sub-category, that of critical thinking, with two closely related strategies.

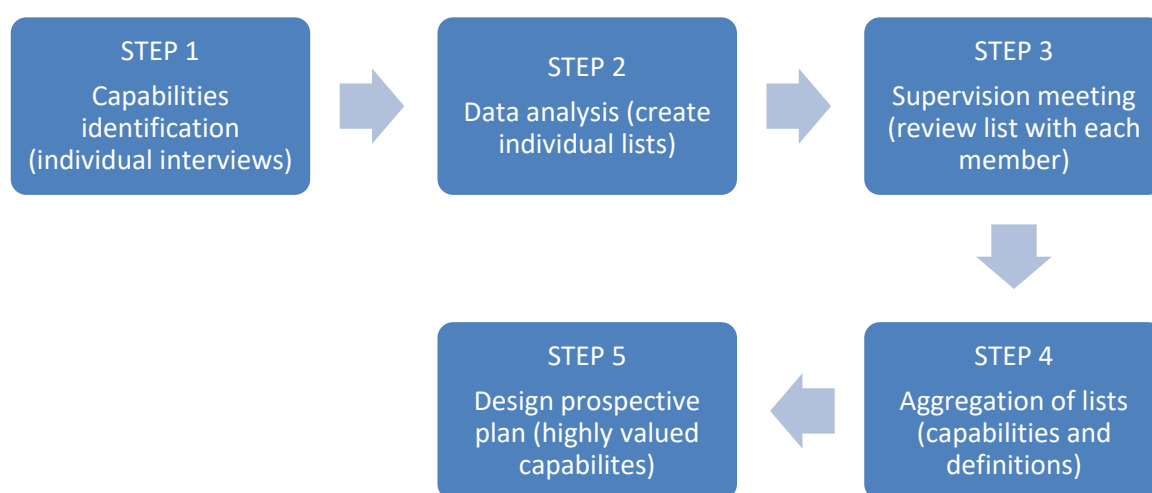
## CRITICAL THINKING

Although the concept of critical thinking can be a really ambiguous one, in this case, it helped me to frame what all the students meant by their self-development capability. This can be revealed by reviewing the two strategies proposed here. Firstly, strategy 4.1.1. was to avoid simplistic explanations or one unique perspective. This could enable students to challenge their assumptions. However, this strategy went together with 4.1.2. In terms of allowing different perspectives, in the sense of using the research project to contrast and assess these perspectives together. Therefore, this aimed not only to expand the informational basis but also to increase the autonomy in their decisions, as was reflected in the above section. Throughout the project, this was something that went on during our workshops, but was especially focused on the topics the group was interested in researching.

### 6.4.3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS OF A PROSPECTIVE FRAME

In conclusion, the Capabilities Approach can be a really valuable framework to provide us with some guidance in our DCR practice. Especially orienting our practices towards the lives that our participants have reason to value (Sen, 1999). To do so, different stages need to be undertaken by the facilitator. Firstly, to identify the active valuable capabilities of our participants. This can be

done as established above, through individual interviews. Then, the researcher will explore the data, creating an individual list for each of them. This list will be used in a subsequent list, which the researcher and participant can discuss together and make changes if necessary. And finally, the aggregation of the list will provide us with a list of capabilities, from which we will select those that half—or more than half—of the group consider being really relevant. Moreover, the aggregation of the definitions of each capability can be used to frame the main considerations from our prospective plan and decide where to incorporate the different strategies to be followed by the facilitator.



*Figure 12: Process of the prospective plan*

These steps are an orientation to illustrate the process of analysis by the facilitator to elaborate this prospective plan; therefore, they may be subject to change and re-elaboration where needed.

## 6.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to explore how a prospective perspective of the Capability Approach can be applied to our DCR practices, arguing that it actually has substantial benefits in terms of orienting our practices towards the individual aims of our participants. The first section was dedicated to exploring what a prospective approach is within the Capabilities Approach. I argue that in this perspective we are looking for an analysis of capabilities that can provide us with a set of specific recommendations to implement our DCR participatory project that is closely related to the participants enrolled. However, the second and third sections highlighted some methodological questions. When deciding about capabilities, we need to clarify whether we want to use a pre-designed capabilities list from the literature or whether we want to use our own elaborated list. I have strongly defended the latter by comparing the DCR valuable capabilities with Nussbaum's central capabilities list. Furthermore, this has provided evidence showing that although we can look for isomorphic elements—elements that are not necessarily the same but similar—we still

have added value in our specific list, especially in highlighting 'active' capabilities, as the model presented has shown.

The final part of the chapter focused on the actual prospective frame designed for this DCR participatory project. First, clarifying how this list of capabilities came out of the data and the steps I made to reach this outcome. The prospective plan was presented in a table with three levels: active valuable capabilities, the main considerations, and strategies for each consideration. As this prospective table represented only the set of recommendations for the implementation of the participatory project, the following section not only explored why these considerations and strategies were made, but also linked them to the actual practice. Thus, the section described the different attitudes and the real actions made during the project to follow the strategies from the prospective frame. To conclude, the chapter finished with a clear summary of the steps to be taken when designing the DCR prospective frame.

Therefore, this chapter has not only answered research question three, in terms of which capabilities these students have reason to value, but has also related the exploration of the data collected in this study with debates from the theoretical framework, discussing the group's capabilities with Nussbaum's central capabilities. Furthermore, it has equally used this data to frame the DCR facilitator's role in the process, in order to achieve DCR principle number five (expand participants valued capabilities). After this exploration of which capabilities these students have reason to value and their application to the DCR process through the facilitator's role, the following chapter will analyse two student cases, in order to understand their individual preferences in terms of valued capabilities and their achievement due to the DCR project.



## CHAPTER 7: BROADENING OUR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS

### 7.1. INTRODUCTION

Having investigated the prospective frame, this chapter explores the experiences of two members from the twelve participants in the DCR project. These two members were selected—see below—as a way of illustrating how the Capabilities Approach can provide a more adequate evaluative frame for participatory practices. Exploring a participatory project under a capabilities lens requires more than an evaluation of general capabilities, as presented in the previous chapter. Focusing on individual valued capabilities contributes to the expansion of participant's valuable freedoms, as defined by the participants themselves (Sen, 1999). In this manner, the grassroots potential of the Capabilities Approach is enhanced, challenging other generic and extended practices in the capabilities area. Hence, this chapter focuses on the third research question by looking at the cases of two students and answering which of their valued capabilities were expanded through their involvement in the DCR project. As in the previous chapter, the empirical data is not only explored in order to answer the research question, but to highlight the potential of the CA to evaluate participatory practices, and therefore, how the facilitator can evaluate her/his implementation of a DCR project.

Therefore, the two cases are here displayed to demonstrate the potential of a capabilities evaluation. First, a broad explanation of each member's life experiences is provided in order to understand their valuable capabilities. Second, each member's valuable capabilities are explored in detail to understand why they are important and how the project has achieved these capabilities, if this is indeed the case. The capabilities presented for each case are distinct, according to the formulation process by the participants. Furthermore, each case concludes with a summary reflection on how the project has contributed—or not—to the achievement of each member's capabilities.

The chapter concludes with three main contributions of the Capabilities Approach to participatory evaluations. First, it expands the informational basis of the evaluative space. It expands the evaluation from an outcome perspective (functionings) to a freedoms-outcome perspective (capabilities-functionings), giving primacy to the valued capabilities of the individual to evaluate the outcome. Second, it provides an individual centred perspective. It is able to capture the differences between members and how different conversion factors affect their personal capabilities before and after the process. And third, it avoids a paternalist evaluation, beyond evaluations drafted and implemented mainly and only by external actors. The Capabilities Approach does not provide an external evaluative frame. Conversely, it constructs an individual frame based on capabilities that are valuable for the individual and explores whether or not a practice has achieved these capabilities individually, applied to a DCR practice as proposed by this study.

### 7.2. BROADENING OUR PARTICIPATORY EVALUATIONS

Minenhle and Siyabonga, the two cases presented here, share some common features. For example, they both study at the same university as undergraduate students, they are black, and they live in a post-1991 South African context. These features cause them to have some similarities. However, Minenhle and Siyabonga are not the same, for instance, their gender and socio-economic status are different. These differences between them truly matter when it comes to evaluating our participatory projects.



### 7.2.1. CASE ONE: MINENHLE

At the time of the project, Minenhle was a young woman of twenty-one years of age in her third year of studying political science. She comes from a township close to Bloemfontein and has a stepbrother, with whom she is no longer in contact. She identifies herself as Xhosa, even though her mother is Sotho and her father Xhosa. Minenhle never had the opportunity to spend time with her father because he was incarcerated and died while she was very young. Her childhood was not easy, she remembers her mother struggling to provide for the family, especially after the death of her father. Eventually, her mother moved in with another man and this situation did not benefit Minenhle. Minenhle's mother and her partner verbally abused her for years. Without a doubt, Minenhle would have wished for a more supportive mother, but this was not her case.

Minenhle attended a public fees-free primary and secondary school where the unofficial language of instruction was Xhosa. Both schools were deficient in resources and did not provide a proper education for her to be able to access higher education easily. However, she fondly remembers a teacher at the high school who was supportive and helped her during that period.

In her community, she did not have much contact with white people. During high school, she did an assignment on racism, which, to some extent, made her feel frustrated and angry toward white people, because of all the stories she heard from the individuals she talked to. However, she thought it was wrong to think that way, making simple generalisations that all white people were bad. Therefore, she tries to understand the situation behind every person.

At University, she chose politics and started her first course of education in English. She wanted to study politics because it is a male-dominated field and she wanted to demonstrate to her community that a girl can make it through, as she is certain to do. This desire is especially due to all the negative messages that she received from the close community and family members. Minenhle was continually told that she would end up in jail like her father. However, none of these comments broke Minenhle down. On the contrary, she took it as a way of determining who she does not want to become, and who she wants to be, despite the difficulties surrounding her.

Her first encounter with University was when she arrived after being accepted, with a friend, to register as a student. This friend was looking for bursaries and knew someone who could help them. Fortunately, this person was really helpful for her too. He paid the tuition fee for her—because she did not have the money for it—looked for accommodation on campus and provided her with a bursary which covered the three years of her undergraduate studies. This bursary, despite not being much, was fine for her. She said 'for someone who is from my background, it is enough' (1<sup>st</sup> interview). However, as that year (2017) was her final undergraduate year, she was worried about how to finance her post-graduate studies, because Minenhle wants to continue studying. Minenhle understands the importance of education as a way to challenge her background and change her future.

For Minenhle, the enjoyment of being on campus did not last very long, due to the racism she encountered there as various racist incidents happened during her second year. In one of these, she remembers some incidents outside of her residence, such as one case with security guards, and the incident at Shimla Park<sup>42</sup>.

---

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter Five for more information about the Shimla Park incident.

Indeed, Minenhle is determined to work hard to become the person she wants to be. She wants to be the first woman to become President of South Africa. She is really determined to fight against injustices and show people that they can do it. She thinks that it does not matter what has happened to you in the past, or how bad it was; you should not allow these circumstances to define you or determine who you are.

In conclusion, Minenhle's story determines her own valuable capabilities. The context and the historical moment when Minenhle was born is substantial to understand what kind of life she wants to lead and the things she wants to do. Therefore, having briefly revealed some aspects of her life, her capabilities choices will be better understood. Minenhle highly valued four capabilities at the time of the project. These were (A) Human recognition, (B) Ubuntu, (C) Self-Development and (D) Knowledge.

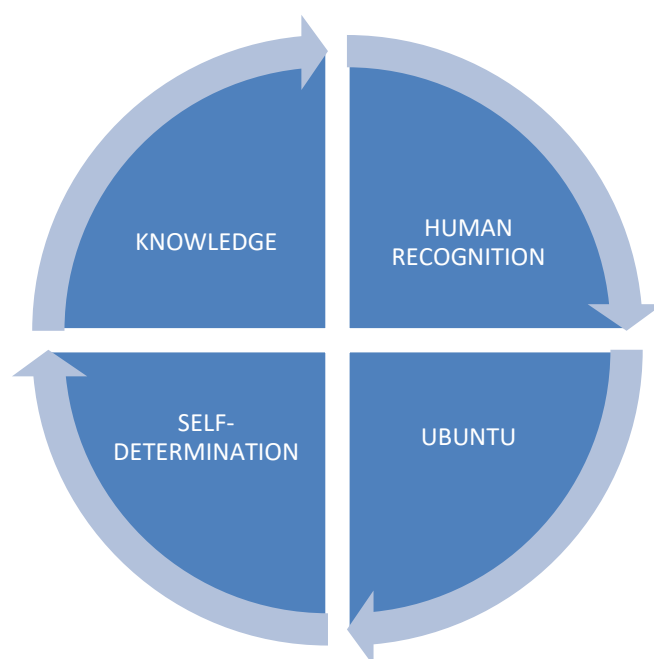


Figure 13: Minenhle's valuable capabilities

The following sections will explore each of Minenhle's capabilities. First, by showing why this capability is important for her, continuing with an exploration of how the project has expanded this freedom, if this is indeed the case.

#### A. HUMAN RECOGNITION

To be recognised by others and by yourself as a full human being, valuable for your intrinsic value and not due to the circumstances surrounding your person. Not being judged because of your opinions, race, religion, gender or culture.

For Minenhle, *human recognition* is strongly linked to her life experiences and her past. The constant influence of the community and family members on her self-perception acted as a degenerative conversion factor. The freedom of Minenhle to be recognised as a full human being was significantly reduced by the stereotypes in her community. However, this continues in the present, due to her context, and the different social categories that make Minenhle more vulnerable than

others. For instance, her racial group, gender, and financial status intersect, preventing Minenhle from exercising her own valuable capabilities, such as this one, *human recognition*.

Minenhle had encountered multiple experiences which degraded her own self-perception, which had been further reinforced by others in the context surrounding her. She said:

‘I don’t really trust myself in terms of talking about your...sharing my thoughts about...maybe social injustices or maybe the LBGTQI community, and this is true because most of the time, when you come to varsity when you come from a state school and you come to varsity, you feel like. No...uhh Carmen is smarter than me, and that [another person] is smarter than me, so I don’t want to say anything because what if I say something stupid, something that might be stupid.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

In this case, her security, her self-perception is mediated by the social stereotypes surrounding her, due to the circumstances of her life, minimising her own capability to value herself for who she is and not what is around her or what people think about her.

The project had an effect on this capability. As she explained, the group was not a judgmental space; we respected each other and provided a space to value our opinions and ourselves. She said:

‘The group...it does allow you to be yourself and obviously, they don’t judge you...I never...they don’t judge. That is one of the things that I love about it because I was worried...because I have this face that is like...I don’t wanna talk to you...which...but...they are actually quite friendly...because at the beginning I though...mmm...they will look at me...and...I don’t know...but they are...actually...a bunch of friendly people and not so judgmental as...people that I normally meet with outside.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

During the last interview, she said:

‘The project did give me...some...value...in terms of...discussing certain issues and then...also being heard...also the...the other people...who I told my opinion, like how I feel about certain things...and to recognise that my opinions also do matter, like...other people’s opinions...mmm...matter...’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

To a certain extent the project provided a space to make her feel relevant, to be recognised as an individual who deserves to be heard. Moreover, this capability is closely related to outcomes—functionings—such as voice and participation. Minenhle wants to be an activist and participate actively in her society to change it. Therefore, she must acquire a position of leadership that allows her to do something about the inequalities she has experienced and continues to experience. However, the combination of different conversion factors has contributed to reducing Minenhle’s chances of raising her voice. Minenhle did not have many spaces or platforms to raise her voice or feel like a valuable person. Moreover, she did not, and does not, have appropriate spaces for active participation within the university context, nor many spaces to feel recognised and valued. She said during the interviews that, actually, the project helped her to have a voice for the first time:

‘I have never in my three years of being here, I’ve never raised my hand in class to give a view about something or to ask a question...yeah...I’ve never...they are very different, in that sense. In the sessions I am able to say something I have the confidence to say something and the environment allows me to say something and in classes there are a lot

of people and most of them are not...so...they are very different from the normal setting that we have in the normal sessions [workshops], so I guess I would say I still don't have that confidence to say something in class but also the environment of the class does not allow you to say something because you feel like...I mean...in class...I am learning about something that I've never heard before, so...I don't really know anything and if I would say something what if they laugh at me, so...it's different in that sense and also...that in class you can say something at whatever, the topic that might be that day but he [the lecturer] being in front telling you what is right and what is wrong, so you can't really say "Sir I feel like this theory is wrong", or whatever, so it's different in that sense.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

She said that actually, the project not only helped her to talk within the project but also outside the meetings in other contexts, therefore, enhancing this valuable capability:

'It has helped with my confidence, just being able to speak in front of people and tell them my perspective confidently, it really helped me [...] Yes, it actually does. Yeah, it does. It builds that thing of...if I can tell this to these people about this and that, then I am able to do so outside of the session which, it really helps.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

She continues:

'So it also helped...in that because, now I'm able to stand up...for myself or for other people, umm that's with regards to...activism, leadership, and participation...I'm able to participate on campus...with such things...like res [student residence], when they talk about...whatever that is happening, like feminism, I'm able to take a leadership position and stand up for what I know [...] Yeah...that's after...after...joining the project, when the project started...because before then I wasn't so vocal, I know...I know that I am...umm...I'm opinionated but most of the time, I keep that to myself...I felt...felt...something about a certain issue...I just keep it to myself or I just say it to a close friend...so that's how...I feel...that's not right...it really helped in giving me the confidence to...to stand up...not just knowing that...sorry...it gave me the confidence to...stand up in front of other people and tell them how...I feel about certain things...so yeah...it really helped.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

The project not only helped Minenhle to have a voice and participate in different spaces (functionings) but also expanded her capability of recognition, despite the conversion factors surrounding her. In addition, the group helped her to be proactive in the exploration of issues that affected her from a leadership and activist point of view. For Minenhle, racist issues were really important due to her past experiences and the injustices surrounding her. The small group, in which Minenhle participated was researching this, and to a certain extent the project provided her with a platform to explore these issues:

'It feels amazing because, at first you sort of think that...agh...it is just some volunteering stuff...it's nothing but becoming part of the project it's, it feels more like, it feels more personal than just being a participant [...] Personal in the sense of...that for example talking about certain topics like race, issues that we actually live with on a daily basis, that we experience...So...that's why I say it feels personal, it's like things we experience sometimes and issues that need to be tackled, and having the platform to do so, it's, it's just amazing.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

Racism is a very important issue for Minenhle. However, while her context does not allow her and other students to openly discuss it, the project allowed her and the other members to openly discuss these issues:

‘Race, I find race very relevant because of the current situation in...generally in the country, not only at the university. I find it relevant, which is something that I feel it’s something that need to be discussed more, and not suppress it like it’s not there, because it is there.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

In conclusion, it seems that Minenhle was not able to fully exercise her recognition capability, impeding her from raising her voice. This, therefore, diminished her active participation in matters that were important to her, and also restricted her possibilities of achieving a position of leadership, which Minenhle valued. Conversely, the project acted as an interruption between some of her conversion factors and her capabilities; she achieved certain functionings, and it also helped her to enhance her capability. Nevertheless, it can be said that this capability expansion is neither complete, nor perfect. It is actually fluid, according to past and new experiences that are yet to come for Minenhle. Human recognition was compromised by Minenhle’s experiences and her own personal perceptions. The project helped her to understand herself differently and to achieve certain functionings, as well as considerably expanding her freedom. However, Minenhle still has to deal with the context and the society that surrounds her, which, to some extent, can limit her recognition capability in the present and future.

#### *B. UBUNTU*

Being able to support people (known or not) who are in need. Being able to be supported by others when you need it. Being able to construct meaningful relations with others and establish friendships with them. Being able to love, care and support (financially and emotionally) others, just as you are loved, cared for, and supported.

As Minenhle did not have her mother’s support, nor care from the community or many family members, she highly valued support and care, due to her lack of this capability. In addition, this lack of care and support has continued during her current student life and the experiences that she encountered when living in a new environment. To a certain extent, much of Minenhle’s survival on campus depends on the people surrounding her and their willingness to support her on diverse matters. Nevertheless, this urgency for Minenhle does not necessarily mean that the context would provide her with this substantial freedom. Conversely, as Minenhle was not able to value herself prior to the project, this diminished the way in which she engaged with other students and individuals, directly affecting this capability of Ubuntu.

However, the research group provided a supportive space, where many of the members were like a family for her. Even though the purpose of us coming together was to implement our research, the members were also there to assist with personal issues. Minenhle said:

‘When we come to varsity and we meet new people, or some of them, obviously...you meet different people, some of them were good for you, some of them not so much...they are just there for the sake of being there, and then...they don’t really bring value into your life, but the project...enabled me to meet some of the most amazing people who...have taught me so much about...even...about things...outside of the project like we do...talk

about other things like life generally, so it did help in terms of affiliation...having that support, knowing that, if you need something sometime you are able to call one of the people within the group.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Minenhle also talked about how difficult it was for her to have female friends, and how the project helped her to meet other girls and challenged her own stereotypes:

'I normally say to people like...I don't get along with girls, I don't really have good friends who are girls...no...umm...but meeting the different girls in the group...like...it really taught me something, that not every girl is the same, not every girl is too dramatic...or...yeah [...] so...meeting...having those friendships with them, was really great and amazing...we always get along, which is something that I'm not used to...so yeah.' (3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

Moreover, the project helped Minenhle, to understand herself differently, as seen in the previous capability. And this contributed toward changing the way she usually relates to others, facilitating her affiliation, at least with group members. She said:

'Actually, I cannot wait...for sure I cannot wait to...to...see them again...which is quite...which is quite interesting. Because one would say that...I am not comfortable with people that I live with, but I am not so comfortable with them, I am more comfortable with the group, which also they...they give you that thing to value yourself more...so yeah...yeah.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

All of this enabled an adequate space for Minenhle to establish support networks that are basic and necessary for her survival. She said:

'In the group I know there's at least one or two people that I can actually come and say ehh, I don't have food, do you have food? Can I have...do you know what I mean...so that they're very supportive.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

These networks helped her in different ways, as a way to ensure her food security but also, to get valuable information about bursaries and knowledge that can benefit her in the future. She said:

'Yeah...it also helped, like finding bursaries...and...umm...just having the help...knowing people...like you who know where I can get certain knowledge about bursaries...or help with my academic work, or yeah...in terms of that it did...help.' (2<sup>nd</sup> Interview).

And:

'Knowing that Carmen can know where to find bursaries, finding what what what or what what...it was helpful...instead of being alone... not having someone to tell you, that if you have financial problems you have to go to this institution or whatever place. It maybe...so it was relevant as well [...] and the vouchers as well, it helped umm, in terms of...maybe when you need...certain things...maybe you don't have certain food...then, you are able to buy food with the vouchers...or if you need airtime...maybe...make arrangement with whatever, even to call your family, it also helped.' (3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

Therefore, Minenhle was able to expand this capability due to the project and achieved it throughout different functionings. Her enrolment in the group provided her with supportive networks, as an outcome of the project. Nevertheless, this also expanded her capability for creating



meaningful friendships and accessing networks of support in different ways, challenging the way she used to relate to others.

### *C. SELF-DETERMINATION*

Being able to have the capacity to differentiate between what society thinks you are, and who you want to be. Being able to challenge labels and work toward the person you want to be. Being able to learn from experiences in your life and better yourself by thinking critically about it. Being able to change yourself and your life.

The self-determination capability discussed here supports the development of one's valuable life through critical thinking, which is closely related to Minenhle case and her life experiences concerning the negative social stereotypes that have been present in her life, and her desire to change her past and secure her capabilities in the future.

Minenhle's transformation was not a capability that was absent before the project. Her story says a lot about it. Her resilience and perseverance highlighted how this capability was available and achieved in the way she wanted to be different and she managed to produce some drastic changes in her life, as a way of becoming different from her past.

In this matter, despite the capability being one that was already available for her, the project managed to expand it a little further. She said, 'it really has changed me, it changed me, myself...yeah...because I got to learn, emotionally, intellectually, learn something about myself that I didn't know, so yeah...' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview). Also, in the second interview, when she stated, 'yeah...it helps your growth most of the time.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

To a certain extent, the project not only helped her to gain knowledge which had an impact on her but also to learn from the time being together and the experiences we had together. She said:

'the group really motivated me to work hard, to better myself, be open minded and not judge people because of their mistakes, or because of who they are and really...yeah...just be open-minded about...about things.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Minenhle was determined to lead her life in the way she wanted. However, the project contributed to expanding the information available to assess that life. Equally, it provided her with the spaces to achieve (functionings) some of her personal aims, for instance, the possibility to learn more about the issues she was concerned with, or to provide her with an adequate platform to fight against these injustices in various ways.

### *D. KNOWLEDGE*

Being able to gain knowledge from educational institutions but not limited to them. Being able to have an adequate educational environment to learn and to expand the way in which you think. Being able to learn from others and be a source of inspiration for others to think differently. Being able to gain relevant knowledge and skills for the future in terms of securing financial freedom through employment.

For Minenhle, this capability is key, not only as an end but also as a means of achieving other things she wants to do in her life. As an end, Minenhle wants to know more about the things she is passionate about, she wants to expand her critical thinking and be able to challenge her assumptions. On the other hand, Minenhle considers this capability as essential for her financial freedom, especially when talking about formal learning. Minenhle's life conditions did not make it easy for her to access higher education. Nevertheless, she highly valued her education as a way to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to access a job that can provide for her and her family, and, therefore, challenge her present and past situation.

However, the university context was not always as open and plural as Minenhle wished. The racist incidents Minenhle experienced and the hierarchical structure of the institution, together with her gender, limited her capability to learn from other students and share her own knowledge.

On this matter, the project provided Minenhle with a space for mutual learning. She said:

'It's been good...mmm...I've learnt a lot, especially from the other participants, yeah...It's been really great and really helpful.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

This space for learning and gaining knowledge from each other was significant for her. Equally, having different perspectives from diverse individuals, among the group members and beyond, helped her to expand her own thinking, as well as to share her own knowledge with others:

'The people that we met and the team as well. Meeting the different individuals that I met, my knowledge...I was able to share my knowledge with them, and they also shared what they know, their knowledge with me. So that allowed me to have a broader...umm...perspective on certain things...getting...having knowledge about...for example Kungawo...telling us about the LGBTQI community...which I didn't know what it meant...I didn't know...I didn't know fully what they go through [...] having other people that explained such things...to you, the knowledge they pass to you was really vital because you are able to think critically in the future.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

On the other hand, as revealed above, this capability is a means for Minenhle. Higher education can help her to achieve the life she wants to lead. On this matter, the project had academic benefits for her, but it also provided her with skills that might be helpful in the future, in terms of employability. In terms of academic benefits, she said:

'You talked to us about different methodologies, it was very important to me, to know that because I've been failing my assignments, so it was really important to me. Because it really helped me a lot. It helped me a lot with my assignments, because I always failed my assignments and for the first time I got above 60%. So it was very important for me.' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

Equally, she mentioned how some of the programs we used for our research also helped her in her academic work:

'Google scholar as well, it makes things so much easier for me actually...because normally...I normally took my information for my assignments...from...mmm...not so...umm...how do they say them...I took them...from maybe blogs. I didn't know that I shouldn't take information from blogs...and that doesn't mean that whatever they mean...is the right information...or...taking them from websites...or Wikipedia actually.

So...and also...it is easier for me...in terms of the referencing, bibliography-wise...it really helped me...it made things so much easier for me...yeah.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

Moreover, the project also helped Minenhle, to develop different skills, in terms of academic writing, research or the use of different software that was useful for her studies, as well as for a professional career in the future:

‘It did...especially in terms of...writing my assignments, it...it was an improvement with my references thing, how I go about my assignments...although I still have a lot of work to do, but It really helped me with writing my assignments, and doing research...so it helped me in that instance.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

She continued:

‘Definitely, definitely, timing...umm...Writing skills, critical thinking skills...umm...just... communication skills. And also the different programs...that you taught us how to use...that is gonna be really helpful [...] The editing one, the video and also the one that you, that you normally do, like...voice thingy and then, you transcribe [...] so yeah...I’m even considering putting them in my CV.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Minenhle not only expanded knowledge useful for her studies, but also knowledge helpful for her future. Moreover, the project allowed her to challenge her assumptions about those things that were important to her and others, in a space of mutual learning.

#### E. MINENHLE’S VALUABLE CAPABILITIES –ACHIEVED FUNCTIONINGS

To provide a graphic view of Minenhle’s initial achieved functionings before the project, and those after the project, the following chart broadly examines how this expansion looked. The graphic does not provide an account of statistical data; it merely graphically presents an approximation of the data explored qualitatively in this section.

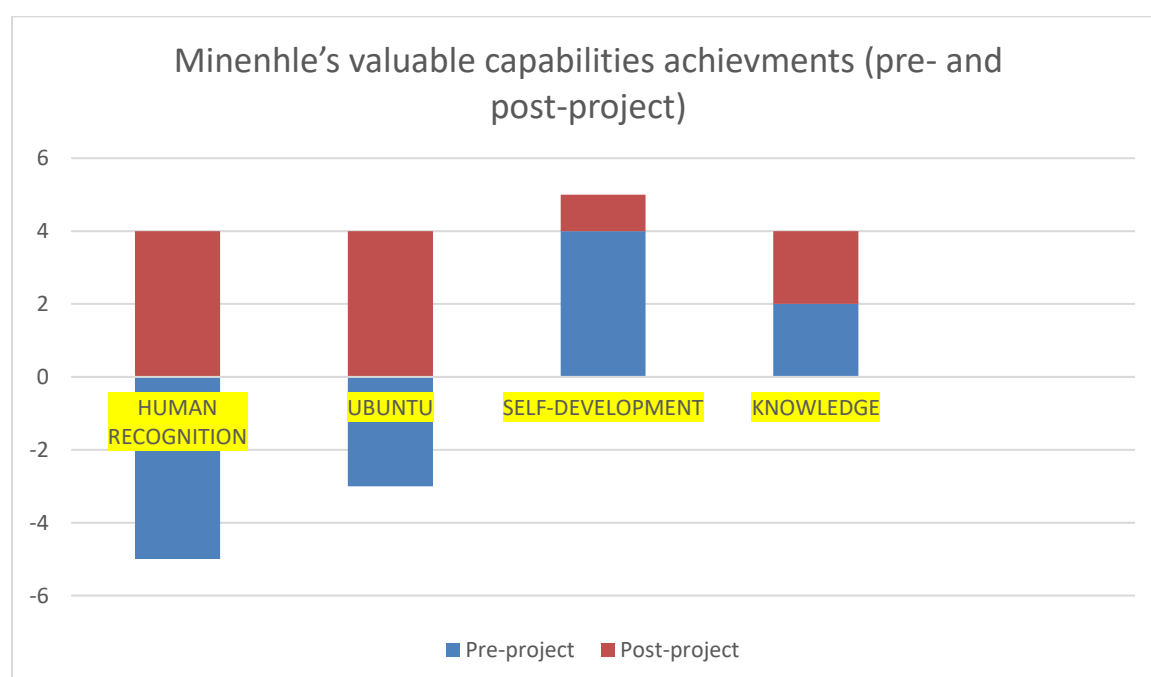


Table 20: Minenhle’s valuable capabilities achievements (pre- and post-project)

### 7.2.2. CASE TWO: SIYABONGA

Case two, Siyabonga, is a twenty-two-year old male born in the Free State, but who has lived in different parts of the country throughout his life. He is the middle of three siblings and maintains a good relationship with both his parents and his brothers. His father holds a PhD and works as an educational consultant, providing for the family. His mother worked as a primary school teacher until he was born, then she dedicated herself to the children and home as a housewife. All three siblings, he and his two brothers, went to private primary and secondary school, with English as the language of instruction. At home, all his basic needs were covered. However, Siyabonga's father was absent during his childhood at important moments, due to work commitments. Moreover, Siyabonga's mother suffered from depression, leaving a deep impression on Siyabonga regarding mental health.

He enrolled in various sports during his academic life, such as rugby, cricket, action cricket or squash. Thanks to these sports, he had the opportunity to go overseas for tournaments. However, Siyabonga's childhood was not always easy. As a black child enjoying a certain financial comfort, it occasionally put him in uncomfortable situations. For instance, black friends accused him of being too white—in terms of lifestyle and comfort—and white students did not like the idea that he was going out with black friends. All that situated him in an identity loophole, which is still present today.

Around the time of matric (the final year of high school), he was very busy playing music as a DJ for parties with friends, in addition, his mother had some health issues which affected him, leading Siyabonga to fail matric. Thus, he had to repeat a year to increase his marks. Nevertheless, in the end, in order to access the degree he wanted to study—Finance—he had to go through the extended programme at the university<sup>43</sup>.

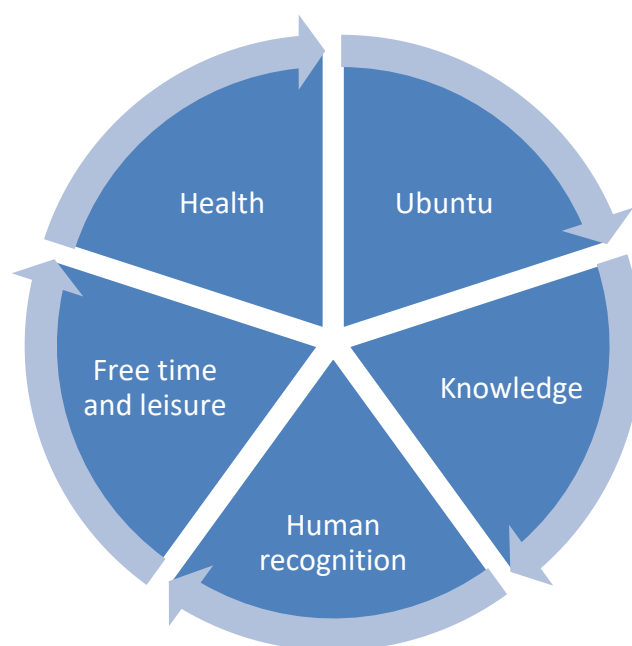
In addition, Siyabonga did not play a very active role during his application process; his parents decided which university to send him to and took care of his application. His parents wanted him to keep away from distractions, so he could focus on his studies. Equally, his parents took care of the economic support for his education, providing him with monthly allowances, schooling materials, accommodation, transport and tuition fees.

Siyabonga enjoys his student life, especially the year of the study (2017). He is relaxed as he is only studying a few modules. However, he is worried as he is repeating the modules he failed last year and it will be his last chance to continue with his studies in Finance, as the Dean had warned him at the beginning of the year. Actually, Siyabonga wants to finish his degree because of his parents, to give them peace of mind, knowing that he can provide for himself. Nevertheless, he is thinking about studying honours while working in a bank, but he thinks there is no rush; he can always go back to his parents' house. Siyabonga also thinks about saving for a few years while working as an accountant and then investing the money to create an income. He also wants to create a company and become a CEO sometime in the future. In this way, he will be able to help his girlfriend's family and build big houses in which they can all live close to each other—his family and his girlfriend's family, together with them.

---

<sup>43</sup> The extended degree programme deals with students who have insufficient access points upon entering university. This programme adds an additional year to the mainstream degree.

In this case, Siyabonga has a different compilation of valuable capabilities from Minenhle. He considered the following to be important capabilities (A) Ubuntu (B) Knowledge (C) Human recognition, (D) Free time and leisure and (E) Health.



*Figure 14: Siyabonga's valuable capabilities*

To explore these capabilities one by one, the following section investigates Siyabonga's capabilities and whether the project helped him to enhance/achieve them, or not.

#### *A. HUMAN RECOGNITION*

Being recognised as a full and valuable human being despite the colour of your skin, educational level or religious affiliation. Being able to recognise your good aspects and what you are good at. Being able to be recognised by others and to recognise others. Being able to live in a space where your opinion is valuable and heard.

For Siyabonga, the capability of recognition was not absent in his life, as it was in Minenhle's case. Siyabonga, enjoyed a good, secure self-perception that influenced his way of approaching others. This positive self-perception also helped him to share and defend his opinions easily. In particular, his economic status and gender benefited him in various ways in terms of this capability. All this was easily visible in the way Siyabonga behaved within the group and the number of times Siyabonga intervened to give his opinion, in comparison to Minenhle.

Nevertheless, although Siyabonga's case differs greatly from that of Minenhle, the Capabilities Approach allows us to explore both cases deeply, uncovering conversion factors that impede Siyabonga—to a much lesser extent than Minenhle—from fully enjoying his capability of recognition. In this case, Siyabonga valued recognition not for the absence of this capability in his life—as was Minenhle's case—but due to some structural challenges that impeded him from enhancing this capability. These are nuances that will be difficult to identify without carefully exploring each case.

In Siyabonga's case, two major conversion factors diminish this capability. First, despite his comfortable socio-economic status, he still falls into the category of black, in a post-1991 context in South Africa. While he is able to enjoy this capability to a certain level, he still lacks certain aspects of this human recognition, due to the race structures surrounding him. Secondly, he is equally placed in a hierarchical society where respect for elders is a social imperative, to the extent that it affects him negatively. As a young man, Siyabonga has to respect those who are older than him and show them respect to a point that diminishes his own recognition from other individuals.

To provide some examples of these structures that reduce Siyabonga's *recognition capability* to some extent, the text will first highlight some racial challenges in Siyabonga's life. Siyabonga spoke about incidents in high school. He said:

'When I got to the school I was in, I was one of four or five black kids, but in grade ten I was like the only black kid, so I was like almost being indoctrinated into being a part of the whites, and seen as a white guy. So, because I was in a black school before I went to the white school, when my black friends came, I obviously still wanted to hang out with them. It wasn't because now I'm only around white people, I don't wanna hang out with them...like I'm better or whatnot. But that caused a lot of troubles in my life, because the white people were angry or my white friend's were angry because I wanted to hang out with the black friends and the black friends were angry because they said I was too white, and I didn't understand their issues.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

For Siyabonga, recognition was significant due to his identity challenges, and less related to self-perception and voice, as it was in Minenhle's case. To a certain extent, the contextual racial division does not allow individuals to be recognised beyond these racial categories. Therefore, due to the circumstances surrounding Siyabonga, he has to battle between both, to be recognised as an individual, beyond his lifestyle or the friends he has.

However, despite the double recognition Siyabonga deals with, at the end of the day, his skin is still dark; therefore, he does not have as much freedom as he would like to voice his opinions, especially when they are related to racial issues. Siyabonga says:

'Back then...the people in power, the white people...if you ask too many questions, if you...if you...are talking too much, don't expect to be around next week, that's the truth about it...You will be killed or...whatever...so...you know...also the older parents...who know how it was and how it still is. Kids keep quiet, you don't know...these people might not be happy with you talking about it...things might happen to you or whatever...so I think it is also a precautionary matter, like being careful what you say. You might say the wrong thing, to the wrong person, or about the wrong person, and things would happen.' (3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

Siyabonga did not generally lack this capability, as was Minenhle's case, but he was especially affected by his racial condition, in the way he could not openly talk and be heard regarding his opinions on racial matters.

On the other hand, despite Siyabonga's gender, there are other hierarchical structures that can affect him, such as the respect toward the elders, or the educational level of the person he is talking to. These structures constrain the recognition of young voices and opinions, such as those of Siyabonga and Minenhle. Explaining what would happen if he gave his opinion about race to another adult person, he said:

‘Ah...you are disrespecting me! Ah, you young people are disrespecting me! How can you ask? I’m your elder...whether you are right to ask or not. I am your elder, you should not be asking questions like that...yeah...it’s one of those...taboos...you know.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Regarding educational level, he mentions having had a conversation with his father, who is highly educated, and how ridiculous it feels to him to talk from his position:

‘Or for instance maybe speaking to my father about something like that...I wouldn’t say dangerous but a little bit of...because of my dad is...highly educated or whatnot... He would say...hey you are naive, naive in your train of thought or whatnot...you know it’s like when you speak...when you are speaking to like a rocket scientist but all you have is like grade eight math you...so how do I factorise? He is gonna be like...Ah...this is so beneath me.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

Additionally, he mentioned a debate on the radio, asking the audience whether students should or should not participate in political debates. He said, ‘there was a topic on the radio the other day, it was speaking about should it be ok, or should students even be allowed to argue about politics? Because they are students!’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview). Actually, Siyabonga knew and had the voice to say that, he had his right to discuss these political issues like any other individual. However, he identified the project as helping him to discuss sensitive issues that will be difficult to explore for him in other contexts or outside of the project. He said:

‘How can I not debate that or speak about it? So...because I am a student I’m not allowed to speak about it...so...It [the project] helped me because I could speak about it, you know, yeah...it certainly enlightened me, it made me more aware, but it was also exciting because, I mean, it was...getting to work with people on topics that are quiet hard, it still...not really accepted in society [...] Those were the topics that we were looking at...so...yeah...it was exciting because I would say that was a taboo. Or...but it was exciting...when we get to talk about something that we are not allowed to talk about...and yeah.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> Interview).

Siyabonga’s case is very different from Minenhle’s case. While Minenhle had an initial lack of human recognition that was significantly expanded by the project. Siyabonga did not completely lack this capability, on the contrary, he enjoyed more freedoms in terms of recognition due to his socio-economic status and gender. In Minenhle’s case, self-confidence, voice, and participation were essential to enhance this capability. However, for Siyabonga, it was more a matter of identity and voice, referring to being able to discuss sensitive issues. Therefore, the Capabilities Approach is able to mark an initial stage before the project and explore the transitions of different individuals. Moreover, a capabilities perspective is able to appreciate the redistribution of power and its implications on capability expansion and achievement. While Siyabonga could not achieve a higher level of this capability, his presence as a member of the group contributed to the expansion of this capability in others. Siyabonga said:

‘I’m being recognised for what I believe in...I am being recognised and I’m recognising them or we are recognising each other. [...] No...you know...but in terms of a group...I think...yeah...we do...recognise each other and respect each other...that I think is great.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> Interview).



In this case, Minenhle, as well as other members, were in a space where someone who was a male, went to a private school and did not have financial problems, was listening to her/them, recognising her/them and her/their opinions.

### *B. UBUNTU*

Being able to care for and support others, as well as being supportive and giving advice. Being able to be around people that care for and love you. Being able to establish meaningful friendships with others and enjoy their companionship.

Without any doubt, when Siyabonga arrived at the project he enjoyed this capability, especially financial support, which was scarce among the members of the group. However, this network of support was notably deficient for him in the case of the emotional support provided by his family. He said:

‘I don’t go to school with a bursary, my parents pay for me. So...you know...it just does...looking at the differences like, there are kids that are with a bursary, even my girlfriend is with a bursary. But I’m not...but like my girlfriend her mum calls every day you know like they have that connection. I am financially stable, but I don’t have that connection.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

This emotional deficiency caused Siyabonga to give special importance to friendships, creating his own networks to fulfil the emotional support he needed, in different ways. However, this was not easy at times, especially regarding Siyabonga’s situation in his battle between two social groups that were antagonistic. Conversely, the project helped him to make new friendships. He said:

‘When I got to the group, we were strangers but we ended up being those people in each others’ lives, who...umm...can care and support each other, especially...because we were disclosing personal, harmful...or...ahh...I don’t know. If I can say...private things about ourselves...things that we felt and pains...so...we are those people for each other now...those friends that we are caring for and supporting each other.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Siyabonga enjoyed a supportive space within the project, in the sense that the issues he had in terms of identity were no longer relevant in that space. The group was a family despite the colour of our skin, our socio-economic status, religion or nationality. This allowed Siyabonga to create support networks easily.

To a certain extent, the project was also financially supportive, providing a small but significant contribution to the members. Siyabonga explained how he helped other friends and therefore, this money was really useful for him. For Siyabonga, it was also important to care for and support others, beyond the support he needed. He said:

‘There have been a couple of times that I’ve lent my friend my allowance, it was half of my allowance this month... so like I’ve been broke the past week so like you know this hundred bucks would be great cause I thought I’d like some cool drink, maybe I’ll get some milk and some tea or whatever...and now I can go and get those things.’ (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

Therefore, Siyabonga was not lacking this capability in any way before the project. Conversely, this available capability allowed him to support others, for instance, in terms of financial support,

while being supported emotionally. Thus, the project enhanced this capability, achieving some functionings due to his new friendships within the group and the help that he was able to provide to others.

### C. KNOWLEDGE

Being able to gain the adequate knowledge to pass through courses at university and not fail. Being able to achieve a university degree that gives you opportunities in life. Being able to use that knowledge in order to provide a decent standard of living for your family and you. Being able to access a well paid job to help others and provide for yourself and your family.

Siyabonga's case differs greatly from that of Minenhle. Minenhle had extensive experiential knowledge about injustices, as she experienced them in different ways. Moreover, Minenhle understood knowledge as end in itself, in the sense of being able to learn and to gain knowledge to know, not only as a means of ensuring a good life (which was also important for her). Siyabonga has a more instrumental perspective of knowledge. He wants to gain knowledge in order to be able to provide for his family and himself with a decent standard of living, especially in providing for her girlfriend's family. For instance, he wants to pass his courses in order to be an accountant, and therefore, have a stable job and good income. Moreover, this educational success was especially relevant for him because, despite having access to a first-class education, he was—and is—not doing so well in his academic work. Therefore, for him, knowledge in terms of passing his courses and graduating was his main concern at the time of the project.

Nevertheless, it seems that the project provided him with a platform to reconsider knowledge beyond its instrumental perspective. Siyabonga said that the project provided an adequate space to expand his learning and knowledge in general. He stated:

'Looking at epistemologies and whatnot...methodologies. Actually doing research. So I feel like...I got to do a lot of learning and gain knowledge...that's not...although it's formal...education...formal...we were just coming and speaking to each other, doing a research project in our own time...so I feel like I learned a lot from the research project...from that aspect...' (2<sup>nd</sup> interview).

However, he also added that it was a space to challenge his own thinking and challenge other's opinions, and he enjoyed it because it was actually something that he would not do with others:

'I really enjoyed the workshops, yeah...I really enjoyed talking to other people...ahh...I...yes, you could say the joyful environment...where...you were challenging yourself and they were willing to challenge you...we really were able to...really...critically analyse stuff that maybe when you are with your friends, you wouldn't talk so deeply about...or whatnot...so I really enjoyed that.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Siyabonga was not especially exposed to discussions about social issues. To a certain extent, his lifestyle and undergraduate studies on finance, limited the spaces to engage critically with these type of challenges. The project contributed toward expanding his knowledge of some of these matters. For Siyabonga, his learning about gender and LGBTQI inequalities were especially noteworthy, as he had not been aware of them before the project. For instance, he reflected on his positionality as a man:

'I don't know, looking at it in terms of gender...I'm a man, so I'm unintentionally, I'm already causing an inequality because of my...I can...you can say, the patriarchy or whatever...it's because I'm a man [...] it's something to learn from the project...or it was something that we help each other to understand.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Although Siyabonga presented very conservative ideas about gender roles and sexual orientation at the beginning of the year, the project helped him to challenge these assumptions and reflect on his own positionality. Equally, he had the chance to better understand the lives of others students:

'I feel like it's...it's just the way to remind myself that there are people out there struggling or whatnot...who would kill for the opportunity to be where I am so just keep working hard even if days are tough even if you feel like not studying just remember that one day something might depend on you...you know...because you went to school you have a salary maybe you could send the kids to school whatever or do something so now that you're there try your best at what you are doing [...] Definitely, yeah...and learn more from them, not just look at them, like it was just a bad life experience.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

However, despite the general knowledge about social issues surrounding him, Siyabonga valued learning useful skills for the future, skills that might enhance his capacity to find a secure job. He mentioned different skills developed by the project and that are situated in the direction of helping him in the future in various ways:

'I guess the main thing I learned is being able to use the PC better, the laptop a lot better...using the video maker...I feel like that could be a skill, in terms of...for me there are a lot of things outside of school you could do for people, beyond videos and things like that...umm...but other skills...general it's not like...umm...academics skills...per se...but I learned, people skills...I learned...how to be punctual...I learned umm...like I mentioned before...I learned how to do a research project...I learned how to...I learned how to be a leader...how to delegate and I learned a lot of things that are gonna benefit me in the future.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

He added that team work was also an important skill gained from the project:

'I did definitely learn how to work in a team, because we have to work on a research project together. So I really got to learn the dynamics of working together in a team and working with people and working specifically with people that are doing different things so there are many different challenges...umm...and barriers...that get in the way of team work, and I really got to learn how to combat those barriers, umm...but ultimately it was about learning to work with people toward a common aim, and I feel like I definitely got to learn that from the DCR project.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

These skills contributed to his life-long learning but will also be relevant at the time in his life when he is close to accessing the labour market:

'It will be good for my CV, which ultimately does impact employability because I could say while I was studying...or it could be good for my honours interview because you apply to do your honours and then they look at the candidate's CV. They look at why you feel like you can be a student for that, so I could say that I was really involved in research projects of that level early on in my academic career, and it can help me.' (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Siyabonga not only gained knowledge in terms of benefiting him in the future and using it for other things that he considers important in his life. He also started to value knowledge for the sake of learning about—and understanding—the reality that surrounds him.

#### *D. FREE TIME AND LEISURE*

Being able to enjoy free time and leisure after formal education. Being able to enrol in different activities which allow you to have fun with others, like sports or playing music.

Siyabonga highly valued the capability of enjoying free time and time to dedicate to things outside his formal responsibilities. He valued his free time, to dedicate it to playing sports, as well as playing music with his friends. To a certain extent, Siyabonga enjoys and achieves this capability in various ways.

The project allowed Siyabonga, to enjoy his free time doing something that was significant for him. The work done in the project was not considered a job or a responsibility, but conversely as a free time activity, doing something he was interested in. He said:

‘Although we were working on the project...it was a less stressful environment...where I was...still learning and increasing my knowledge...I was still participating and interacting with other students, not just people. And ultimately, you can see it as leisure time that we have spent, or easy time in terms of...I was doing something, that I was actually interested in...and at the end of the day—a hobby or something—you are doing something you are interested in...that doesn’t pretend necessarily to be work...that’s very serious or stressful.’ (3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

Therefore, the project in itself did not expand/achieve this freedom for Siyabonga, as he enjoyed the right circumstances to enable this capability in his life. Conversely, it can be said, that the project helped him to achieve some functionings related to this capability, such as being able to enrol in a leisure activity other than his formal education.

#### *E. HEALTH*

Being able to be healthy physically and emotionally. Being able to know yourself well in terms of understanding your emotional and physical limits and needs.

Siyabonga did not suffer from any serious illness, however, his life was marked by his mother’s mental health, due to her depression. This situation, together with the lack of emotional support previously mentioned, caused Siyabonga to highly value health in general, in particular, the balance between mental and physical health. Most certainly, this capability was not expanded by the project, due to the nature of our work. However, this case can be seen as part of—or related to—the expansion of emotional support in the previous capability and how that has improved Siyabonga’s well-being.

#### *F. SIYABONGA’S VALUABLE CAPABILITIES – ACHIEVED FUNCTIONINGS*

To provide a graphic account of Siyabonga’s initial valuable capabilities before the project and achieved after the project, the following chart broadly examines how this expansion looks for his particular case, not being a quantitative representation but a graphic outline of the sections above.

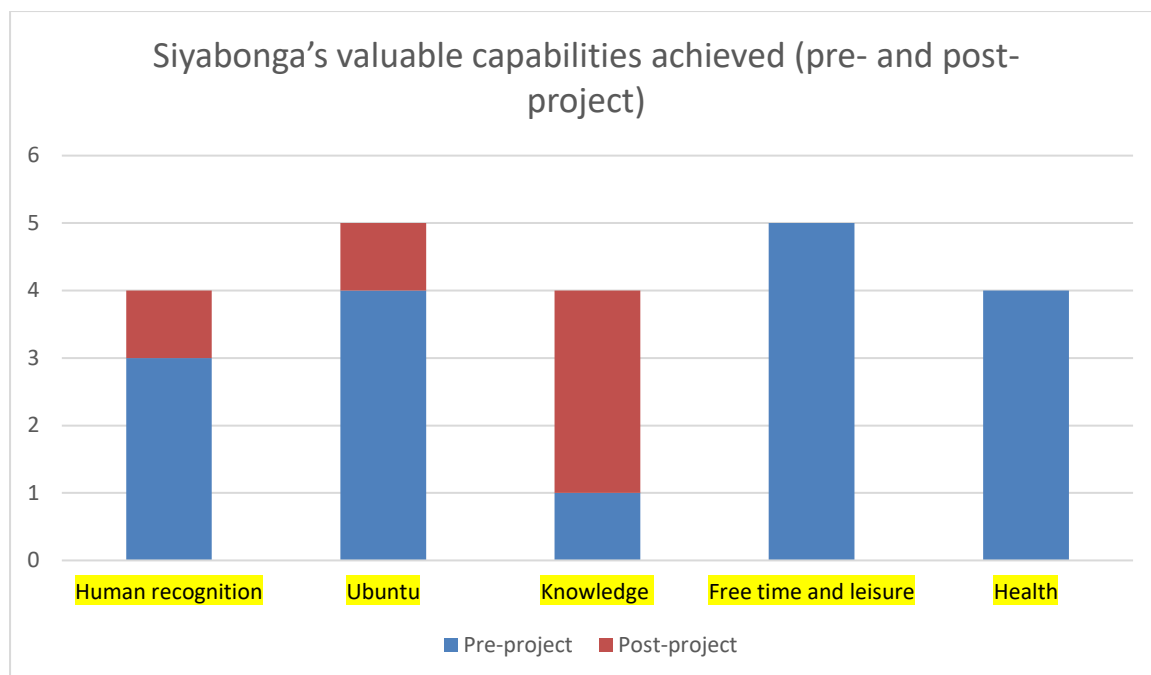


Table 21: Siyabonga's valuable capabilities achieved (pre- and post-project)

### 7.3. CONTRIBUTIONS OF DCR TOWARDS A MORE ADEQUATE PARTICIPATORY EVALAUTIVE FRAME

The two cases presented above highlighted that, actually, the same participatory process can affect diverse members of the same group differently; thus, their experiences are divergent due to their personal backgrounds. Participants arrive at the project with different valuable internal capabilities, which they enjoy at different levels, as has been revealed previously. Siyabonga and Minenhle both valued the Ubuntu capability; however, the way they enjoyed this capability before the project diverged, and this is important to understand when assessing our participatory practices. Therefore, the Capabilities Approach as a way to evaluate participatory practices adds a broader range of information. This range of information not only expanded our own understanding of the DCR practice, but also oriented the practice as a way to expand the life that the individuals involved have reason to value (Sen, 1999), as the previous chapter has displayed.

Moreover, the Capabilities Approach does not simplify into a polarised distribution (advantaged-disadvantaged). Conversely, it visualises the complexity of both cases. First, showing us that, despite the better-off situation of Siyabonga, and the limited capabilities of Minenhle, both cases are worth exploring carefully, as different conversion factors affect them in different ways. Thus, we need to understand these cases from a broader informational perspective. Although it can be generally said that the project has been more beneficial for Minenhle than Siyabonga. A capabilities analysis helps us to capture the complexities buried in our participatory practices and how individual personal experiences and challenges intersect with them. Figure Twenty-two graphically summarises both cases and their differences.

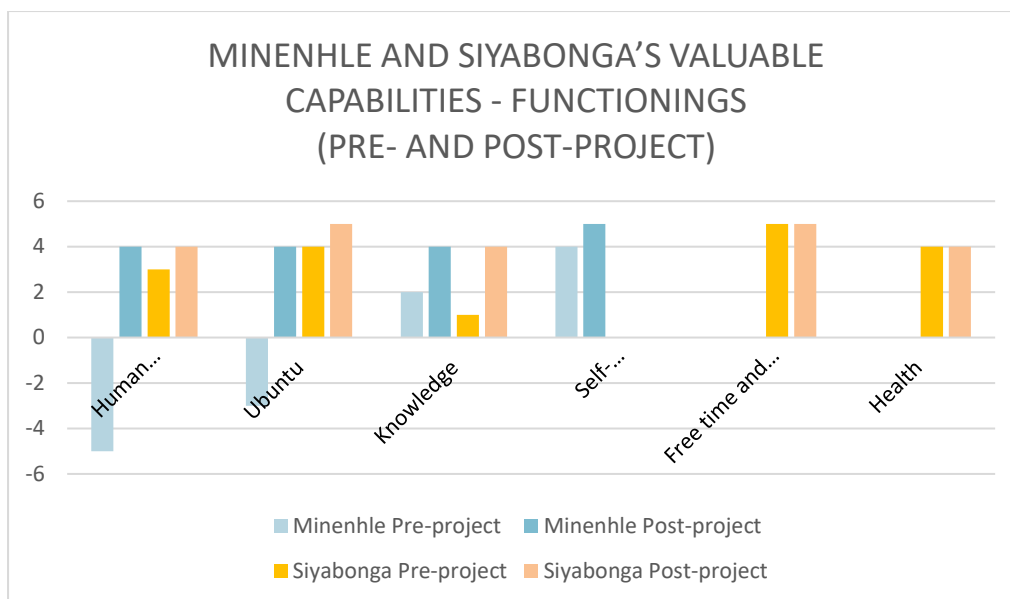


Table 22: Minenhle and Siyabonga's valuable capabilities (pre- and post-project)

In conclusion, four main contributions can be highlighted as the most important from a capabilities perspective in order to understand the impact on participants, and as a way to achieve the fifth DCR principle. The capabilities perspective contributes to the evaluation of participatory practices as it expands the informational basis of the evaluative space. The evaluative space goes beyond, therefore, the tangible effects (achieved functionings) of participatory practices on a particular individual. For instance, without this perspective, we would not have been able to understand Minenhle's individual definition of the human recognition capability, nor know that this capability was important for her at that moment of her life. Equally, it would not take into consideration the initial state of Minenhle or Siyabonga, restricting our knowledge of their specific backgrounds prior to the project, and the effects of the project on their valuable capabilities.

The Capabilities Approach provides an individual-centred perspective. As the chapter has revealed, the contribution from the same participatory practice might differ among individuals. Thus, individuals should be at the centre of our explorations, especially focusing on the lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Thus, they use this deeply relational space as a way to enhance, as well as achieve, the capabilities that are important to them. The individual perspective, therefore, allows us to understand their backgrounds and current challenges. Thus, the evaluative space does not aim to be a comparative space, but an exploration and understanding of each case and its own complexities. It does so, as this chapter has examined, by not simplifying matters, by not stating that the project has been more beneficial for Minenhle, but rather, conversely, that it has been more beneficial for Minenhle in terms of the way she wants to lead her life.

Therefore, linked with the previous point, it avoids paternalist evaluations. Whereas evaluative spaces are mostly framed determined by criteria external to the participants, the Capabilities Approach offers a set of criteria that are determined by the individual. These criteria, the valuable capabilities that the individual has reason to value to lead the life they want to have, is the evaluative space (Sen, 1999). Hence, the process is used as a way to contribute to the individuals' aims and not external or institutional aims, which are not related to their own lives.

## 7.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored two different cases, represented by two members of the DCR group. These two individuals presented different preferences, and therefore diverse valuable capabilities at the beginning of the project. Each case has been analysed, exposing whether the project helped them enhance their freedoms (valuable capabilities) or achieve functionings (tangible outcomes), or not, answering the third research question of this study. Therefore, the study has revealed that adding a capabilities perspective to our evaluative space for DCR is a gain in itself. It substantially shifts the way we understand our evaluative spaces, orienting them toward individuals' aims, instead of institutional goals. There are three major contributions of this capability perspective to the field of participatory evaluations and DCR. First, the expansion of the informational basis, going beyond an outcome analysis and collecting information prior to the project to understand the participants' individual cases. Second, the individual perspective, allows us to explore the complexities of each individual and better understand how a participatory practice affects each of the members we work with. Therefore, third, the evaluative space is not determined by external criteria; instead, the criteria are determined by the individual, in the sense of the extent to which the project has helped this individual to lead the life they have reason to value (Sen, 1999) in a deeply relational space. Hence, the chapter exploring this two cases presents how a DCR facilitator can undertake her/his evaluation of a DCR project, enhancing the ways in which current practices are assessed.



## CHAPTER 8: DCR TOWARDS SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

Having reviewed the valued capabilities and acquiring an understanding of the impact of the project in two cases, Chapter Eight reflexively aims to discuss the first and second research questions, which focus on the conceptualisation, of the capabilities-based participatory research after the case study implementation, in addition to the challenges, opportunities and lessons of the DCR project towards justice. To this end, the first sections of the chapter focus on the first research question and the conceptualisation of DCR after the project implementation. Firstly, the five DCR principles are investigated with the theoretical framework, in order to reflect on their contribution towards social justice after the South African DCR project. A review of each principle is presented, highlighting how they were developed and implemented in this DCR project after their theoretical formulation in Chapter Three. Furthermore, following the review of the principles, a final clarification is given of the conceptualisation of DCR beyond the participatory practice. In these final remarks, the idea is to clarify the two main roles in a DCR project—the facilitator and the participants—and how these two elements, although together, imply different processes. While the facilitator's task is to identify valued capabilities at the beginning of the project, design a prospective way to lead the project towards the member's valuable capabilities (Chapter Six), as well as evaluate them at the end of the project (Chapter Seven), in addition to promote the ecology of knowledges, the task of the participants is to develop their own research project in a democratic way together with the facilitator. Furthermore, the section highlights that although this DCR project has applied both roles in a single project, their use might be implemented independently, as the facilitator role can benefit and enrich other participatory practices.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the second research question exploring general challenges and opportunities from the pilot DCR project. Thus, the section explores points regarding the implementation of the case study, highlighting seven substantial points from the South African case. These points are: (1) The intricate academic space and the challenges of DCR to navigate it, (2) The difficulties in the space of co-creation, (3) The challenges presented by equal participation, (4) The issues with time frames and participant availability, (5) The dynamism of capabilities and difficulties in capabilities expansion, (6) The incompleteness and/or limitations in the formulation of the Ubuntu capability, and (7) the challenges involved in bringing about ecology of knowledges in a non-ideal setting. In addition to this, the last part of the chapter focuses on the lessons learned, reflecting on four major points from the previous section, the co-creation of knowledges, equal participation, valued capabilities and ecology of knowledges. To begin the examination of these ideas, the following section will summarise some of the key points from the theoretical framework and link them to the arguments discussed in this chapter.

### 8.2. DCR TOWARDS SOCIALLY JUST HIGHER EDUCATION

Drawing from the theoretical framework, social justice is presented from a capabilities perspective; however, this vision is interwoven with elements from participatory approaches and the decolonial debate. Firstly, it highlighted that from a capabilities perspective, under an open-ended version of the CA sustained by Sen (1999; 2011), we are not looking for the perfectly just society. Conversely, we look to identify injustices, to remove them or to expand capabilities, helping individuals to lead the lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Moreover, it has been shown that the CA and

participatory approaches are indeed aligned throughout their constitutive elements, including their understanding of social justice including the preservation of diversity through capabilities expansion and the removal of injustices (see Chapter Three).

Therefore, Democratic Capabilities Research was presented under several stages and composed of various principles in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the assumption is that by following these stages we can contribute to socially just higher education. This is mainly, due to the centrality of participants' capabilities and the expansion of the process to enhance them (see Chapter Six and Seven), but also to other elements, such as ecologies of knowledge or the promotion of more democratic spaces for knowledge production within academia. Thus, the following sections aim to discuss these elements together in order to further explore how a capabilities-based research project can be conceptualised and implemented in the light of the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education in the South African DCR project.

### 8.3. REFLECTIONS ON THE DCR PRINCIPLES AFTER THE PILOT STUDY TOWARDS SOCIAL JUSTICE

This section will focus on the principles discussed in the theoretical framework (Chapter Three). Reviewing each principle, this section not only highlights their contribution to more socially just practices but also explores the way these principles were implemented in the South African DCR project and how this orientation toward socially-just higher education has been accomplished.

#### 8.3.1. PROCESS AS CAPABILITIES EXPANSION

The first principle discussed here is to understand the participatory process as a space for capabilities expansion and achievement, which has two constitutive elements according to the literature and the theoretical framework (Chapter Two and Three). First of all, social justice has been framed as the expansion of capabilities that diverse individuals have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Moreover, this is more a moral positionality, an ideal perspective. That is to say, we are not trying to expand these capabilities perfectly, but to explore the structural conversion factors to enhance them at different levels. Equally, as argued in previous chapters (see Chapter Six), the DCR research has not used universal or general lists. Rather, it has identified valuable capabilities that have enabled me, in my role as facilitator, to take strategic decisions about the DCR participatory project. Therefore, this principle has two dimensions when applying a DCR process, the prospective and the evaluative dimension. Both are strategic in the sense of orienting the DCR facilitator in her/his practice.

Focusing on the prospective part of this principle, Chapter Six argued that, from a DCR perspective, we have good reasons to design a contextual capabilities list for each participatory group. Several valued capabilities were identified and a prospective table was presented with recommendations and strategies for this South African DCR case. These strategies allowed the facilitator to align the DCR project with the things that the members have reason to value, thus orienting the process toward the preservation of diverse valued lives, and therefore to social justice.

On the other hand, the evaluative perspective was presented in Chapter Seven. This chapter (Seven) defended the individual exploration among the members, helping the facilitator to better understand the effects of the DCR project in each participant. The chapter explored the potentialities in evaluating through a capabilities lens, not only by understanding the valuable capabilities but also, by exploring whether these individual capabilities had been enhanced/achieved by the project. This, to some extent, guides us in the way to assess our practices and identify them as more just than others. In this case, the DCR project was able to achieve some of the valued capabilities for this group, thanks to their

involvement in the participatory project, and thus advance toward social justice, in the sense of achieved freedoms.

### 8.3.2. THE VOICELESS AS KNOWLEDGE CREATORS

Moving on to the second principle, the term voiceless is a common one in the participatory approaches literature (Cornwell & Jewkes, 1995; White, 2003). However, there are many ways to refer to certain voiceless groups, such as ‘oppressed groups’ for example (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Nevertheless, if we view this voiceless person from a capability perspective, it would be someone who not only lacked a kind of *human recognition capability* or a kind of affiliation in relation to non-humiliation, but also a capability of control over one’s environment, in the political sense (Nussbaum, 2011), diminishing his or her effective participation.

These capabilities are central to the process of knowledge creation as a way to remove injustices, in terms of removing epistemic barriers that impede individuals to have epistemic access and/or become epistemic contributors (Fricker, 2015). Therefore, not only from a capabilities perspective but also from the participatory viewpoint and in terms of the decolonial debate, epistemic justice potentially has an impact on the achievement of global justice as a whole (see Chapter One). Thus, De Sousa Santos claims that ‘there is no global social justice, without global cognitive justice’ (2015, p. 8), referred to here as hermeneutic and epistemic justice. Furthermore, linking these two ideas, Fricker argues (2015) that, beyond being receivers or having epistemic access, it is central to thinking about epistemic contribution as a central capability. Thus, she claims:

The general idea that human well-being has an epistemic dimension depends on the idea that functioning not only as a receiver but also as a giver of epistemic materials is an aspect of human subjectivity that craves social expression through the capability to contribute beliefs and interpretations to the local epistemic economy (Fricker, 2015, p. 21).

Therefore, Fricker (2015) links the idea of epistemic justice, heavily defended by participatory debates and the decolonial debate, to the Capabilities Approach, suggesting that it needs to be included as a central capability. This leads us to the assumption that in order to advance social justice, and in this case epistemic justice, there is a need to include individuals as epistemic contributors; thus, to see individuals as knowledge creators, especially those that are most excluded—the voiceless. This idea is especially relevant when talking about formal ways of knowledge production by professional scholars. The discussion here guides us toward a more flexible and inclusive approach to understanding research and knowledge production/contribution. Appadurai (2006) rightly argues that all individuals are in essence researchers as they have the capacity to ‘make systematic forays beyond their current knowledge horizons’ (2006, p. 167). Moreover, he clarifies that:

Research, in this sense, is not only the production of original ideas and new knowledge (as it is normally defined in academia and other knowledge-based institutions). It is also something simpler and deeper. It is the capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one’s current knowledge, in relation to some task, goal or aspiration (2006, p. 176).

Therefore, considering this broad perspective it makes sense to promote knowledge production and research beyond a scientific frame and context, in the sense of leading research with those who are excluded from these processes and constrained in their own capability to have epistemic access and to become epistemic contributors (Fricker, 2015).

In the DCR case, a group of undergraduates was selected as participants of the project in a South African university (see Chapter One and Four). This decision was guided by the aforementioned main principle from DCR, in addition, to the relevance of undergraduate students to be involved in higher education transformation, instead of resolving problems outside the university walls, as explored in Chapter One.

In terms of participation in knowledge production, these undergraduate students were mostly treated as passive receivers of their ‘teaching and learning’ university programme. Therefore, they appeared to be highly passive until reaching their post-graduate level, whereupon they are considered ready to become knowledge producers. Moreover, various examples to illustrate this can be given from the interviews and data collected for this research, highlighting the role that the students themselves think they have in the university. Kungawo said: ‘Classes are just you hearing that person speak, the person who has the...the fancy degree or Master Degree or Doctorate or whatever. They speak to you and then you listen for the entire hour’ (Kungawo, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). Amahle stated: ‘we all sit right at the back, moving from the back forward and then the lecturer speaks, then its done, and maybe they try to force us to answer a question to show that we are actually involved’ (Amahle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). Minenhle mentioned the way in which she perceives the lecture: ‘He’s at the front and telling you what is right and what is wrong, so you can’t really say “Sir, I feel like this theory is wrong” or whatever’ (Minenhle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). Another student explained: ‘They don’t introduce us to this kind of research. It’s like we never do research’ (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). Therefore, all this highlights the secondary role of these particular undergraduate students in this specific context, conceptualising their participation as listeners and empty recipients, who do not have anything to contribute to the university context (Freire, 1996), not only within the classrooms, but beyond their undergraduate programmes.

In conclusion, for a research process to consider the voiceless as those who are excluded from formal knowledge creation processes, and those that are not considered as worthy epistemic contributors, is a way to challenge knowledge inequalities, as well as to pay attention to a central capability, as Fricker (2015) has highlighted above. It is a way to fight against epistemic barriers and expand the capability of these individuals as knowledge producers toward social justice.

### 8.3.3. INJUSTICE AS AN INTIAL ISSUE

The third principle arises from the decolonial debate, along with elements discussed in the theoretical framework, such as diatopic hermeneutics (De Sousa Santos, 2010). However, I will cite De Sousa Santos to clarify how this relates to social justice and the case study presented here:

The diatopic hermeneutic 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. It should be pursued with full awareness that this will result in black holes, areas of irredeemable mutual intelligibility that, in order not to result in paralysis or factionalism, must be tempered through inclusive common interests in the fight against social injustice (De Sousa Santos, 2010, p. 81).

What De Sousa Santos (2010) is trying to highlight is that, as argued above, we need alternative ways to create knowledge—collective processes in which we can come together with a common interest guided by injustices we want to fight against. Moreover, the Capabilities Approach is aligned with this idea, in the sense that our agency is the focus on our pursuit of things we want to do (Sen, 1999). Therefore, this can be linked to ideas of fighting against social injustices that limit

other individual capabilities or our own experiences of being constrained by conversion factors to lead our lives in the way we want (Sen, 1999).

Nevertheless, this principle presents a challenge in the way academia works and funding is allocated, impeding practices that are fully participative or collaborative, as explored in Chapter Two. Understanding research in this way means that it is the group of individuals the ones deciding the object under research and guiding the process together. The group needs to decide which injustices are important to them and are worthy to be researched together. This is well defined in one of the categories of participatory approaches, Community Based Participatory Research, Vaughan et al. (2017) acknowledge that:

‘[CBPR] 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 (Vaughan et al., 2017, p. 1457).

Therefore, this is how this principle is conceptualised in the DCR process: researching injustices that matter to individuals. In this way, and as presented in Chapter One, what DCR is claiming it is not only the methodological space—the strategies to create knowledge—but the formulation of the issue under research democratically. This is a major statement as it assumes that the conceptualisation of the research issue is a political and ontological statement that might highly impact the research process as a whole.

Furthermore, having the freedom to decide which issue they would research by themselves had a great impact on the DCR participants, expanding the capabilities linked to it, and making them view the project as something personal. It positions agency at the core and this was visible throughout the interviews with statements like: ‘We choose topics that are relevant to us’ (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview); or ‘It’s very, like, personal’ (Lethabo, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview); ‘It feels amazing because at first you sort of think that...aggg...it is just some volunteering staff...it’s nothing but becoming part of the project it’s, it feels more like, it feels more personal than just being a participant’ (Minenhle, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview); and most of all ‘For me it was like a milestone, it was really important, especially because race and racism is important to all of us...and a lot of us had been subjected to racism’ (Kungawo, 3<sup>rd</sup> interview).

In conclusion, this kind of practice can be more just than other research practices in which the participants are not those who decide which issue is important for them and they research the issue together. This does not deny the importance of other participatory methodologies or methods (see Chapter One and Two). Conversely, it highlights that when using the Capabilities Approach and participatory practices to create a practice such as DCR to advance social justice, this practice is better situated in that direction, not only expanding capabilities but considering individuals as capable of identifying, investigating and resolving their own concerns in terms of fighting their own experienced social injustices. Therefore, it places the agency of the participants at the centre of the knowledge creation process and considers them as active knowledge contributors.



#### 8.3.4. UNCERTAIN HORIZON (DEMOCRATIC SPACE)

Uncertain horizon is closely related to the previous section in the sense of providing democratic spaces where decisions are taken together, such as enhancing more democratic spaces for knowledge creation. In the theoretical framework (Chapter Three) I discussed whether ‘participatory’ is a really ambiguous word within the field of participatory approaches. This is intimately related to the different schools of thought among participatory practices. Nevertheless, DCR was conceptualised in a clear way, in the sense that it is not a practice to include participants in several stages of the researcher’s interests project but to allow them to be the protagonist together with us, as explored above. To defend this idea, I used the Capabilities Approach and the concept of democracy, in the sense that we need to advance in the direction of more inclusive frames, in which participants are not participating in the research, conversely, members are sharing spaces of knowledge creation with scholars. In this sense, knowledge creation is not only for the sake of contributing to the expansion of discipline knowledge, but also beyond that—using different knowledges in combination to produce a change in participant’s lives. In this sense, research is ‘The capacity to systematically increase the horizons of one’s current knowledge’ (Appadurai, 2006, p. 167), beyond being a discipline contribution.

Therefore, this principle aligned with the previous principle highlights the conceptualisation of DCR as a democratic space where decisions are taken by the group, not mainly guided by a facilitator who elaborates an academic project before meeting the research team. Coming back to the ideas presented above about Community-Based Participatory Research, DCR represents an orientation to research. It is a way to start, create and finalise a research project with others. This aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter Five; it involves exploring how the decisions were taken during the project and demonstrating that the members of the group were making the decisions over time, forming the process by walking through it together. Only some actions were undertaken by the facilitator during the DCR process, as a way to expand/achieve members’ capabilities and follow the prospective plan designed from the capabilities analysed at the beginning of the project; as well as the decision taken in order to ensure ecology of knowledge.

In conclusion, participatory practices and more democratic practices like DCR are situated in the direction of advancing socially just higher education in terms of fighting knowledge inequalities and epistemic injustices, as explored in Chapter One. DCR is here situated in a space which is more closely related to the expansion of capabilities for the participants than other participatory practices in the broader field (see Chapter Two). DCR allows the agency of the participants to be at the centre of the process, guiding the project together toward the things that matter for us, creating more democratic spaces for knowledge production.

#### 8.3.5. INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL DIVERSITY (ECOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGES)

The principle of internal/external diversity is more intricate than the previous ones. However, let me draw from the introduction and the theoretical framework chapters (also Chapter Five) and link it to the case study in a way that the reader will be able to capture the differences between both positions and their advancement toward social justice.

First, the CA talks about the need to have diverse voices heard in the sense of having better-informed choices, as well as a moral meaning of what inclusive public scrutiny would look like (Sen, 1999). This position was aligned with the theoretical framework with the term ‘subjectivities of intersubjectivities’ (Dussel, 2008), showing how both positions talk one to another. This perspective can be extrapolated to knowledge production when we are able to understand

knowledge beyond the scientific discipline contribution (Appadurai, 2006). In this sense, as noted in earlier chapters, by including as many knowledges as possible we are able to investigate better. This is an idea coined by De Sousa Santos with the name 'ecology of knowledges', which refers to the epistemic diversity needed to challenge the dominant structures of knowledge creation, as explored in Chapter One (De Sousa Santos, 2010). Nevertheless, although some theoretical concepts can be easily grasped, it is not the same when these concepts are put into practice. An easy way to better understand these concepts is by exploring practical examples of how this has been done by scholars in the past. In this case, the ecology of knowledges was implemented through the Popular University of the Social Movements (UPSM).

The UPSM looked for the 'potential to exchange knowledge, alternating with periods for discussion, study and reflection as well as leisure periods' (UPSM proposed methodology, p. 4). Throughout the workshops, this will involve a shared space with militant intellectuals (one third), such as scholars or artists committed to social movements, together with two-thirds of the group composed of activists, leaders of social movements or NGO's. The idea of this itinerant<sup>44</sup> university is to confront the different perspectives of each collective about the same issue, as a way of building epistemic bridges between groups, and to 'overcome the separation between academic and popular knowledge and between theory and practice' (UPSM proposed methodology, p. 2). That is why the UPSM methodology document states that 'the ecology of knowledges is an attitude that transcends the prevailing logic of the production of knowledge and encompasses a pedagogical process for the production of knowledge aimed at mutual enrichment, combining knowledge emerging from struggle and knowledge emerging from committed academic work' (UPSM proposed methodology, p. 4). This way of implementing ecologies of knowledges will be considered (in the terminology of this study) as internal diversity, where different individuals sit together to explore their common concern in a same research project.

The DCR project was slightly different; it used four groups of very different commitments, taking one as the principal. First, the group of undergraduate students, who primarily decided the issue to be researched and formed the internal or permanently active group. Secondly, three more collectives were added externally, in the sense that they made visits to the DCR group for conversations, which situated them as external groups. These groups were: Social Movements (University organisations such as, Embrace a Sister and Unsilenced UFS), institutional groups (Student Representative Council, transformation office) and intellectuals committed to the issues under research (two scholars from the university)<sup>45</sup>.

As explained above, the UPMS brings together different groups for knowledge creation in one space, which under my criteria would be 'internal diversity'. This is, for instance, an idea which could be taken further in subsequent DCR practices by carefully exploring the way relations are constructed among the different groups and the expansion of their capabilities. However, due to the passive role of the undergraduate students on campus in terms of them not being viewed as legitimate knowledge contributors, and the need for them to make some central decisions about how to proceed with the research in terms of capabilities expansion and agency, I framed it as

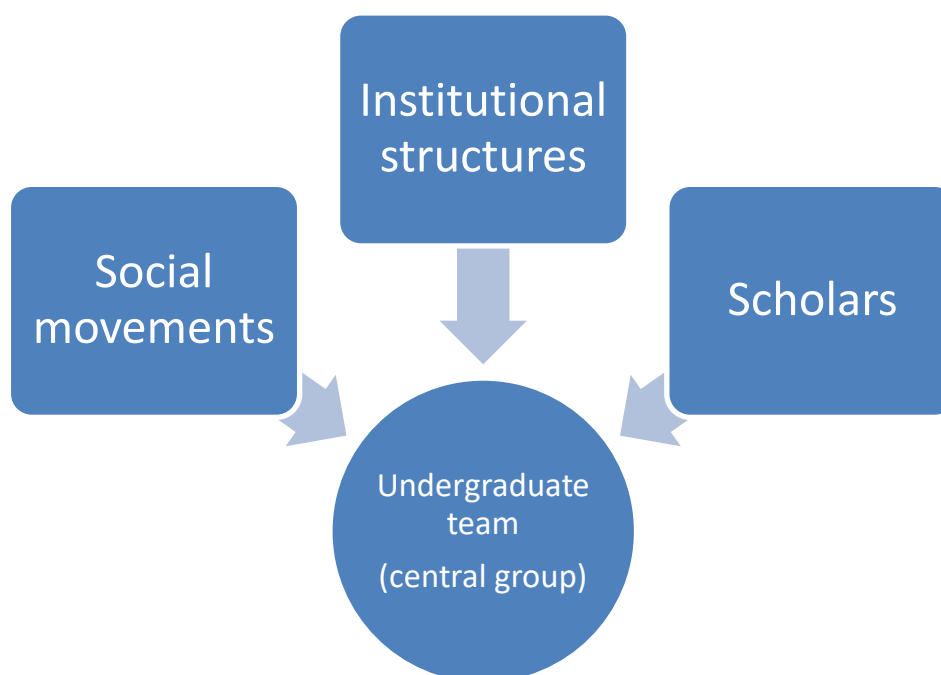
---

<sup>44</sup> I refer to the UPMS as itinerant because it is not frame as located in a campus or particular institution or space. The UPMS can be proposed by any individual and be organise in different places around the world, as has been occurring since 2000 (see <http://www.universidadepopular.org/site/pages/en/about-upms/history.php> for more information [29.06.18 09:42])

<sup>45</sup> See Chapter Five for more information about these individuals/groups and their participation in the DCR project.



external diversity. Thus, the figure below represents this distribution graphically, placing the undergraduate students in the centre and other actors around them.



*Figure 15: Ecology of knowledges in the DCR process*

In conclusion, whether we use the internal or external diversity—as I did in this DCR case—as a way to introduce ecology of knowledges in the research process, the question of justice relies heavily on the diversity of perspectives presented and the possibility to expand the informational basis. This is substantial for the Capabilities Approach, as well as participatory approaches and the decolonial debate. It highlights how we can create more democratic spaces for knowledge creation including other knowledges, and thereby advance in the direction of more just processes of knowledge creation.

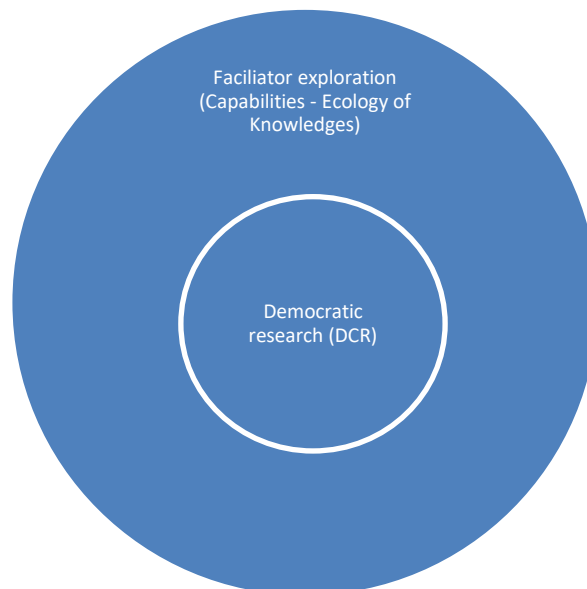
### 8.3.6. FINAL REMARKS

The five principles discussed above highlight how DCR is a participatory practice in the direction of advancing socially just higher education, even though it is situated in an imperfect context. DCR generates a context that continuously interacts with members' capabilities and with the possibilities to create a 'perfectly just' research processes. To a certain extent, this is not a limitation but a particular perspective orienting us in the way of understanding the limitations and challenges surrounding our participatory practices. Therefore, when we talk about the process as a space for capabilities expansion, the voiceless as knowledge creators, injustice as an initial issue, the democratic space for knowledge production or the need for internal/external diversity (ecology of knowledges), I refer to theoretical categories that are presented in a particular way toward a specific idea of justice, considering some of them to be more just than others. Furthermore, these five principles imply the role of two different actors: the research facilitator, and the participants. That is why the following section will elaborate on this distinction and its implications for the conceptualisation of DCR as a whole.

#### 8.4. THE DCR PROCESS BEYOND A DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Initially, DCR was conceptualised as a collaborative research project that, although it was specifically conceived for this South African DCR case, could be implemented in different ways due to the flexibility of its principles. However, the theoretical framework also presented stages to be undertaken by the facilitator. This highlighted that there are two central roles in a DCR process: first, the facilitator role; and second, the DCR group members' role.

After the DCR implementation, this division was clear. The facilitator helped a group of people to research a topic of interest for them in different ways, guided by the principles explored in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the role of the facilitator consisted of valued capabilities exploration at the beginning of the project, designing a frame to guide the process according to the group valuable capabilities (Chapter Six), in addition to exploring the evaluation of valued capabilities at the end (Chapter Seven), and promoting ecology of knowledges throughout the process. Therefore, two main roles, as described above, are identified: the facilitator capabilities-centred exploration/ecology of knowledges promotion, together with the collaborative practice.



*Figure 16: Two main parts of the DCR process*

However, beyond considering both parts as necessary and complementary to implement a DCR project, I argue that DCR can in fact be both together, as an integrated tool; moreover, it can also be used for the facilitator exploration applied to any other participatory practice, as a prospective-evaluative frame. Therefore, DCR can be used at two levels that can be combined or applied separately depending on the interest and circumstances surrounding the research project.

In some way, this division resolves the scientific tensions that have been discussed throughout this thesis. It does so by providing a rigorous research process able to accommodate the scientific standards of disciplinary contribution—the facilitator's roles—at the same time as it includes flexible research processes in which individuals excluded from networks of knowledge creation are included as researchers, thereby understanding knowledge as the expansion of participants' knowledge frontiers—the participants' role—(Appadurai, 2006).

## 8.5. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM A PILOT DCR PROJECT

Therefore, having reviewed the five DCR principles and clarified the roles that a DCR implies. This section explores some of the key issues and opportunities that arose from this case study involving a DCR research project with undergraduates in a South African university towards social justice.

As expected for a first-time practice, many challenges arose in this DCR project. However, these challenges helped me to better understand the fields in which DCR is situated and to rethink some aspects of the practice. I will start by highlighting some general elements together with opportunities that are probably familiar to the reader, as some of them have been mentioned in this thesis in one way or another in the previous chapters.

The first challenge I would like to discuss is the issue of participatory approaches and their intricate academic positionality. Unfortunately, or perhaps hopefully, some areas of participatory research advocate the use of really uncomfortable questions for science in general, questioning much of the structures and procedures in which they operate (Hall & Tandon, 2017). As I argued in the literature review, as well as the introduction (Chapters One and Two), this is not the case for all type of practices, as we see how easily participatory methods can be used within conventional research, or even some of the participatory methodologies when they adjust the established practices (Noffke & Somekh, 2009). As the DCR frame was conceptualised, this was an initial limitation having to reconsider the structure of the thesis as a case study, in which I would be able to initiate a pilot DCR project and, therefore, explore it as a case study with a qualitative methodology, linking this exploration with the facilitator's role. Nevertheless, although this could be seen as a limitation, it was in some way a great opportunity as well. This process of deep exploration allowed me to accomplish my academic duties and also provided me with the platform for innovation and experimentation necessary for a project like DCR. For instance, being able to explore debates about the meaning of knowledge or the borders of considering research as something more than a scientific contribution (Appadurai, 2006). In addition, having this opportunity as an early career scholar was a unique and valuable opportunity. It allowed me to better understand the theoretical and practical space of participatory practices, along with the opportunities at the South African higher education context. This context became substantial and necessary for the conceptualisation of DCR. The student protests and movements like #FeesMustFall or #RhodesMustFall, together with the concern for decolonisation exhibited by the scholars surrounding me, enriched the research and also helped me to explore my role within it more deeply and critically, along with the DCR frame.

The second challenge is related to the co-creation of the process together with the participants. This process was not an easy one, as mentioned in Chapter Five. Although theoretically ideal, in the way of allowing new elements and ideas coming from the group to be included in the research process, this represented a tremendous responsibility for the members of the group right from the earliest stage, which was at times overwhelming for them, as they were not used to it. Iminathi mentioned the difficulties of adapting to a new way of working and learning, coming from a 'given' system. She said:

'Mmm... I feel like because we are so used to being given... like...this is the work...you are gonna write about it. That is what we are used to.' (Iminathi, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview, May 2017).

The participants presented difficulties in the way of appropriating the project and leading it. They were not used to autonomous or self-driven learning-work, thus, this delayed and obstructed the

transfer of leadership throughout the project. This was not only caused by social conversion factors, such as the one highlighted above, but by a combination of personal and social conversion factors, as shown in Chapter Five. For instance, participants did not feel confident enough to talk, especially at the beginning. To a certain extent this was resolved by the long term engagement with the participants; however, it did limit the research process as a whole.

The third point is linked with the issue highlighted above, active participation seemed at the time to be unequal, especially for the female members of the group. As raised in Chapter Five, when meeting together the imbalances in terms of the *human dignity capability* were visible in functionings such as voice. Male members who were coming from more advantaged backgrounds tended to dominate conversations and decision-making from the beginning of the project. This was present during the first half of the project and raised by the group as a concern to debate together. During the interviews, the female members—especially those who tended to participate less—justified the matter by their lack of knowledge or personal insecurity (Chapter Five). Nevertheless, as mentioned above, this was an opportunity for the group to discuss the issue together and reflect on the internal dynamics of the group.

The fourth point focuses on the project being framed as a PhD case study in a specific time frame. This time frame created a challenge with several unforeseen consequences; it made me rash at times, being overwhelmed by time and occasionally forcing decisions within the group. For instance, the decision to finalise the official project at the end of 2017 was due to the need to set aside time for interviews, transcriptions, and analysis in order to start writing my thesis at the beginning of 2018. This impacted the project in several ways. First, it created a feeling among the participants of the project being finished, although the agreement was to continue within the following year, but on a more informal basis. And second, the risk of participants being absent the following year, due to them finishing their studies, or not being registered as a student. Certainly, this tension would be resolved by applying these practices outside of a PhD project, as well as by considering a flexible time frame which could adapt to different circumstances and processes. Furthermore, during the DCR project, the participation rate dropped significantly towards the end of the project. When exploring the causes of this issue in the interviews, although responses were oriented toward motivation in general, they more specifically concerned their academic calendar, in the sense that the students viewed the second semester as being extremely demanding and they struggled to combine their study responsibilities with the project duties.

The fifth point focuses on capabilities expansion and achievements as a crucial part of the facilitator role. Analytically, capabilities are difficult to identify, as they are dynamic components of an individual's life. In this sense, we could say that, empirically speaking, we can create approximations of the enjoyment of a particular capability through functionings (Achieved capabilities), as explored in Chapter Seven. These functionings, reflected the available choice for the individual, due to the project, as well as the choice of the participant to achieve it, providing valuable outcomes in order to assess our practices. On the other hand, we can have fair approximations of individuals' valued capabilities by qualitative techniques following some extra validation processes, as presented in Chapters Six. As I have argued, these research outcomes represent approximations, due to the capabilities dynamism defended through this study, however, they are still valuable in our way of using capabilities as guidance to better lead and evaluate our participatory processes from a more individual-centred and culturally related perspective.

The sixth point relates to the Ubuntu capability and the implications of it as a group valued capability. First of all, this capability was initially conceptualised as *Care and Support*. Nevertheless,

at this early stage, this initial capability highlighted the Ubuntu ideas immersed in its definition. Students mentioned it during the interviews, explaining how the meaning of Ubuntu leads their lives as caring for others, or by seeing themselves as interconnected individuals. This made me finally decide to name this capability *Ubuntu* in a final stage of the project. However, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations, as I was the one deciding the name of the capability at a later stage. On this matter, it appears necessary to understand myself as an outsider, making an interpretation, in the sense of being a white, European, woman, PhD fellow conceptualising an *Ubuntu capability* from a group of undergraduate students in South Africa. Hence, due to my cultural background and the short time I have lived in this context to engage with these and other cultural elements, the use of the term and the capability of *Ubuntu* presented here seems limited and conditioned, being necessary to examine it further more deeply in the future. For instance, and as highlighted in Chapter Six, to understand the extent to which this capability impacts more than one capability and could be an especially generative fertile capability.

To conclude this section, I will highlight the challenges presented by the ecology of knowledges in the DCR process. To promote an ecology of knowledges, in terms of epistemic multiplicity in a space in which all knowledges are treated as equal—all the different knowledges are valued equally—requires a deep and critical understanding of knowledge and academic knowledge production. This seems to be difficult to maintain working with a group of individuals that are not familiar with these debates. In the DCR project, students came to the research with their own ideas and beliefs, very different from each other. While some students coming from biochemistry or natural sciences generally understood the scientific method as the only way to achieve truth—although their knowledge about how to do so was limited—others relied on and believed in witchcraft, and the majority had a combined vision. This multiplicity of perspectives seems to highlight that the main element when talking about ecology of knowledges outside of the academic scope, is to question, in terms of limitations, each knowledge presented during the research project, as well as present their potentialities. The equal use of different knowledges in a research process seems inapplicable, as one will prevail more than another depending on the composition of the group. For instance, in the DCR case, experiential knowledge was much more used than scientific knowledge, due to the composition of the research group (see Chapter Five). In this way, ecology of knowledges seems to be achieved not by the extent in which ‘all’ knowledges are presented in a project equally, but by the way the various knowledges, whichever ones we are using (Scientific, conceptual, experiential, intuitive, local, indigenous, cultural, prepositional and so on) are questioned and scrutinised by a rationality, in a broad sense. Thus, this rationality is not understood in a modern rational frame, conversely, it is considered in an extended manner<sup>46</sup>. Hence, in this ecology of knowledges the research project would question any knowledge presented but at the same time would use the type of knowledges that were more appropriate and relevant for the participants involved in the process.

## 8.6. LESSONS FROM A PILOT DCR PROJECT

As a way of summarising the ideas presented above, four main lessons can be highlighted from the pilot DCR project at a South African university with undergraduate students.

Firstly, the co-creation of the research collaboratively. This is not a process that suits all institutions, nor all contexts, and it also demands a lot of resources in different ways. Co-creation

---

<sup>46</sup> As Hoffman and Metz refer to rationality understood by Sen ‘If rationality were a church [...] It would be a rather broad church’ (Sen, 2009, p.195 cited in Hoffman and Metz, 2017)

involves a lot of team work and face-to-face meetings that not only require time, but also resources in terms of places to meet, food, refreshments and stationery material, in addition to planning and preparation. Equally, the time to implement the project will need to be taken into account, the facilitator availability to adequately coordinate the process—in terms of valued capabilities identification and evaluation—as well as the participant's responsibilities and obligations during the project in order to facilitate their active and engaged participation. For instance, in this case, undertaking the project during the second semester of the academic year could have been avoided, as this interfered with the attendance of the participants in the workshops, or the number of participants could have been reduced, as twelve members were too many for a single facilitator.

Secondly, in order to promote equal participation among the members during the project, two points can be mentioned. The first is that it seems important for the facilitator to be familiar with the context and understand the way in which the participants are situated in the social structures, such as understanding where they come from, their cultural background, gender and what that means for those individuals in that particular context. For instance, in this project, the first interviews were important in order to provide a brief background from each participant as a way to better understand their positionality and relevance within the group.

Thirdly, the exploration of valued capabilities among the members has been of substantial importance. This is due to the contribution that the CA presents for participatory practices in order to guide the practices towards the lives the participants have reason to value. Moreover, it is beneficial to understand capabilities beyond universal lists and start using the Capabilities Approach within its grassroots potential. In this way the contextual approximations of the Capabilities Approach might help us, as capabilities scholars to conceptualise new capabilities of value and confront them with others in order to understand the different lives that we have reason to value and why, due to our different contexts and societies.

To conclude, in terms of ecology of knowledges, various ideas need to be acknowledged. Firstly, whether we understand knowledges as the commonly recognised as scientific, conceptual, experiential, intuitive, local, indigenous or cultural (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Keany, 2015), or as knowledge systems (indigenous, scientific, Western or popular, etc.). In a broad understanding of rationality towards ecology of knowledges, it is not a question of equality in the process of knowledge production, but a refutation and scrutiny of all those that are relevant and significant for the members of the group under a broad rationality. In this sense, ecology of knowledges in practice reflect knowledge inequalities throughout the process, but the process of ecology remains important in terms of refutation and scrutiny of different knowledges within the group of participants.

## 8.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has mainly discussed the first and second research questions, the conceptualisation of the capabilities-based research as well as the opportunities, challenges, and lessons in regards to social justice and capabilities expansion in this DCR project. In doing so, the first part of the chapter has focused on the first research question, conceptualising DCR after the case implementation. It has explored the five principles in its application in this South African project, and as it has reviewed each of them by exploring their implications towards social justice. The second part has investigated the roles involved in the implementation of a DCR practice, clarifying and concluding the conceptualisation of DCR. This section has highlighted the two roles in the DCR practice by dividing the facilitator's role—in terms of valued capabilities identification and

evaluation together with the promotion of ecology of knowledges—with the participant's roles, in terms of leading the research process on those things that matter to them.

The second part of the chapter investigated more general challenges and lessons from the case study, answering the second research question. It has explored aspects such as the intricate academic space for DCR, the challenges in the space of co-creation, the difficulties in equal participation among the members, the time frame constraints, the challenges to capabilities identification and expansion, the incompleteness of the Ubuntu capability, and the reflections on the use of ecology of knowledges in this case study. To conclude, the final part has summarised the elements above, bringing some particular lessons learned from the DCR project, focusing on learning from co-creation issues, equal participation challenges, valued capabilities importance and the process of the ecology of knowledges in a non-ideal setting.

Therefore, after concluding with the empirical chapters in section two of this document, Chapter Nine and the conclusion of this thesis, will summarise the research as a whole, focusing on its contributions, the answers to the research questions, methodological challenges, dissemination, and future directions.



## CHAPTER 9: SUMMARY, CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONCLUSION

### 9.1. INTRODUCCION

This study aimed to conceptualise a participatory capabilities-based research process linking the Capabilities Approach with the field of participatory approaches. The reason for connecting these two fields was not only to make a conceptual contribution—although this is an important element of this thesis—but to implement a capabilities-based research process (DCR) and explore it as a case study, developing the actual DCR practice throughout this study. The dual nature of this process complicated the research. Multiple challenges arose throughout the procedure, due to both research processes (DCR and case study) being interwoven but separate at the same time. For this reason, the main purpose of this final chapter is to clarify and summarise the major elements of this study, reflecting on the different research questions, contributions, and future directions of the research project. Therefore, the chapter reflects on the findings of the study and it highlights how the project contributes new ways of knowing to the field of higher education and development research. Thus, the first section explores the key findings to continue with the conceptual, empirical and methodological contributions of this study, concluding with the final contributions to pedagogical practices and education policies in higher education.

### 9.2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

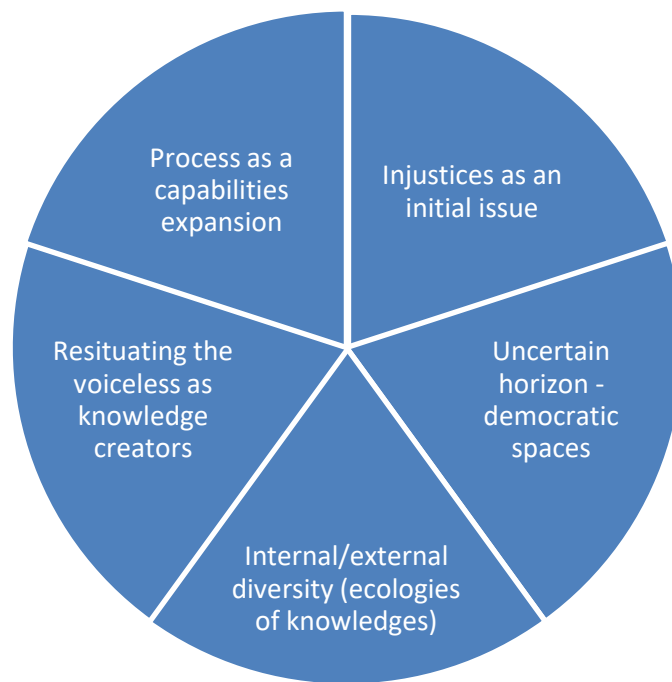
Primarily, this section aims to reflect on the research questions of this study and answer them more directly, despite them being the central focus of previous chapters. Thus, by reviewing them one by one, a summary will be provided in order to offer a clear concluding view of this study.

#### 9.2.1. RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

**How can a participatory capabilities-based research project be conceptualised and implemented in the light of the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches towards socially just higher education, given the academic gap between both fields?**

This first research question has been explored throughout this thesis; its combination of conceptual and empirical formulations is spread over several chapters. The first part of the question—How to conceptualise this participatory capabilities-based research—was investigated in Chapter Three, through the theoretical framework. In this chapter (Three) the discussion between the two areas of research—The Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches—justified the creation of DCR (Democratic Capabilities Research) together with the explanation of the terminology used. First, by switching *Participatory* for *Democratic* and visualising the differences between both concepts and the contribution of democracy from a capabilities perspective, this alternative concept expanded from an initial space for participation to a democratic space for knowledge production, in which all the counterparts are agents of the process. Moreover, the change of *Action* for *Capabilities* was justified, in terms of the contribution that a participatory practice has in terms of advancing the way the participants have reason to value. In this manner, we not only pay attention to the social aspects and impacts in general but to the extent, our participatory practice is contributing to the lives they have reason to value.

In addition to this conceptual contribution, the theoretical framework (Chapter Three) proposed five DCR foundational principles. These five principles represented the major contribution of this thesis, bringing together two research areas and combining them to form five flexible principles, which are open-ended.



*Figure 17: Five central principles of DCR*

These five principles are (1) Injustices as an initial issue; (2) Uncertain horizon—Democratic space—Agency centred; (3) Internal/External diversity—Ecology of knowledges; (4) Resituating the voiceless as knowledge creators; and (5) the process as a capabilities expansion. Together they represent an open-ended frame (DCR) to rethink our knowledge creation practices within higher education institutions, in order to give us direction towards socially just higher education. Moreover, in this thesis, the conceptualisation of justice in the context of higher education is not exhaustive, in terms of providing a closed and well-delimited formula to achieve socially just higher education. Conversely, the argument necessitates an incomplete view of justice in which the area of knowledge creation within our higher education institutions is challenged and problematised, visualising the need to diversify and complement processes of knowledge creation with practices, such as the proposed DCR research.

Nevertheless, as stated above, this research question was not only conceptual but also empirical. This has been presented throughout the different evidence chapters, not only by investigating the DCR process (Chapter Five), but also by revising the five principles presented in the theoretical framework following the implementation of the DCR process (Chapter Eight) and investigating the capabilities exploration of the DCR participants (Chapter Six and Seven). In doing so, these chapters expanded the initial conceptualisation of DCR, linking conceptual/theoretical elements with the DCR pilot project.

In brief, this final conceptualisation of a capabilities-based participatory research project—DCR—intentionally leaves this research question incomplete as a way of pursuing the conceptual and incomplete theoretical ground supported throughout this thesis. This is not a limitation per se but a particular and deliberate feature of this specific use of the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1999). From this standpoint (Sen's perspective) the approach remains open-ended, thus, DCR does so

too. This might allow us to continue building from here in the future, in order to better scrutinise and understand DCR under a capabilities influence, as well as their potential for social justice in a global world that demands more open, flexible and contextual forms of research (Chapter Three).

### 9.2.2. RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

**Which opportunities, challenges and lessons with regard to social justice and capabilities expansion emerge from a participatory capabilities-based case study with undergraduate students in South Africa?**

In an attempt to learn from this DCR experience using empirical data, this second research question aimed to identify challenges, opportunities, and lessons from this DCR pilot project. This research question was explored in Chapter Eight, where several challenges and opportunities were highlighted, together with the lessons learned.

Therefore, seven challenges were discussed in Chapter Eight as part of this question. First, in terms of the difficulties of applying a participatory project as DCR in academic institutions, due to the questioning of the internal structures of knowledge production, as well as the use of DCR as part of a PhD study. To a certain extent, although this can be seen as a limitation, it has provided an adequate environment for the combination of intrinsically different processes of knowledge production, by combining them. Moreover, the context of South Africa higher education has been tremendously beneficial for the project, due to the student protests and diverse academic debates about decolonising higher education institutions.

The second challenge explored was related to the co-creation of the process together with the participants. This process—which was not an easy one, as highlighted in Chapter Five—although theoretically ideal, in the way of allowing new elements and ideas coming from the group to be included in the research process, represented a tremendous responsibility for the members of the group. The participants presented difficulties in the way of appropriating the project and leading it. They were not used to autonomous or self-driven learning-work, thus, this delayed and obstructed the transfer of leadership throughout the project. This was not only caused by social conversion factors, such as that highlighted above, but to the combination of personal and social conversion factors as shown in Chapter Five. Conversely, as the process was slow and progressive, this was an opportunity for these students to explore their own potential towards leading and managing a research project.

The third point was linked with the issue highlighted above, in terms of active participation. Participation seemed at times to be unequal, especially for the female members of the group. As raised in Chapter Five, when meeting together the imbalances in terms of *human dignity capability*, were visible, in functionings such as voice. Male members who came from more advantaged backgrounds tended to dominate conversations and decision-making from the beginning of the project. This was present during the first half of the project and raised with the group as a concern to debate together. During the interviews, the female members—especially those who tended to participate less—justified the issue due to their lack of knowledge or personal insecurity (Chapter Five). Nevertheless, as said in the previous chapter this was an opportunity for the group to discuss the issue together and reflect on the internal dynamics of the group.

The fourth point focused on the project being framed as a PhD case study in a specific time frame. This time frame created a challenge with several unforeseen consequences, such as rushing for the finalisation of the project, or impacting further participation in 2018, as had been planned.

The fifth point focuses on capabilities, firstly, it highlighted that although valued capabilities are dynamic, we can have fair approximations of individuals' valued capabilities by qualitative techniques following some extra validation processes, as presented in Chapter Six. As I have argued, these research outcomes represent approximations, due to the capabilities dynamism defended through this study. However, they are still valuable in our way of using capabilities as guidance to better lead and evaluate DCR from a more individual-centred and culturally related perspective, and in terms of expansion and achievements; thus, they are crucial elements of the facilitator role.

The sixth point was related to the Ubuntu capability and the implications of it as a group valued capability. First of all, I explained that this capability was initially conceptualised as *Care and Support*. However, this initial formulation already highlighted the Ubuntu ideas immersed in its definition. Students mentioned during the interviews how the concept of Ubuntu led them to lead their lives by caring for others, or seeing themselves as interconnected individuals. All this made me finally decide to name this capability as *Ubuntu* at a later stage of the project. However, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations as I was the one deciding the name of the capability at a later stage and on this matter it would appear necessary to understand myself as an outsider, as a European, female, PhD fellow conceptualising an *Ubuntu capability* for a group of undergraduate students in South Africa. Hence, due to my cultural background and the short time I have lived in this context to engage with these and other cultural elements, the use of the term and the capability of *Ubuntu* presented here seems limited. For instance, and as highlighted in Chapter Six, it is necessary to further understand the extent to which this is a capability or a feature that impacts more than one capability.

Ecology of knowledges was presented as the last challenge. It highlighted that to promote an ecology of knowledges, in terms of epistemic multiplicity in a space in which all knowledges are treated as equal, a deep and critical understanding of knowledge and academic knowledge production is required. This seems to be difficult to maintain when working with a group of individuals that are not familiar with these debates. In the DCR project, students came to the research with their own ideas and beliefs, which were very different from each other. This multiplicity of perspectives seems to highlight that the main element when talking about the ecology of knowledges outside the scholarly scope is to question, in terms of limitations, each knowledge presented during the research project, as well as reveal their potentialities. Because the equal use of different knowledges in a research process seems inapplicable to the extent that one will prevail more than another depending on the composition of the group. For instance, in the DCR case, the experiential knowledge was used much more than scientific knowledge. In this way, ecology of knowledges seems to be achieved not by the extent in which 'all' knowledges are presented in a project equally, but to the way various knowledges—whichever we are using—are questioned and scrutinised by a broad understanding of rationality. Hence, in this ecology of knowledges, the research project would question any knowledge presented, but at the same time would use those types of knowledges that are more appropriate and relevant for the participants involved in the process.

Furthermore, in terms of lessons learned, a few recommendations were given in the previous chapter. Firstly, the co-creation of the research collaboratively. This is not a process that suits all institutions, nor all contexts; in addition, it requires a lot of resources in different ways. Co-creation involves a lot of team work and face-to-face meetings that not only require time, but resources in terms of places to meet, food, refreshments and stationery material, in addition to planning and

preparation. Equally, the time to implement the project will need to take into account the availability of the facilitator to adequately coordinate the process—in terms of valued capabilities identification and evaluation—as well as the participants' responsibilities and obligations during the project in order to facilitate their active and engaged participation. For instance, in this case, undertaking the project during the second semester of the academic year could have been avoided, as this interfered with the attendance of the participants in the workshops, or the number of participants could have been reduced, as twelve members were too many for a single facilitator.

Secondly, in order to promote equal participation among the members during the project, two points can be mentioned. Firstly, it seems important for the facilitator to be familiar with the context and understand the way in which the participants are situated in the social structures, such as understanding where they come from, their cultural background, gender and what that means for those individuals in that particular context. For instance, in this project, the first interviews were important in order to provide a brief background of each participant as a way to better understand their positionality and relevance within the group, as well as the participants having the opportunity to know the facilitator.

Thirdly, the exploration of valued capabilities among the members has been of substantial importance. This is due to the contribution that the Capabilities Approach presents for participatory practices in order to guide practices towards the lives the participants have reason to value; moreover, it is useful to understand capabilities beyond universal lists, and start using the Capabilities Approach within its grassroots potential. In this way the contextual approximations of the Capabilities Approach might help us, as capabilities scholars conceptualise new capabilities of value and contrast them with others in order to understand the different lives that we have reason to value and why, due to our different contexts and societies.

To conclude, in terms of the ecology of knowledges, different ideas need to be acknowledged. Firstly, whether we understand knowledges in the commonly recognised way as scientific, conceptual, experiential, intuitive, local, indigenous or cultural (Zuber-Skerritt, Fletcher & Keany, 2015), or as knowledge systems (indigenous, scientific, Western or popular, etc.). Under a broad understanding of rationality towards ecology of knowledges, it is not a question of equality in the process of knowledge production, but a refutation and scrutiny of all those knowledges that are relevant and significant for the members of the group under a broad rationality. In this sense, the ecology of knowledges in practice reflect knowledge inequalities throughout the process, but the process of ecology remains important in terms of refutation and scrutiny of different knowledges within the group of participants.

### 9.2.3. RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

**Which capabilities do these undergraduate students have reason to value and why? Which of these capabilities are being expanded through the involvement in a participatory capabilities-based case study experience?**

These two research questions were investigated in Chapter Six and Seven. Both chapters explored the valued capabilities among the group and the expansion of capabilities by focusing on the cases of two students. Firstly, Chapter Six focused on the valued capabilities of these twelve undergraduate students. It highlighted that, despite the incomplete or limited analysis—in terms of providing a static picture of dynamic elements—six capabilities were identified as valued capabilities among the group (*Knowledge; Self-development; Human recognition; Ubuntu; Health; Free time and leisure*), from which four were valued by more than half of the participants (*Knowledge,*

*Self-development, Human recognition, Ubuntu*). The table below represents the valued capabilities, thus, how many participants considered these capabilities to be very important.

VALUABLE CAPABILITIES PRE-PROJECT						
	Self-Development	Knowledge	Human recognition	Ubuntu	Health	Free time & leisure
Member 1	X	X	X	X		
Member 2	X	X	X	X		
Member 3	X	X	X	X		
Member 4	X	X	X	X	X	
Member 5		X	X	X	X	X
Member 6	X	X		X	X	
Member 7	X	X	X	X		
Member 8	X	X	X	X		
Member 9	X	X		X		
Member 10	X	X	X	X		
Member 11		X	X	X		X
Member 12	X	X	X	X		
	10	12	10	12	3	2

Table 23: Members' highly valued capabilities

In brief, I argued that, beyond the mere identification of these valued capabilities, they are themselves substantial as they are different from other generic capabilities lists, such as Nussbaum's central capabilities list (2011). The context in which these students lived, and the moment they were at in their lives, greatly shaped their own understanding of these capabilities. Chapter Six explored these ideas in depth by comparing the student group's six identified valuable capabilities with Nussbaum's central capabilities. In this comparison, I argued that although some similarities exist, Nussbaum's list does not match the classification of capabilities for this group of individuals, as they are not incommensurable. Some of the group's categories embrace several of Nussbaum's capabilities, although the conceptualisation of a particular capability misrepresents cultural and contextual features, which, therefore, are lost on her list. Hence, we have good reasons to scrutinise these type of lists when trying to understand contextual and cultural differences and their implications for capabilities conceptualisation and preferences.

Additionally, I put forward the argument that these highly valued capabilities are constantly moving in and out of an individual's life, as well as having different values at different times. To represent this idea, a graphic was presented in Chapter Six highlighting the different levels (see graphic below). In the case of two different individuals, both of them will make conscious choices about which set of capabilities matter to them as a way to lead the lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). This is represented by the area called 'active' in which capabilities are situated at different levels of importance for the individual and are constantly moving within this area. On the other hand, a threshold was given as a way to understand adaptations or reduce aspirations due to long-standing conversion factors surrounding the individual (Teschl & Comim, 2005). However, this latent zone can not only be extended to long-standing deprivation, but also to the moment of data collection. For instance, a significant event that happened just before the data



collection can give more weight to certain capabilities, hiding others that are not necessarily irrelevant for the individual, locating them in the latent area, thus making them potentially invisible to a researcher's analysis. However, these capabilities can be mobilised later on due to new experiences, knowledges and so on.

This model was presented as a way to resolve the tensions that might affect conscious choices about valued capabilities or the influence of the moment in which we collect data and capabilities are registered. This representation highlighted how capabilities are in continuous movement between the active and latent areas, which determines whether we, as researchers, after data collection, might be able to identify active capabilities (highly valued capabilities) in a static perspective, which freezes a particular moment.

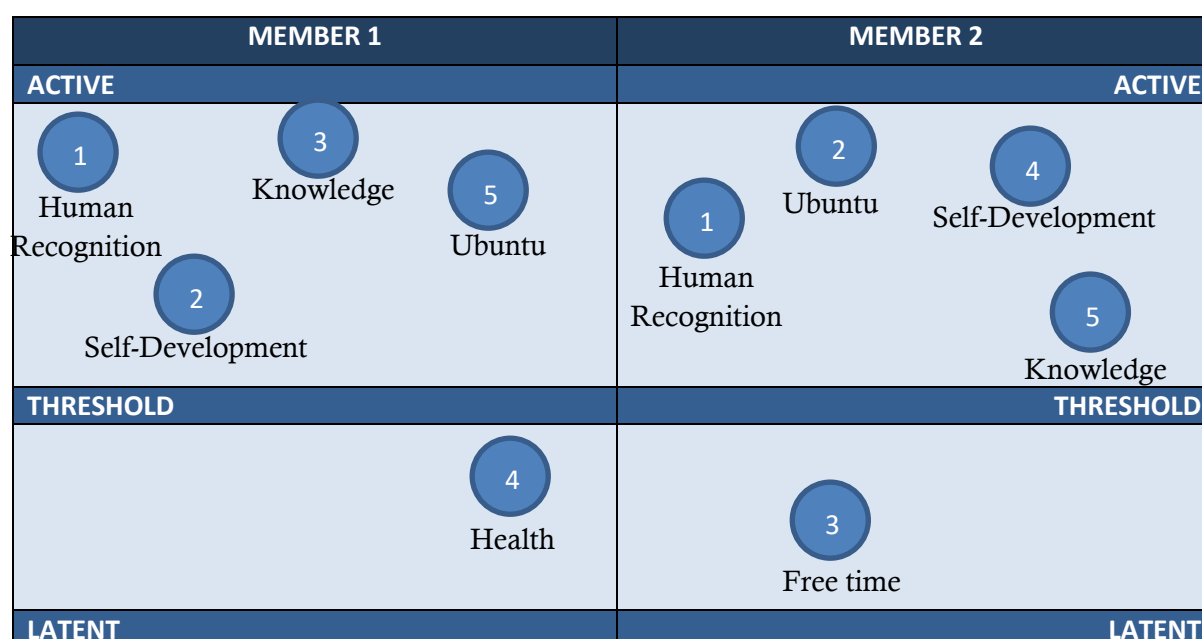


Figure 18: A dynamic and contextual model of valuable capabilities

Furthermore, this chapter not only highlights the evidence from the data but applies it to the DCR project. For this reason, the second part of the chapter not only answered which capabilities these students have reason to value, but also explained how the DCR facilitator can use these capabilities in order to guide the DCR project. Therefore, a table is provided with the strategies coming from the student's definitions from each capability and how the DCR process implemented them during the pilot project.

Furthermore, focusing on the second part of the question (which of these valued capabilities has been expanded throughout the involvement in the DCR experience), Chapter Seven explored two cases from among the twelve students. As explained in the previous section, presenting the two cases in detail not only allows the reader to appreciate the substantial value of a capabilities analysis, but also goes beyond more extended generic analysis, which misses the differences in individuals between when they enter and when they exit a participatory process.

Therefore, the specific capabilities were given for each case presented, as both individuals had reason to value different capabilities sets. First, Minenhle highly valued four capabilities, which she defined in a particular way. These were (1) *Human recognition*, (2) *Ubuntu*, (3) *Self-development*, and (4) *Knowledge*. From these capabilities, *Human recognition*; and *Ubuntu* were highly valued. However, Minenhle entered the project with a relatively low level of freedom in both aspects,



which contributed to a greater expansion due to the project. On the other hand, *Self-development* and *knowledge* were less impacted, as Minenhle did have choices and access to resources to help her to achieve both of them. In the case of *self-development*, her life experiences and personal conversion factors greatly helped her to achieve this capability before the project, so her participation in the DCR project had a low impact on this capability. In terms of *knowledge*, the situation was similar. Despite the project having a positive impact on this capability, the way in which Minenhle came to the project reduced the possibilities of expanding this valued capability more (as she was already enjoying it to a large extent), as well as in terms of achieved functionings, which had a low impact on her *knowledge* capability.

On the other hand, in Siyabonga's case, his capabilities differed greatly from those of Minenhle at the beginning of the project; his capabilities set was more diverse and he enjoyed his capabilities to a greater extent than Minenhle did. Siyabonga highly valued five central capabilities (at the time of the project). They were (1) *Ubuntu*, (2) *Knowledge*, (3) *Human recognition*, (4) *Free time and leisure* and (5) *Health*. To a greater or lesser extent, Siyabonga enjoyed many of them at the beginning of the project. In these terms, Siyabonga did not expand many of these capabilities; only three of them were moderately affected by the project. These were *Ubuntu* (in terms of the new friendships Siyabonga made through the project), and *Human recognition* (in terms of achieving freedoms, as the project was a platform for Siyabonga to express himself without fear or being judged). Moreover, among his highly valued capabilities, *Knowledge* was the capability that was most impacted, due to the limited access to critical information that Siyabonga had at first, and the deep involvement he had with social issues relevant to him during the project.

Therefore, these two questions have been reduced to the capabilities that participants had reason to value before the project and how the project has influenced them, in terms of their expansion for two of the members. However, by using two cases, instead of focusing on the twelve participants, this question was expanded to include *how* and *why* this occurred, providing important details about the capabilities valued by individuals and their expansion (see Chapter Seven).

As has been described previously, this capabilities analysis is not exhaustive as capabilities are dynamic and those that are captured will depend greatly on the moment the data collection occurs, as this collection depicts a static picture that may misrepresent their real nature. In this case, I argue that although the category cannot provide an exhaustive measure, the importance of approximations and the details provided are substantial for our judgments, by providing a normative space to understand the impact of DCR beyond universal aggregations.

### 9.3. CONCEPTUAL/EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The major contribution of this thesis is conceptual/empirical, based on the unification of two fields of study to conceptualise, develop and implement a capabilities-based participatory research capable of resolving some of the current limitations of the participatory approaches field. This capabilities-based research process has been named Democratic Capabilities Research. The central point of this study is the conceptualisation of the practice, as well as a review of its application following a South African project. Furthermore, the use of the Capabilities Approach in this study has intentionally been focused on a particular perspective—that defended by Sen (1999)—in order to better understand its grassroots application. This declaration of intent represents a clear positionality, one which clarifies that the importance of the Capabilities Approach goes beyond general aggregations and evaluations. It allows a more individual perspective to look at actual

individual narratives, beyond its universal application, which is pervasively used. The claim of the Capabilities Approach is to focus on actual lives; however, this focus seems to be a secondary matter in the capabilities literature, which focuses on aggregations of individuals and human development index quantification. As Sen claims:

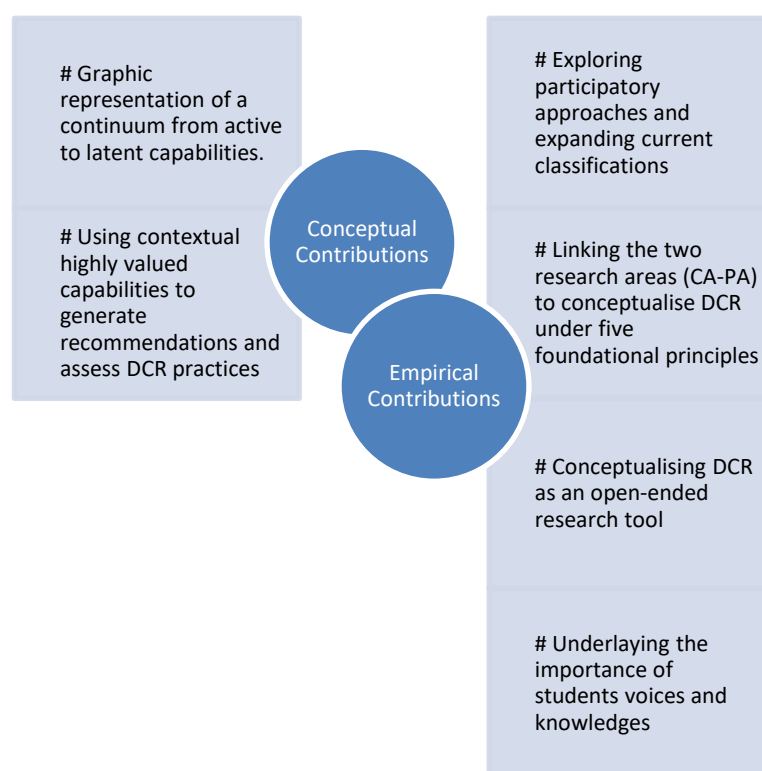
‘The passion for aggregation makes good sense in many contexts, but it can be futile or pointless in others. Indeed the primary view of the living standard, as argued earlier, is in terms of a collection of functionings and capabilities, with the overall ranking being a secondary view. The secondary view does have its uses, but it has no monopoly of usefulness. When we hear of variety, we need not invariably reach for our aggregator’ (1988, p.33).

Thus, this study brings back the centrality of individuals in the process of choosing valuable capabilities and how to assess practices such as DCR in terms of these valued capabilities at a local level.

Nevertheless, various claims can be made in terms of the contributions of this study to several aspects in both fields—the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches. To begin, in terms of the conceptual contributions—which are interwoven with the empirical contributions—of this thesis, three major points can be highlighted. First, the deep exploration of the different traditions of participatory approaches has expanded the current analysis of this field and proposed an alternative classification in order to understand the different traditions and theoretical influences. This classification not only contributes to defining the various types of approaches in this field, but also to the different practices that each undertakes and the different levels in which participation is used and implemented. Second, this thesis has proposed an innovative type of participatory research—Democratic Capabilities Research (DCR)—based on five foundational principles, in order to advance socially just higher education. Thus, the study has managed to link both research areas (the Capabilities Approach and participatory approaches)—an undertaking which has thus far not been made in the literature—to present a participatory capabilities-based research process. Third, arising from this conversation between the two areas, the research has presented the conceptualisation of DCR as an incomplete and open-ended tool, following the decolonial theoretical influences and the Capabilities Approach. Therefore, DCR is conceptualised as being open-ended and as advancing contextual frameworks, meaning it is able to accommodate practices that are relevant and adequate for different contexts and times. Thus, it assumes that our theoretical frameworks need to be incomplete in order to adapt to the dynamism that characterises societies (see Chapter Six).

Additionally, in terms of conceptual contributions—which are equally interwoven with the empirical contributions—two main points are important. First, the understanding of contextual valued capabilities as dynamic and situating them in a visual representation as a continuum, from active to latent capabilities. This representation supports the argument of dynamism and also challenges the use of a universal list. The current classification—Nussbaum’s universal list—despite its major contributions to the field, does not represent the context in which these students from this case study operate and live (see Chapter Six). Second, the use of contextual valued capabilities is advocated as a means of generating recommendations and assessing DCR in order to expand current evaluative spaces within participatory approaches. In this view, the participatory process is not only guided by the things that the participants have reason to value but, ultimately, the process is also assessed in terms of the things that matter to them (Sen, 1999) (see Chapter Seven). And to conclude, a major contribution is the underlying importance given to student’s

voices and knowledges throughout the process. An implicit aim of this study was to trouble and interrogate arbitrary liminalities in the process of knowledge production and amplify the voice of the students who are often mistaken for receipts and end users of knowledge and not architects and actors in institutions of higher education. In this line, this research questioned the limited epistemic space in scientific knowledge generation, highlighting the relevance of other knowledge systems. Thus, claiming for the introduction of these knowledges in our academic practices, as a way to achieve social justice. This is especially important because knowledge is not considered anymore as unique and universal but as multi-epistemic, expanding our understanding of knowledge production, and therefore, the type of knowledge that emerges from these practices.



*Figure 19: Conceptual-empirical contributions of the study*

Thus, the figure above summarise these contributions linking conceptual elements with empirical aspects.

#### 9.4. METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The idea of this research project was methodologically challenging. I needed to take into account numerous debates and ethical considerations when it came to choosing the most suitable methodology for this study. These deliberations led me to decide on a case study, even though it would significantly increase the amount of work and involve important debates about the nature of knowledge and the positionality of the researcher towards the object of study. Firstly, my duty as a researcher would not only be the exploration, in terms of researching the case study, but also the conceptualisation and implementation of a DCR project. Therefore, while this opportunity allowed me to expand the process and make a greater contribution—one that was not only

conceptual but also empirical—this feature was extremely challenging in terms of time management, especially during the second year of the study. Secondly, this choice involved combining two research processes that were, in essence, different, while both simultaneously played a part in this study as a whole, being interwoven. The collaborative process in which the students were involved was implemented as a case study and formed the methodology of this thesis.

On the one hand, the collaborative research process called for epistemic and methodological considerations that go beyond conventional science standards (see Chapter Three, Five and Eight). It questioned the structures of knowledge production and the knowledge gap between different epistemic systems, requiring the need to build bridges between them as a way to challenge knowledge inequalities and to advance social justice. Furthermore, the case study highlighted that this type of research—qualitative studies—is still of value and is necessary to advance this epistemic diversity, not by removing traditional processes, but by combining them with other types of epistemological systems and research processes. Therefore, this methodology—the case study—was validated as a way to continue creating relevant knowledge and politically involved research in ways that have been historically dominant. Hence, this combination of both processes required both processes of knowledge creation. Despite their imbalances, they were both necessary and substantial to challenge the epistemic barriers that are present in some of the most traditional schools of thought within the sciences, as well as in the most radical movements against scientific knowledge production. This involved an intricate positionality which, although it may not be supported by all scholars, is nevertheless clear and determined to pursue values of plurality and diversity within knowledge creation processes. Citing an instructive argument highlighted by Nanay (2018), the idea is to switch from a ‘they are all stupid paradigm’ to a ‘we are all stupid paradigm’ in which we, as scholars and scientists, can acknowledge our own limitations towards rationality and embrace the multiplicity of ways in which knowledge can be created. In summary, the major methodological contribution of this study was the implementation of these theoretical principles (DCR), as well as the case study, showing how it can be applied in practice. This study made all these ideas tangible; showing how something works in practice and what its limitations are in these cases, as dividing the initial investigation into two different projects. It provided a new solution to a known challenge and demonstrated the efficiency of this solution.

In addition to the previous philosophical discussions, I would specifically like to mention some practical reflections on each of the methods used in this case study research project, as a way to focus on their more technical aspects. Firstly, I will start with the interviews with the participants at different stages of the process. This was the most useful source of data collection from the beginning to the end of the project. Due to the collective space of the DCR process, the interviews allowed me to collect individual perspectives in a more private space. This was helpful to better understand the collective process and its individual impact on each participant. Thus, the initial interviews to identify valuable capabilities for the members and the follow up in two stages of the process were suitable and necessary for the analysis and understanding of the impact this project had on their valued capabilities. Moreover, the informal meetings I had with the students to discuss the findings greatly helped to assess and validate some of the research outcomes.

Regarding the use of journals, this method of data collection did not work so well in this instance. While my personal journal was essential and truly valuable, that was not the case for the participant journals. Initially, the journals were planned to be collected at different stages of the project, however, upon the first collection, the limitations of the method were clearly visible. Many

of the students did not write more than a few pages, usually between three and four pages, and the content was not very relevant in terms of deep reflections about the collective process. In various conversations with the participants, it became clear that they considered the journals a burden. Thus, we agreed that only those participants that were highly interested in continuing with them would do so and that the journals would be collected at the end of the project. Subsequently, just a few of them continued working on the journal throughout the process, without much improvement in the quality of data. Thus, although the data was uploaded into the analysis software and briefly analysed, the journals from the participants were not used as data sources for this study, only my individual journal was used.

The participant observation worked well as a data collection tool, although its collection was at times overwhelming. To mitigate these consequences, I made use of different sources, such as a video camera and voice recorders, which I would review after every meeting to complete the report for each workshop. I strongly recommend this strategy, as it not only helped to revisit elements of interest that arose during the registration and analysis periods but can also be used for various further explorations after the initial research project.

However, although the internal exploration (in the sense of an insider exploring the case study) could be beneficial in terms of providing a better understanding the details and the dynamics within the group, it could also be a limitation, by increasing the bias in the manner of analysing the data. Hence, this positionality as an insider might have caused some blind spots and bias in the analysis and interpretation of the data, such as focusing on capabilities expansion and not negative impacts on valued capabilities, for example. The focus on looking at capabilities expansion—as formulated in research question three—limited the way of looking at the data. Throughout the data explored in the cases of the two individual students, it became visible how a valued capability for a member was not affected by the project, but a decrease in a specific capability was never highlighted, due to this way of looking at and analysing the data. This could be a consequence of the way in which the question was formulated and the analysis was performed, with the emphasis on looking for expansion. Thus, this limitation narrowed the interpretation of the data to the sole factor of capabilities expansion.

To conclude, I would like to finalise this section with some reflections on my own learning as a facilitator. My learning as a facilitator arose from contradictions and difficulties in this project. The most important learning was being able to understand other ways of living, other priorities in life, other values, in short other ways of perceiving the world. I was able to immerse myself into students' understanding. This was to learn about racism and what this meant for them, as well as for me as a white person living in South Africa, but also, learning about notions as Ubuntu and the implications of it in their lives and their relationship with other. This process of learning about 'others lives' had implications in the way of being 'the researcher' as this role was at times contradicting my position as a facilitator, for instance, the pressure of time. As highlighted in this chapter, this challenge made me questioned perceptions of time and progression from my researcher positionality. Time was for me conceived in a different way than the participants. As a researcher, I had to accomplish my schedule, however, as a facilitator; I needed to understand time from students' perspectives. Time did not have the same value for them as for me. Therefore, this matter had a central space throughout the project because we had to understand our different perspectives, and therefore, it generated a learning process for me as a researcher in this context but also for them. In this way, I learned, as a facilitator, that in this project the relationship between us was much valuable than following tidily the schedule.

On the other hand, one of the more important tensions mentioned in the researcher diary was the emotional/personal involvement with participants. As a facilitator, I thought that a close relationship with the students was essential to create an honest working space, as well as to challenge hierarchies and power imbalances between them and myself. However, as many entrances in my journal, this was at times, painful and discouraging but also perceived as inadequate and negative. Primarily, because I was really touched by their personal matters and difficulties trying to help them in the way I could. This was difficult as I was not always able to help or I did not want to be paternalistic with them. After the project, I learned that to be involved emotionally was okay, as to cry with them, to be sad with them, as well as to be happy and excited in good moments. This was an essential component to a real relationship of care and support between us. Therefore, becoming vulnerable was a positive and substantial part of the role of the facilitator.

## 9.5. CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION POLICIES

Another important point to consider as a contribution of this study is the possibilities of application of DCR in university classrooms and for educational policies. Firstly, the current debates on decolonising universities in South Africa, as well as in other countries in the South, forces us to re-think our institutions, thus, classrooms are crucial spaces in this transformation of the higher education sector. Therefore, in this transformation, the representation of diverse kind of knowledges in classrooms is a question of social justice and practices as DCR are able to introduce this diversity as a way of achieving this aim. There are many ways of introducing DCR into classrooms, and one of them is using DCR as a pedagogical tool in the line of project-based approaches<sup>47</sup> currently used in some educational systems around the world. In these project-based pedagogies, what DCR can add to them, it is its collective nature—as working in small groups—but also the central need to introduce knowledges that are not necessarily scientific into higher education learning programmes.

Another option to use DCR within the classroom is to introduce valued capabilities as central for the design of curriculums. In this case, lecturers can use students valued capabilities in order to guide the content and relationship with them. This is an interesting point, as it leads to questions as How is a classroom based on a Ubuntu capability? In this case, perhaps exams will not be important anymore, and collaborative learning and support between students and the larger society will be central to the pedagogical process.

Regarding educational policies, DCR can offer an alternative to conventional policy generation, as some participatory monitoring and budgeting practices do. Using the DCR perspective, what educational policies are aiming for, it is not a unique universal/global trend—coping policies from the North and implementing them in the South—but developing policies using local aspirations and interests, in order to connect the local with the global. Therefore, one way of using DCR for policy generation can be exploring local capabilities as this study does, in order to contextualise policies to the local space and cultural specificities, where they are used. Alternatively, DCR can be used as well, as a collective research process—including those collectives that are currently excluded—in order to investigate, design and implement policies, bringing together in one space diverse sectors of society.

---

<sup>47</sup> Project based-pedagogies are based on the acquisition of skills throughout the development of activities/projects by the students. Normally, students are assigned an open project, in which they choose a theme and decide how to go about it, just with a few guidelines given by the lecturer.



## 9.6. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The future directions for this study are the most exciting part of this project. To a certain extent, DCR represents the beginning of a conceptual connection between different research fields and this gives us, as scholars, endless opportunities to inquire and achieve a better understanding within this frame. Firstly, the DCR principles might be applied to rethink different practices. For instance, I could highlight the potential of DCR to be conceptualised as a participatory method, beyond the specific conceptualisation as a research process presented here. In this sense, DCR might facilitate our work in this area, allowing researchers to contribute—from a human development perspective—to the creation of specific enquiry tools that might better accommodate capabilities elements from a grassroots/ local perspective. Moreover, DCR can be expanded to an Action conceptualisation adding a final ‘A’ that gives emphasis to their social impact but also its unconventional practice, as DCRA.

On the other hand, DCR as a research process, as proposed in this thesis, may be further explored and conceptualised. For example, by implementing the internal knowledge diversity (internal ecology of knowledges) and comparing this practice with the external processes used in this research (see Chapter Eight). Alternatively, DCR could be applied in other higher education contexts—for instance, in the Global North—in addition to other contexts beyond higher education. This might help in the advancement of more inclusive ways of researching, in which the Capabilities Approach becomes the central influence of our participatory practices.

To conclude, networks will be substantial for the future of DCR, in terms of linking this work with other scholars interested in participatory practices and capabilities as a way to contribute to further practice and theorisation about DCR. Currently, there are a variety networks of interest to initiate this expansion of DCR, such as some of the thematic groups of the HDCA association, or other networks within participatory approaches, such as ARNA, CARN or PRIA. Thus, the future of DCR will depend on its use and expansion during the year following this thesis.

Nevertheless, in addition to the ideas on how to take DCR further in the future, it is also necessary to mention what has been undertaken with DCR to date, in terms of public engagement and networking.

This research project had and continues to have, a deep commitment to public engagement in various ways. First, during the project, I was involved in different public events, trying to scrutinise the research project and present some preliminary findings to other scholars. In terms of presentations, I have attended various conferences and presented this research project at several seminars. Initially, I presented a paper about DCR at the annual conference organised by ARNA in 2017 (Action Research Network of the Americas) whose theme was ‘Participation and democratisation of knowledge: New convergences for reconciliation’. At this conference, DCR was presented to a broader audience specialised in participatory approaches, and I introduced DCR as a capabilities-based research process. I also attended the 2017 HDCA (Human Development and Capabilities Approach) annual conference, presenting DCR as a research process towards epistemic justice. In October 2017, this aspect was taken further by linking DCR with decolonisation in a seminar given at the University of the Free State (South Africa). Moreover, as many scholars cannot attend annual conferences, I agreed to participate in a global webinar with the collaboration of three thematic groups from the HDCA association (Participatory methods, education, and indigenous peoples) as a way to engage with more scholars about the DCR conceptualisation and the DCR case study. The webinar presentation, which is available on



the HDCA association website, is accessible to all HDCA members and was presented in January 2018. Furthermore, more conferences are planned in 2018 and various academic articles to be published as an academic outcome of this research. In brief, the academic engagement was and continues to be substantial, with the goal of scrutinising DCR together with a broader specialised public in order to achieve a robust conceptualisation and theorisation, because DCR still work in progress.

Notwithstanding, this research should consider a different form of public engagement beyond its academic aspect. This is being undertaken with the participants of this research and it is still an ongoing process. The decisions about how to implement this public engagement need to be taken together as a group and the form of its implementation will depend on the members of the group. Thus, the DCR members from this case study are still meeting in 2018. They planed a public event to engage with other university students regarding the issues they researched during the 2017 project, together with a public presentation of their book and videos in August 2018. Therefore, although this project has engaged critically with diverse scholars, and plans to continue to do so in the future, it has also contemplated engagement in a broader sense by creating a platform for students to connect with their peers regarding the personal concerns they explored in the 2017 DCR project.

## 9.7. CONCLUSION

This final chapter has endeavoured to close a long and diligent thinking process by discussing the main contribution of this research project to different fields, as well as clarifying the main arguments sustained throughout the thesis. The conceptual/empirical contributions section highlighted that, even though the conceptualisation of capabilities-based research process (DCR) is one of the main elements, the thesis contributes on a variety of levels and in other terms to the expansion of knowledge and innovation within the different fields involved in this study. Furthermore, other contributions were highlighted in the chapter, as methodological or pedagogical contributions, identifying possibilities of using DCR in higher education classrooms or for the planning and implementation of educational policies.

As a final part, the chapter examined the future directions for the research, but also what has been achieved in terms of public engagement and what the future measures for this engagement are. This section highlighted the importance and relevance of taking this DCR frame forward on different levels, such as how this proposal might form the starting point of a particular participatory frame, as has happened with other forms of the proposal such as CPAR or PALAR. Although we do not know the extent to which this proposal can cross frontiers among fields and become a highly used approach, the idea is to continue developing the tool at different levels, so various scholars from different fields may make use of it. In order to do so, this study will require networks and deep public engagement on different levels. The future development of DCR will depend on the joint work of scholars and practitioner networks who are interested in developing and expanding the use of a participatory capabilities-based orientation to research towards a more grassroots and local use of the Capabilities Approach.

## REFERENCES

- Adelman, C. (1993). Kurt Lewin and the origins of action research. *Educational action research*, 1(1), 7-24.
- Alkire, S. (2010). Human development: Definitions, critiques, and related concepts.
- Altrichter, H., Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1991). Defining, confining or refining action research? In O. Zuber-Skerritt (Ed.) *Action research for change and development* (pp. 3–9). Aldershot (UK): Gower Publishing Company.
- Appadurai, A. (2006). The right to research. *Globalisation, societies and education*, 4(2), 167–177.n
- Appiah, A. (1993). *In my father's house: Africa in the philosophy of culture*. OUP USA.
- Appiah, K. (2010). Europe upside down. *Perspectives on Africa: A reader in culture, history and representation*, 48.
- Argyris, C., Putnam, R., & Smith, D. M. (1985). *Action science* (Vol. 13). Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.
- Badat, S. (2008). Redressing the colonial/apartheid legacy: Social equity, redress and higher education admissions in democratic South Africa. In *conference on affirmative action in higher education in India, the United States and South Africa. New Delhi, India* (pp. 19-21).
- Badat, S. (2012). Redressing the colonial/apartheid legacy. *Equalizing access: Affirmative action in higher education in India, United States, and South Africa*, New Delhi: OUP.
- Balakrishnan, V., & Claiborne, L. (2016). Participatory action research in culturally complex societies: opportunities and challenges. *Educational action research*, 1-18.
- Biggeri, M., & Anich, R. (2009). The deprivation of street children in Kampala: Can the capability approach and participatory methods unlock a new perspective in research and decision making? *Mondes en développement*, (2), 73–93.
- Biggeri, M., Libanora, R., Mariani, S., & 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.
- Boidin, C., Cohen, J., & Grosfoguel, R. (2012). Decolonizing the university: Practicing pluriversity.
- Boni, A., & Millán, G. F. (2016). Action-research using participatory video. A learning experience in San Lorenzo, Castellón, Spain. *Commons. Revista de Comunicación y Ciudadanía Digital*, 5(1).
- Boni, A., & Walker, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Human development and capabilities: Re-imagining the university of the twenty-first century*. Routledge.
- Boni, A., & Walker, M. (2016). *Universities and global human development: Theoretical and empirical insights for social change*. Routledge.
- Bonvin, J. M., Laruffa, F., & Rosenstein, E. (2017). Towards a critical sociology of democracy: The potential of the capability approach. *Critical sociology*, 0896920517701273.
- Bosch, T. (2017). Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: The case of# RhodesMustFall. *Information, communication & society*, 20(2), 221-232.
- Botha, M. M. (2007). Africanising the curriculum: An exploratory study. *South African journal of higher education*, 21(2).

- Boyd, J., & Boyd, S. (2005). Reflect and improve: Instructional development through a teaching journal. *College teaching*, 53(3), 110-114.
- Bradbury, H. (Ed.). (2015). *The Sage handbook of action research*. Sage.
- Brydon-Miller, M. (2001). Education, research, and action theory and methods of participatory. From subjects to subjectivities: A handbook of interpretive and participatory methods, 76.
- Buchanan, A., & Mathieu, D. (1986). Philosophy and justice. In *Justice* (pp. 11–45). Springer US.
- Bunting, I. (2006). The higher education landscape under apartheid. In *transformation in higher education* (pp. 35-52). Springer Netherlands.
- Butler-Adam, J. (2016). What really matters for students in South African higher education?. *South African journal of science*, 112(3-4), 1-2.
- Caister, K., Green, M., & Worth, S. (2012). Learning how to be participatory: An emergent research agenda. *Action research*, 10(1), 22-39.
- Capeheart, L., & Milovanovic, D. (2007). *Social justice: Theories, issues, and movements*. Rutgers University Press.
- Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming critical: Knowing through action research*. Deakin University.
- Carr, W., & Kemmis, S. (2005). Staying critical. *Educational action research*, 13(3), 347-358.
- Castells, M. (2001). *Challenges of globalisation: South African debates with Manuel Castells* (Vol. 4). J. Muller, N. Cloete, & S. Badat (Eds.). Pearson South Africa.
- Chambers, R. (2008) "PRA, PLA and pluralism: Practice and theory." *The Sage handbook of action research* (2008): 297-318.
- Chilisa, B. (2012). *Indigenous research methodologies*. Sage Publications.
- Cleaver, F. (1999). Paradoxes of participation: questioning participatory approaches to development. *Journal of international development*, 11(4), 597-612.
- Clegg, S., & Stevenson, J. (2013). The interview reconsidered: Context, genre, reflexivity and interpretation in sociological approaches to interviews in higher education research. *Higher education research & development*, 32(1), 5-16.
- Cloete, N. (2006a). *Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities* (Vol. 10). Taylor & Francis.
- Cloete, N. (2016b). The ideology of free higher education in South Africa: The poor, the rich and the missing middle. *Kagisano*: 115.
- Cloete, N. (2016c). For sustainable funding and fees, the undergraduate system in South Africa must be restructured. *South African journal of science*, 112(3-4), 1-5.
- Coghlan, D., & Brydon-Miller, M. (Eds.). (2014). *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research*. Sage.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
- Comim, F., Qizilbash, M., & Alkire, S. (Eds.). (2008). *The capability approach: Concepts, measures and applications*. Cambridge University Press.

- Conradie, I. (2013a). Aspirations and capabilities: The design and analysis of an Action Research project in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. PhD Thesis, South Africa. University of Western Cape.
- Conradie, I. (2013b). Can deliberate efforts to realise aspirations increase capabilities? A South African case study. *Oxford development studies*, 41(2), 189-219.
- Conradie, I., & Robeyns, I. (2013). Aspirations and human development interventions. *Journal of human development and capabilities*, 14(4), 559-580.
- Cornwall, A. (2003). Whose voices? Whose choices? Reflections on gender and participatory development. *World development*, 31(8), 1325-1342.
- Cornwall, A., & Jewkes, R. (1995). What is participatory research? *Social science & medicine*, 41(12), 1667-1676.
- Dadds, M. (1995). *Passionate enquiry and school development: A story about teacher action research*. Routledge.
- Damons, B. P. (2017) A collaboratively constructed process model for understanding and supporting the work of the community volunteer in a community school. PhD Thesis, South Africa. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Dash, D. P. (1999). Current debates in action research. *Systemic practice and action research*, 12(5), 457-492.
- Davis, J. M. (2007). Rethinking the architecture: An action researcher's resolution to writing and presenting their thesis. *Action research*, 5(2), 181-198.
- Del Moral-Espin, L. , Perez-Garcia, A. & Galvez-Munoz, L. (2017). Una buena vida. Definiendo las capacidades relevantes para el bienestar desde las voces de niños y niñas. *Sociedad e infancias, revistas científicas complutenses Vol. 1*, 203-237.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2006a). *La universidad popular del siglo XXI*. Lima: Fondo editorial de la facultad de ciencias sociales-UNMSM.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2006b). *Conocer desde el Sur: Para una cultura política emancipatoria*. Fondo editorial de la facultad de ciencias sociales, UNMSM.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2010). *Descolonizar el saber, reinventar el poder*. Ediciones trilce.
- De Sousa Santos, B. (2015). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Dei, G. J. S. (2014). Indigenizing the School Curriculum. In *African indigenous knowledge and the disciplines* (pp. 165-180). Sense publishers.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Dick, B. (2015). Reflections on the SAGE encyclopedia of action research and what it says about action research and its methodologies. *Action research*, 13(4), 431-444.
- Dick, B., & Greenwood, D. J. (2015). Theory and method: Why action research does not separate them. *Action research*, 13(2), 194-197.
- Diop, C. A. (2010). The meaning of our work. *Perspectives on Africa*, 44-47.
- Du Toit, P. H. (2012). Using action research as process for sustaining knowledge production: A case study of a higher education qualification for academics.

- Duraiappah, A. K., Roddy, P., & Parry, J. E. (2005). *Have participatory approaches increased capabilities?* International institute for sustainable development= Institut international du développement durable.
- Dussel, E. (1994). *Historia de la filosofía y filosofía de la liberación*. Editorial nueva América.
- Dussel, E. D. (2007). *Materiales para una política de la liberación*. Plaza y valdés España
- Drydyk, J. (2012). *A capability approach to justice as a virtue*. *Ethical theory and moral practice*, 15(1), 23–38.
- Ebersohn, L., Ferreira, R., & Beukes, J. (2012). An attractive choice: Education researchers' use of participatory methodology.
- Elliot, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. McGraw-Hill education (UK).
- Erskine, J. M. (1985). Action research approach to rural development in the Biyela area of KwaZulu. *South African journal of science*.
- Escobar, A. (2007). Worlds and knowledges otherwise: The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 179-210.
- Esau, O. (2013). Preparing pre-service teachers as emancipatory and participatory action researchers in a teacher education programme. *South African journal of education*, 33(4), 1-10.
- Etmanski, C., Hall, B. L., & Dawson, T. (Eds.). (2014). *Learning and teaching community-based research: Linking pedagogy to practice*. University of Toronto Press.
- Fals-Borda, F., & Rahman, M. A. (1991). Action and knowledge breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research (No. 300.720172 A2).
- Feldman, A. (2017). An emergent history of educational action research in the English-speaking world. In *The palgrave international handbook of action research* (pp. 125-145). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Ferreira, R., Ebersöhn, L., & Botha, K. (2013). Using participatory action research to develop an HIV and Aids school plan. *South African journal of education*, 33(4), 1-17.
- Fertig, M. (2012). The relationship between the capability approach and action research in the context of primary school leadership in Ghana. *Paper presented at the annual conference of the HDCA, 5–7 September 2012, Jakarta*.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmonds worth. UK: Penguin.
- Frediani, A.A. (2006). Participatory methods and the capabilities approach. *HDCA introductory briefing note*.
- Frediani, A.A. (2007). Participatory research methods and capability approach: Researching dimensions of housing. *Oxford Brookes University*.
- Frediani, A.A. (2010) Participation: From tyranny to human development? Participatory capabilities in development planning.
- Frediani, A. A. (2015). 'Participatory capabilities' in development practice. *The bartlett development planning unit*, 121.
- Fricke, M. (2015). Epistemic contribution as a central human capability. *The equal society*, 73–91.
- Gazda, G. M., Kipper, D. A., and Treadwell, T. W. (1997). A message from the executive editors. *Int. J. Act. Methods psychodrama skill train. Role Play*. 50(1),3.
- Gilley, B. (2016). Chinua Achebe on the positive legacies of colonialism. *African affairs*, 115(461), 646-663.

- Given, L. M. (Ed.). (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage publications.
- Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social forces*, 217-223.
- Goodnough, K. (2008). Dealing with messiness and uncertainty in practitioner research: The nature of participatory action research. *Canadian journal of education*, 31(2), 431.
- Gray, D. E. (2013). *Doing research in the real world*. Sage.
- Greenwood, D. J., & Levin, M. (2006). Introduction to action research: Social research for social change. SAGE publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Hall, B. L., & Tandon, R. (2017). Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education. *Research for All*, 1(1), 6-19.
- Hayward, C., Simpson, L., & Wood, L. (2004). Still left out in the cold: Problematising participatory research and development. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44(1), 95-108.
- Heather, J. K. (2014). The upwards spiral using participatory action research to define, evaluate and take action in regards to education for a culture of peace in Nicaragua. *Paper presented at the annual conference of the HDCA, 2-5 September 2014, Athens, Greece*.
- Helskog, G. H. (2014). Justifying action research. *Educational action research*, 22(1), 4-20.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (1997). A participatory inquiry paradigm. *Qualitative inquiry*, 3(3), 274-294.
- Heron, J., & Reason, P. (2007). Participative knowing and an extended epistemology. *South pacific centre for human inquiry. Retrieved March, 6, 274-294*.
- Hlela, Z. (2016). Learning through the action of research: reflections on an Afrocentric research design. *Community development journal*.
- Higgins, C. (2016). The promise, pitfalls, and persistent challenge of action research. *Ethics and education*, 1-10.
- Hoffmann, N., & Metz, T. (2017). What Can the Capabilities Approach Learn from an Ubuntu Ethic? A relational approach to development theory. *World development*.
- Isakhan, B., & Stockwell, S. (Eds.). (2011). *The secret history of democracy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Isobell, D., Lazarus, S., Suffla, S., & Seedat, M. (2016). Research translation through participatory research: The case of two community-based projects in low-income African settings. *Action research*, 14(4), 393-411.
- Joseph, J. (2003). *Hegemony: A realist analysis*. Routledge.
- Karodia, A. M., Soni, D., & Soni, P. (2016). Wither higher education in the context of the Feesmustfall campaign in South Africa. *Research journal of education*, 2(5), 76-89.
- Kearney, J., & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2012). From learning organization to learning community: Sustainability through lifelong learning. *The learning organization*, 19(5), 400-413.
- Kearney, J. F., Wood, L., & Zuber-Skerritt, O. D. (2013). Community–university partnerships using participatory action learning and action research (PALAR).

- Kember, D. (2000). Action learning and action research: Improving the quality of teaching and learning. Psychology Press.
- Kemmis, S. (2008). Critical theory and participatory action research. *The Sage handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice*, 2, 121-138.
- Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory action research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2013). *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Retallick, J. (2004). *The action research planner*.
- Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (Eds.). (2007). Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place. Routledge.
- Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative inquiry*, 12(3), 480-500.
- L'Etang, S., & Theron, L. (2011). A critical reflection on the participatory action process involved in the development of a cognitive-behavioural-based intervention programme for youth living with HIV/AIDS in a rural South African town. *Action research*. Retrieved from <http://www.arj.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/08/06/1476750311414740>. DOI, 10(147675), 0311414740.
- Lavelle-Wijohn, E. (2017). Brain Injury Whānau Action Project (BIWAP): Increasing the capabilities of families of adults with brain injury to live their lives in the ways they have reason to value. PhD thesis. Auckland University of Technology (2017)
- Leibowitz, B. (2017). Power, Knowledge and Learning: Dehegemonising Colonial Knowledge. *Alternation*, 24(2), 99-119.
- Lewin, K. (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of social issues*, 2(4), 34-46.
- Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics II. Channels of group life; social planning and action research. *Human relations*, 1(2), 143-153.
- Ley, T. (2013). The added value of analyzing participation in a capability perspective. *Final Conceptual Report: "Inequality, disadvantage, social innovation and participation"*.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 4, 97-128.
- Lizzio, A., & Wilson, K. (2004). Action learning in higher education: An investigation of its potential to develop professional capability. *Studies in higher education*, 29(4), 469-488.
- Luescher, T., Loader, L., & Mugume, T. (2017). # FeesMustFall: An Internet-age student movement in South Africa and the case of the University of the Free State. *Politikon*, 44(2), 231-245.
- Luckett, K. (2016). Curriculum contestation in a post-colonial context: a view from the South. *Teaching in higher education*, 21(4), 415-428.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). Outline the Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality.
- 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.
- Mertens, D. M. (2008). *Transformative research and evaluation*. Guilford press.



- Meyiwa, T., Letsekha, T., & Wiebesiek, L. (2013). Masihambisane, lessons learnt using participatory indigenous knowledge research approaches in a school-based collaborative project of the Eastern Cape. *South African Journal of Education*, 33(4), 1-15.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality 1. *Cultural studies*, 21(2-3), 449-514.
- Mignolo, W. (2010). Cosmopolitanism and the De-colonial Option. *Studies in philosophy and education*, 29(2), 111-127.
- Mink, A. (2016). What is capability driven design and why use it?.
- Mbembe, J. A. (2001). *On the postcolony* (Vol. 41). Univ of California press.
- Mbembe, A. (2015). Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive. *Aula magistral proferida*.
- McGrill, I., & Beaty, L. (1995). Action learning.
- McKay, T. M. (2014). Combating plagiarism using a community of practice approach. *South African journal of higher education*, 28(4), 1315-1331.
- McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J. (2002). *Action research: Principles and practice*. Second edition. London: Routledge Falmer
- McKernan, J., (1991). *Curriculum action research. A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner*. London: Kogan page
- Msila, V., & Gumbo, M. T. (Eds.). (2016). *Africanising the curriculum: Indigenous perspectives and theories*. African Sun Media.
- Naicker, C. (2016). From Marikana to #feesmustfall: The praxis of popular politics in South Africa. *Urbanisation*, 1(1), 53-61.
- Naidoo, L. A. (2015). The Role of radical pedagogy in the South African students organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, 1968–1973. *Education as change*, 19(2), 112-132
- Negrini, M. (2009). Parents at play: Participation and empowerment in arts-based development research in two communities of Peru. *Paper presented at the 6th annual conference of the HDCA, 10–12 September 2009, Lima, Peru*.
- Nemeroff, T. (2008). Generating the power for development through sustained dialogue: An experience from rural South Africa. *Action research*, 6(2), 213-232.
- Neumann, J. E. (2005). Kurt lewin at the tavistock institute. *Educational action research*, 13(1), 119-136.
- Ninomiya, M. E. M., & Pollock, N. J. (2017). Reconciling community-based indigenous research and academic practices: Knowing principles is not always enough. *Social science & medicine*, 172, 28-36.
- Noffke, S. E., & Somekh, B. (Eds.). (2009). *The sage handbook of educational action research*. Sage.
- Norton, L. S. (2009). *Action research in teaching and learning: A practical guide to conducting pedagogical research in universities*. Routledge.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities*. Harvard University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2017). Human capabilities and animal lives: Conflict, wonder, law: A Symposium.

- Nnaemeka, O. (2004). Nego-feminism: Theorizing, practicing, and pruning Africa's way. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 29(2), 357-385.
- Ngugi, W. T. O. (1986). Decolonizing the mind. *London: James Currey*.
- Nyemba, F., & Mayer, M. (2017). Exploring the roots of participatory action research: An interview with Dr Marja-Liisa Swantz. *Action research*, 1476750316684003.
- O'Leary, Z. (2004). *The essential guide to doing research*. Sage.
- Parra- Romero, A. P. (2016). ¿ Por qué pensar un giro decolonial en el análisis de los conflictos socioambientales en América Latina?. *Ecología política*, (51), 15-20.
- Pedler, M. (2011). Action learning in practice. Gower publishing, Ltd..
- Pellissery, S., & 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.
- Pienaar, C. F., & Raymond, E. B. (2013). Reflections on a shared leadership approach to curriculum development in higher education. *South African journal of higher education*, 27(5).
- Pithouse, R. (Ed.). (2006). *Asinamali: University struggles in post-apartheid South Africa*. Africa world press.
- Postma, D. (2016). An educational response to student protests. Learning from Hannah Arendt. *Education as change*, 20(1), 1-9.
- Rappaport, J. (2017). Participation and the work of the imagination: A Colombian retrospective. In *The palgrave international handbook of action research* (pp. 147-159). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Raelin, J. A. (1997). A model of work-based learning. *Organization science*, 8(6), 563-578.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2008). The sage handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice.
- Revans, R. (2011). ABC of action learning. Gower publishing, Ltd.
- Robeyns, I. (2003). The capability approach: an interdisciplinary introduction. In *Training course preceding the third international conference on the capability approach, Pavia, Italy*.
- Robeyns, I. (2005). The capability approach: a theoretical survey. *Journal of human development*, 6(1), 93-117.
- Robeyns, I. (2006). The capability approach in practice. *Journal of political philosophy*, 14(3), 351–376.
- Robeyns, I. (2018). Wellbeing, freedom and social justice: The capability approach re-examined (p. 266). Open book publishers
- Rowell, L. L., Bruce, C. D., Shosh, J. M., & Riel, M. M. (Eds.). (2017). *The palgrave international handbook of action research*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rowell, L. L., & Hong, E. (2017). Knowledge democracy and action research: Pathways for the twenty-first century. In *The palgrave international handbook of action research* (pp. 63-83). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Saldana, J. (2009). An introduction to codes and coding. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*, 1-31.
- Sen, A., & Muellbauer, J. (1988). *The standard of living*. Cambridge university press.
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Oxford paperbacks.

- Sen, A. (2004). *Rationality and freedom*. Harvard university press.
- Sen, A. (2011). *The idea of justice*. Harvard university press.
- Simpson, N. P. (2018). Applying the capability approach to enhance the conceptualization of well-being in environmental assessment. *Journal of human development and capabilities*, 1-33.
- Simpson, N. P., & Basta, C. (2018). Sufficiently capable for effective participation in environmental impact assessment?. *Environmental impact assessment review*, 70, 57-70.
- Semali, L. M., & Kincheloe, J. L. (2002). *What is indigenous knowledge?: Voices from the academy*. Routledge.
- 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.
- Somekh, B. (2006). Constructing intercultural knowledge and understanding through collaborative action research. *Teachers and teaching: theory and practice*, 12(1), 87-106.
- Scott, D., Cooper, A., & Swartz, S. (2014). 'Cascading participation' and the role of teachers in a collaborative HIV and Aids curriculum development project. *South African journal of education*, 34(2), 01-15.
- Schein, E. H. (1996). Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: Notes toward a model of managed learning. *Systems practice*, 9(1), 27-47.
- Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Indigenous peoples and research*.
- Spreafico, A. (2016). Measurement literature review. *Miratho working paper 2016/1*.  
[http://www.miratho.com/resources/Miratho%20Working%20Paper%202016\\_1\\_Measurement%20literature%20review.pdf](http://www.miratho.com/resources/Miratho%20Working%20Paper%202016_1_Measurement%20literature%20review.pdf)
- Stenhouse, L. (1975). *An introduction to curriculum research and development*. Heinemann educational publishers.
- Tabata, I. B. (1960). *Education for barbarism*. London, England. *Unity movement of South Africa*.
- Tamdgidi, M. H. (2012). Editor's Note: To be of but not in the university. *Human architecture: Journal of the sociology of self-knowledge*, 10(1), 1.
- Tandon, R., Hall, B., Lepore, W., & Singh, W. (2016). Training the next generation of community based researchers research have.
- Teschl, M., & Comim, F. (2005). Adaptive preferences and capabilities: some preliminary conceptual explorations. *Review of social economy*, 63(2), 229–247.
- Thaman, K. H. (2003). Decolonizing pacific studies: Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom in higher education. *The Contemporary Pacific*, 15(1), 1-17.
- Theron, L. C. (2012). Does visual participatory research have resilience-promoting value? Teacher experiences of generating and interpreting drawings. *South African journal of education*, 32(4), 381-392.
- Thiollent, M., & Colette, M. M. (2017). Action research and participatory research in Brazil. In *The palgrave international handbook of action research* (pp. 161-176). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Tuckett, A. G., & Stewart, D. E. (2004). Collecting qualitative data: Part I journal as a method: experience, rationale and limitations. *Contemporary nurse*, 16(1-2), 104-113.

- Vandekinderen, C. & Roose, R. (2014). Conceptual guide for the participative research. 'A common framework for participative research in local youth policy from a capability perspective'. *Social innovation. empowering the young for the common good*.
- Van der Merwe, J. C., & Van Reenen, D. (2016). Transformation and legitimization in post-apartheid universities: reading discourses from 'Reitz'.
- Van Der Voort, G., & Wood, L. (2014). Assisting school management teams to construct their school improvement plans: an action learning approach. *South African journal of education*, 34(3), 01-07.
- Vaughn, L. M., Jacquez, F., Lindquist-Grantz, R., Parsons, A., & Melink, K. (2016). Immigrants as research partners: A review of immigrants in community-based participatory research (CBPR). *Journal of immigrant and minority health*, 1-12.
- Walker, M. (2005). *Higher education pedagogies*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Wamba, S. F., Akter, S., Edwards, A., Chopin, G., & Gnanzou, D. (2015). How 'big data' can make big impact: Findings from a systematic review and a longitudinal case study. *International journal of production economics*, 165, 234-246.
- Waghid, Z., & Waghid, F. (2016). Examining digital technology for (higher) education through action research and critical discourse analysis. *South African journal of higher education*, 30(1), 265-284.
- Wagner, Z. M. (1999). Using student journals for course evaluation. *Assessment & evaluation in higher education*, 24(3), 261-272.
- Webb, G. (1996). Theories of staff development: Development and understanding. *The international journal for academic development*, 1(1), 63-69.
- Wells, G. (2009). Dialogic inquiry as collaborative action research. *The sage handbook of educational action research*, 50-61.
- Wilson-Strydom, M. (2016). A capabilities list for equitable transitions to university: A top-down and bottom-up approach. *Journal of human development and capabilities*, 17(2), 145-160.
- Wolff, J., & De-Shalit, A. (2007). *Disadvantage*. Oxford university press on demand.
- Wood, L. (2012). How youth picture gender injustice: building skills for HIV prevention through a participatory, arts-based approach. *South African journal of education*, 32(4), 349-366.
- Wood, L. (2014). Action research for the 21st century: Exploring new educational pathways. *South African journal of higher education*, 28(2).
- Wood, L., & Govender, B. (2013). 'You learn from going through the process': The perceptions of South African school leaders about action research. *Action research*, 11(2), 176-193.
- Wood, L., & Zuber-Skerrit, O. (2013). PALAR as a methodology for community engagement by faculties of education. *South African journal of education*, 33(4), 1-15.
- White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticising development: the uses and abuses of participation. *Development in practice*, 6(1), 6-15.
- White, S. A. (Ed.). (2003). *Participatory video: Images that transform and empower*. Sage.
- Whitehead, J. (1989). Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?'. *Cambridge journal of education*, 19(1), 41-52.

Whitehead, J. (1991). How do I improve my professional practice as an academic and educational manager. *A dialectical analysis of an individual's educational development and a basis for Socially orientated action research*. Disponível em <http://people.bath.ac.uk/edsajw/bk93/8wc90.pdf>.

Whitehead, J., & McNiff, J. (2006). *Action research: Living theory*. Sage.

Yassi, A., Spiegel, J. B., Lockhart, K., Fels, L., Boydell, K., & Marcuse, J. (2016). Ethics in community-university-artist partnered research: Tensions, contradictions and gaps identified in an 'Arts for social change' project. *Journal of academic ethics*, 14(3), 199-220.

Zaffaroni, E. R. (2012). *La Pachamama y el humano*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones madres de plaza de Mayo.

Zibechi, R. (2015). *Descolonizar el pensamiento crítico y las prácticas emancipatorias*. Ediciones desde abajo.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2001). Action learning and action research: paradigm, praxis and programs. Effective change management through action research and action learning: Concepts, perspectives, processes and applications, 1-20.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2011). Action leadership: Towards a participatory paradigm (Vol. 6). Springer science & business media.

Zuber-Skerritt, O., Fletcher, M., & Kearney, J. (2015). Professional learning in higher education and communities: Towards a new vision for action research. Springer.

Zuber-Skerritt, O., & Roche, V. (2004). A constructivist model for evaluating postgraduate supervision: a case study. *Quality assurance in education*, 12(2), 82-93.