

A CAPABILITARIAN PARTICIPATORY PARADIGM: METHODS, METHODOLOGIES AND COSMOLOGICAL ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES

1. INTRODUCTION

Participation of people as agents in development has been a central concern in capabilitarian scholarship and of Amartya Sen's (1999, 2009) work. Meaningful participation as citizens is not only necessary to shape our democratic and social structures, but it stands out as a valuable freedom and functioning in itself (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). However, when we shift our attention to research processes and the generation of knowledge as capabilitarian scholars, we face a slightly complex puzzle of researching mostly from post-positivist and critical realist paradigms perspectives. Both of these traditions of research practices within development studies have for years maintained methodological boundaries and fixed empirical research in which communities are the repositories of data and researchers do research, interpret the data and share the knowledge. Notwithstanding the reach of these paradigmatic and methodological traditions, we now have a body of knowledge and literature questioning existing methodological hierarchies from a participatory and pluriversal viewpoint (for example, Rowell et al., 2017; Chilisa, 2012). Although participatory approaches and pluriversality aligns with current capabilitarian claims in terms of listening to marginalised voices and leaving the ontological ground of the Capabilities Approach open, we believe current participatory methods and even participatory methodologies are insufficient to completely advance and diversify capabilitarian participatory practices from a pluriverse of methodological perspectives (Mignolo, 2011). Therefore, we argue that our aim should not only be to listen to those who have been historically, geographically, economically or culturally silenced, but to build solidarity alliances with communities against epistemic injustices, engaging with subjectivities of communities, in this way we might fulfil our political (Medina, 2013) and epistemic responsibilities (Code, 2017). The focus on participatory approaches should not only question the outcomes of research projects, but rather the process of knowledge generation as a space for capabilities expansion and empowerment, the centrality of epistemic freedoms and building epistemic communities as the ultimate goal from a pluriversal perspective (Mignolo, 2012; Clark, Biggeri & Fedriani, 2019). More than this, we need to advance the value of different methodological approaches, knowledge systems and the community that possesses them to create

multi-epistemic conversations, what we refer to as a pluriverse. This means acknowledging different positional objectivities to recognise individuals-in-community as full epistemic agents and credible knowers to build responsible alliances (Sen, 2004; Fricker, 2015; Smith, 1999).

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

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

The point of our paper is to highlight that, although the enhancement of epistemic freedoms is substantial for these practices, there is an invisible cosmological (onto-epistemological) dimension in our methodological operationalisation of participatory research in capabilitarian empirical scholarship. Through critical realist and post-positivist paradigms positionality (those predominant within our community) we are constrained to unearth forms of ‘being and doing research otherwise’ when researching with communities with divergent knowledge systems. We argue for the importance of different conceptual, methodological, theoretical and cosmological reference points from which to develop and shape capabilitarian scholarship. And to do so, firstly, we propose a three-tier structure to analyse participatory research in the empirical literature: Method level, Methodology level and Cosmological level, to develop a ‘Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm’

that could assist us to adopt a more empirically plural and inclusive research positionality in development studies. In the next section, we first map the paradigmatic positions in international development literature to argue where participatory paradigm lies in relation to conventional research philosophies.

2. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND ITS PARADIGMATIC POSITIONALITIES

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

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

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

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

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

3. THE PARADIGMATIC BORDERS: EPISTEMIC AND METHODOLOGICAL TURNS IN CAPABILITARIAN SCHOLARSHIP

3.1. SITUATING CAPABILITARIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Since the initial conceptualisation of the capabilities approach, many scholars have contributed to enhancing and theorising the framework (Robeyns, 2017; Nussbaum, 2011), yet perhaps less in its empirical methodological approaches and underlying epistemological assumptions. In this section, we therefore focus on the methodological and epistemological debates of capabilitytarian scholarship drawing on the research published in the journal, while recognising that there are many relevant studies, we chose papers from the journal to illustrate our argument and the direction of capabilitytarian thinking.

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

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

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

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

Certainly, the advancement of this knowledge has contributed to further our thinking and questioned the incomplete ontological and epistemological ground of the capability approach. However, although we have clear contributions at the theoretical level (besides its Northern overrepresentation), methodologically speaking our conceptualisation is still rather thin. We are still not sufficiently reshaping the methodological lines, questioning sufficiently what research relations are, how we operationalise empirical research and which knowledge are valid and necessary as part of this empirical research processes (Heron & Reason, 1997).

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

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

3.2. PARTICIPATORY METHOD LEVEL

The participatory method level is the most widely used in capabilitarian literature; we find how development practitioners have been using participatory methods for many years as a way to bring in direct insights from populations. As Hayward, Simpson and Wood (2004) remind us, there has been an interest in bottom-up approaches that could enable the insight of communities, moving away from a technocratic analysis, however, this has prioritised the accommodation of participatory methods to post-positivist logics leaving other areas unexplored until the moment.

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

‘To [their] knowledge, few participatory studies have been carried out in which the subjects of the research themselves are asked what their capabilities are and how relevant these are for them as individuals and as a group of human beings. Therefore, in this research we propose a survey-based method that employs a questionnaire as a means of stimulating the process of thinking and participation’. (Biggeri et al., 2006 .p60)

They confirm that, ‘with this study we try to move a step forward by applying a participatory method through public reasoning and scrutiny’ (p.66), given that at that stage capabilitarian scholarship did not have much to say about participation in empirical participatory research. Hence, to address the post-positivist and critical realist audience they attest that,

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

And that,

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

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

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

3.3. PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY LEVEL

In a 2018 article in this journal, Walker (2018) clarifies the differentiation between Method and Methodology in the area of participatory research within capability scholarship. She justifies

that the use of participatory methodologies rather than methods, are more grounded on collective agency. However, the representation of these cases are scarce and possibly subjected to advancement, even if they pose many challenges for researchers and institutional constrains they might face (Ninomiya & Pollock, 2016). At the methodology level we find that is not only about implement one particular participatory method, but rather the whole reconsideration of the methodological approach. In this area we find at least, five relevant examples in the journal, even if their methodological applications are divergent.

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

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

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

In our view, the authors were correct in calling their operationalisation ‘methodology’. They articulate a compendium of methods to form an orientation to gather data for their research and generate a useful tool for other scholars. However, we believe this is not the only possibility that a participatory methodology offers us as researchers mixing qualitative methods and participatory methods. The methodological level, in our view and considering literature on different

participatory methodologies (Heron & Reason, 1997; Borda, Reason & Bradbury, 2006), attempts to go beyond participatory methods and beyond qualitative/participatory mixed methods methodological applications. It tries to challenge some assumptions regarding knowledge generation and the role of community in the process that we have not seen yet in our research field (Rowel et al. 2017).

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

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

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

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

Equally, we ourselves we have made use of a case study approach in this journal. In the case of Walker (2018) she recounts a participatory action research practice with university students in the South African context, exploring the impact of this project on capabilities dimensions among the participants. And Crosbie's (2018) contribution follows the line of Walker (2018) in terms of a

Freirean approach to Participatory Action Research. However, in this case, Crosbie focuses on the exploration of youth involved in a local community initiative in Ireland using Participatory Action Research as her research approach. Crosbie clarifies that,

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

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

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

Crosbie’s (2018) and Walker’s (2018) contributions are overarching for the Journal, bringing critical Participatory Action Research approaches as case studies to explore the expansion of capabilities. The examples we discussed above orient the use of qualitative methods to explore locally valued capabilities or to explore the way in which the intervention enhanced the capabilities of the participants involved in a participatory project. Thus, the focus on capabilities expansion of participants (Evaluations), participation, voice, epistemic and so on, pushes us to explore the capabilities and functioning enhancement, however we still have many other options to explore.

While all these studies set the path for new possibilities and, building on them a more plural empirical ground, we seek to take the argument further by unearthing the episteme and the knowledge rooted in communities and cases. Cin and Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm (2020) stress the importance of the feminist knowledge (the episteme in participatory research) produced by the women in their research project as an epistemological positioning that could include them as legitimate actors contributing to gender equality debates in Turkey. They highlight this as the ultimate ethical responsibility of being a feminist researcher, whilst recognising the evaluative nature of their intervention in creating democratic spaces that expand feminist capabilities. Therefore along with the assessment of capabilities, recognising and working with communities' epistemological and ontological contributions should be our political responsibility as the researchers. Hence, we are not minimising the relevance of case explorations but rather pushing towards a combination that respect and conserve communities' ontologies and epistemologies, their own cosmologies, besides our empirical and qualitative corroborations. As participatory researchers we need to open epistemic spaces for participants/co-researchers to co-produce a research agenda, which addresses contextual challenges as they have reason to value. This should include co-analysis to explore the relationality between the communities and their surrounding environment, values and belief and attributes so as not to impose our cosmological assumptions as capabilitarian researchers.

Nevertheless, having said this, we have to accept that as researchers, we are (often) not members of the community, we may not be sharing the same cosmovisions; however, we can create space and opportunities for advancing towards more participatory approaches. We should aim comparative justice in research where our real-world processes are imperfect, but always aspirational in seeking research practices that are more inclusive.

3.4. COSMOLOGICAL LEVEL

This takes us to the third level, an open-ended cosmological dimension that is in our view the direction we should be trying to advance as distinctively capabilitarian participatory researchers. However, we do not claim this cosmological dimension has methodological superiority or claim that this is the unique way to operationalise participatory research. To the contrary, we have tried to present past and present literature in this journal as a way to highlight what is still possible in

our practices and which we have good reasons to pursue as justice-facing empirical researchers under imperfect (and often unjust) conditions of possibility.

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

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

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

That is why we refer to this open-ended cosmological level not as operationalising a perfect participatory research practice, but rather a more collaborative and equitable collaboration in which communities are more than data collectors, or data generators but are also recognised as

epistemic agents able to theorise and contribute with their knowledge to scientific spheres. As Vaughn et al. (2017) clearly explain,

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

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

‘focus on cognitive processes concerning meaning, justification, and orientation in the struggle provided by those resisting and rebelling against oppression. The question of validity emerges from this strong presence. The recognition of the struggle and of its protagonists is an act of pre-knowledge, an intellectual and political pragmatic impulse implying the need to scrutinise the validity of the knowledge circulating in the struggle and generated by the struggle itself. Paradoxically, in this sense, recognition precedes cognition’ (De Sousa Santos, 2018, p.3)

However, although this level classification and theoretical explanation can be useful, we do not find any example of this particular cosmological level in this journal. Moreover, we understand

that our academic conditions are much more convoluted, and the specificities of our participatory projects are much more complex. They do not only depend on the project itself, but on our individual agency as researchers and the structures in which we are immersed and in which we operate, limiting or expanding our opportunities, choices and research practices. Further, we cannot ignore that development research agendas are not detached from global power structures, nor the cosmological perceptions that they and we impose.

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

4. ADVANCING OUR OPERATIONAL MARGINS: CAPABILITARIAN PARTICIPATORY PARADIGM (CPP)

The Participatory Paradigm, the one of our interest in this paper, is not only an alternative paradigmatic addition, but a paradigm that might be able to overcome cosmological barriers and binaries between qualitative and quantitative operationalisations (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Heron & Reason, 1997). What we mean by overcoming this cosmological barrier is that the participatory paradigm opened up the onto-epistemological ground for communities, being able to situate and place their axiological (ethical) dimension under their own worldviews, beyond our academic and scientific positionalities and understanding of research. Communities and individuals play a substantial role under this paradigm, becoming central for the generation of knowledge, but this cosmological level of operationalisation is missing in our Capabilitarian literature. Hence, after highlighting the paradigmatic tensions that stem from research practices and philosophies underestimating different (e.g. indigenous, feminist) cosmologies and showcasing empirical methodological gaps in the literature so far, we argued how we can expand existing participatory practices and take them forward to continue transgressing ontological assumptions and methodological barriers.

Most importantly, communities most rarely get to know what is written about them and their contribution to the literature (Mkwanzani and Cin, 2021). That is why, we want to use this Paradigm proposal to ensure that operationalisations take into consideration co-analysis, co-creation of the research process and outcomes with communities; and to co-author with them to amplify the credibility of their knowledge. It is rather important to acknowledge communities' contributions to theorisation when we undertake participatory projects under the umbrella of capabilitarian scholarship. This process should be mutually reinforcing where we as researchers develop political responsibility to create spaces and opportunities to build political and social networks to ensure that their voices are heard and the communities develop epistemic responsibility and become the most responsible subjects who will speak their concerns and share them widely to inform the contextual solutions to their own development challenges through decolonial knowledge. Medina (2013) makes this distinction very clear by highlighting that epistemic responsibility is the responsibility one holds as a knower whereas the political responsibility is more being agents to challenge the ignorance and being attentive to realities and cosmovisions of the communities. These two are mutually constitutive as for epistemic responsibility we need to work 'to understand, assessing, and (often hermeneutically) engaging with issues about the place of subjectivity in knowledge- making, constructing, and evaluating practices. It is about the ethics and politics of knowledge, and indeed about epistemic subjectivity in its multiple instantiations' (Code, 2017:90). The participatory paradigm sits at the centre of these two responsibilities that assign complementary responsibilities to us as researchers and to the communities as co-researchers. We should follow a decolonial praxis but beyond that, the concern should be the ultimate production of decolonial, or local knowledge informed by communities' cosmovisions to provide contextual solutions to their own development challenges.

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

| CAPABILITARIAN PARTICIPATORY PARADIGM (CPP) | |
|---|---|
| COSMOLOGY (onto-epistemology) | What is knowledge and how do we acquire it as facilitators? What is knowledge and how do we acquire it as viewed by |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| | <p>communities/group/co-researchers)? Are there any common alliances in between our different perspectives?</p> <p>What is reality for us as facilitators? And what is reality for the group/community we are working with? Is there any common alliances in between our different perspectives?</p> <p>How is knowledge describing reality for us and the communities/groups we are working with? Do we have any inflexion points between our different understandings?</p> |
| METHODOLOGY | <p>How can we acquire knowledge working with this community/group? Do they support the same and believe in the same knowledge production processes as us? If not, can we establish communal research lines that are valuable for all of us as a team?</p> |
| NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE | <p>What is the nature of knowledge according to the communities/groups we work with? How is knowledge connected with different cosmovisions (including nature)?</p> |
| QUALITY CRITERIA | <p>Which criteria principles can we establish with the community/co-researchers that is respectful to community values and cosmovisions?</p> |
| AXIOLOGY (ETHICS) | <p>Which ethical procedures are followed by the community/group on their daily lives? Are these ethical procedures distinctive of those from us?</p> |
| ROLES | <p>What is the position I wish to take in this research? What is the position the community want me to undertake in this research? Is there a contradiction between the both? Can we reach an agreement between the roles of each actor taking part on the research process?</p> |

Table 1. The principles of capabilitarian participatory paradigm

5. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper is a collective tribute to the participatory studies in this special issue and the emerging body of participatory research in capabilitarian literature in this journal and elsewhere, contributing to the methodological practices developed so far and its epistemological debates. Expanding these cosmological margins enables us to include other equally valid cosmovisions and relationalities with communities as epistemic agents and contributors. We consider such practices not as unique and the only valid ones but as necessary and complementary to our traditional approaches to research and theorising about the capability approach. This does not negate the complexities of the structures in which we operate, nor do we advocate a blind validation of only a few methodological approaches. We believe that the point is to uncover levels that we need to consider, in order to reframe our participatory practices to expand capabilitarian participatory grounds beyond researchers' worldviews from empirical explorations. As Pellissery and Bergh (2007, p.288) attest 'participation as freedom is not only the right to participate effectively in a given space, but also the right to define and to shape that space', including what is of value to researching together and participating in decision making throughout the project. De Sousa Santos (2010) further builds on this by arguing:

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

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

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

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

How people are involved in empirical research is a substantial element when we talk about research and knowledge generation in the Capability Approach. Drydyk (2012) emphasises that deliberative participation in Crocker’s terms refers to,

‘joint analysis, such as Participatory Action Research, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones; these groups take control over local decisions, and so people have a stake in maintaining structures and practices’.

Hence, the point is not only to enhance academic knowledge which can challenge deprivations but rather to engage and build epistemic communities able to determine their own ontological positionalities and points of reference to generate knowledge. It is not only about identifying communities valuable’ capabilities, but understanding what wellbeing means for this community and what research can do to support their own human development aims, respecting their cosmovisions and knowledge systems. That is why we propose a Capabilitarian Participatory Paradigm (CPP) as a tool to embrace further participatory operationalitions.

To conclude, our paper does not aim to act as a directive but more as a personal reflection about our experiences using the Capability Approach and participatory approaches, to be able to understand our own methodological gaps and also the structural constrains that are on the way when we try to apply more open-ended research process with communities. We hope, this help us all to start drawing alternative paths and research avenues that are still not possible yet, but that might yet be possible in our capabilitarian scholarship, what South African theorist Neville Alexander calls ‘the ontological possibility of the future’. But not as a possibility but rather as

many possibilities. That is why, Waldmuller (2020) eloquently clarifies, that ‘conceptualising and understanding human development requires intercultural dialogue and engagement with other traditions and ways of seeing the world [...]. If there is a pluralistic, global version of human development, that would be human developments’. We hope this paper set the empirical and methodological path to solidify these developments rather than development.

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ⁱ Although engagement with measurement critiques are also found (Eg.....)