Democratising Participatory Research

Pathways to Social Justice from the South

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8. DCR for Socially Just Higher Education: Perspectives from the South

When I think of 'feminism' I see a woman, I see a strong woman. I see a very strong, 'white' woman, and then, I see a sub-category for myself. I see a dark room for me to shove my opinions in, a suggestion box that will never be opened. A voiceless young woman who'll never be intellectual enough, worthy enough, valuable enough and able enough to know more about politics than men do. Finally, I see a transgender woman who'll never be invited to a rally because she's not woman enough. What is gender equality exactly?

In my three years in varsity I got to learn that I, a young black woman, can suffer from sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, I can be raped, beaten and burned alive, and no one will ever look up to acknowledge my absence. I never knew what gender inequality was until I thought back to my past, during my high-school years. Studying history (humanities), which was one of my favourite subjects, I always got high marks. Male students in my class were always curious of what mark I got, until I realised that I was in competition with most boys in my class without really knowing it, it was funny. For me, it became an improvement type of competition but to them it meant more than that, it meant that they were not to be topped by a girl in any of the modules. One is probably reading through this text and wondering how is this narrative relevant to the topic at hand. This is the beginning of the male intellectual oppression towards women. It starts as a seed and slowly grows into the issue we now have of men believing women belong in the kitchen, raising kids, being submissive to their (men's) sexual needs. How ironic?

We live in a society that does not allow women to be cleverer than men, or to be sexual like men otherwise such a woman is considered to be promiscuous, be too successful, too opinionated otherwise. It is disrespectful not to allow a man to have the last word no matter how stupid the "word" is. Our society teaches girls to not be too ambitious.

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I always wondered where this narrative of men being superior and women inferior came from. Then, I remembered a saying in Sotho that elders always used, "Monna ke mokopu oa mnama, mosadi ke cabbage oa ipopa", this allows men to have as many relations as they want but not the women. This, getting to the depth of it, perpetuates a lot of misinterpreted stereotypes that have landed us in the current gender issues we have. When a young girl is unable to sweep, cook or even clean our mothers always say "Who is going to marry you?" Our worth is always narrowed to submitting to a man, we are raised to be good wives while boys are raised to be successful.

The family would go to hell and back to raise funds for a boy in the family to go to university but not the girl. I suppose we are to be ambitious but not too ambitious as Chimamanda puts it, otherwise we are threatening a man's masculinity.

I as a girl am expected to pick up after my little brother's mess and see to it that his clothes are clean. Why not teach them at a young age to cook, clean and do their own laundry? What if he does not marry? What happens when their female caretaker dies? Will they starve because they can't cook? Live in mess because they cannot clean? No. They will learn how to do things themselves. Why not start at a young age? Besides "Thupa e kojoa esale metsi" (Literally: A stick is bent while it's soft (otherwise it breaks). Children are disciplined while they're still young.

Despite the society deeming the sole problem to be the perpetuation of gender inequality... Men. I, however, learned that women themselves are now perpetuating this narrow standard of mental capability. I remember when a friend of mine told me that a boyfriend's role in my life is to provide all my wants be it money-wise, clothes, food, airtime. I as a young woman am not allowed to assist my significant other financially because that's a man's role, how contradicting to the 'gender equality theory' that we so fight for but then again smash to the side like it is not a need but a want.

Being in a long-distance relationship requires money for two people to reconnect but this one particular visit my significant other did not have money to buy me a bus ticket; so I had to pay for my trip. Embarrassing to say, I was ashamed to tell my female friends that I had paid for my trip. I knew what they would have said, that he is either not man enough or that he was not worthy of having relations with me because he could not afford me. Are we now payable objects? Is that not us succumbing to the narrative that men are providers at all times? How is that equality? Is it equality when we deem fit?

We (women) are fighting a war that is never to be won as a result of the division between women. We do not have a united womanhood but instead we have a white woman, black woman, cis women and other non-white women. White women do not experience misogyny the same way

non-white women do. The same way generally women do not experience misogyny the same way cis women do. It is acceptable for 'women' to protest against rape, any type of violence and gender discrimination. White feminism aims to close the wage gap between men and women, but what it fails to recognise is that most of the time non-white women earn even less than white women do. We women are divided by different racial struggles; we face, as a result, that "true gender equality" can never be accomplished.

Someone who understands my non-white struggle... The feminist movement (that fights for gender equality) does not belong to the non-white girl. I know everyone says that it is for all women but truth is it is not that way.

How can I fight with you for your rights when my black people have none?

I have to fight for black rights before I can even begin to fight for other people. How can I fight for your right to make the same pay as the white man when I don't even make as much as you?

I ask the feminist woman: "You want me to fight with you but where are you when I needed backup for my black movement?

You want me to be free but you do not want me to be equal, or at least not free enough to mess with your white privilege." Black women think black struggle first. White women think race first. Gender inequality thinks gender first. That is the first division that disables women to fight side by side against gender inequality.

It is time that we recognise that there are more than two genders. Gender inequality is a fight for all women, all genders and all races.'

Narratives on Social Injustices: Undergraduate Voices, 2018

8.1 Introduction

After reviewing the valued capabilities and acquiring an understanding of the impact of the project in two cases, Chapter Eight reflexively aims to provide a Southern perspective of social justice and of how this DCR project might contribute to the goal of democratising participatory research beyond its evaluation. This chapter discusses the challenges, opportunities and lessons of the DCR project. Firstly, the five DCR principles are investigated, and their contribution to social justice after the South African DCR project is considered. A review of each principle is presented, highlighting how they were developed and implemented in this DCR project after their theoretical formulation. Following the review of these principles, the conceptualisation of DCR beyond the

participatory practice is also considered. These final remarks will seek to clarify the two main roles within a DCR project—that of the facilitator and that of the co-researchers—and to show how these two elements imply different processes. The facilitator's task is to identify valued capabilities at the beginning of the project, to design a prospective way to lead the project towards the member's valuable capabilities, and to evaluate them at the end of the project. The task of the co-researchers is to develop their own research project in a democratic way with the facilitator. Furthermore, this section highlights that although this DCR project has applied both roles in a single project, they might be implemented independently, as the facilitator role can benefit, enrich and democratise other participatory practices.

The second part of this chapter explores the challenges and opportunities that emerged from the pilot DCR project. It explores the implementation of the case study, highlighting the complex academic space and the challenges for DCR's navigation of it, such as difficulties in co-creation. The following section will summarise some of the key points from Chapter Three and link them to the arguments discussed in this chapter.

8.2 DCR: A Southern Participatory Perspective for Socially Just Higher Education and the Democratisation of Participatory Research

Social justice is considered in this book from a capabilities perspective. However, this vision is interwoven with elements from participatory approaches and decoloniality. Firstly, a capabilities perspective, in the open-ended version of the CA sustained by Sen (1999; 2009), is not looking for a perfectly just society. Conversely, it seeks to identify injustices, to remove them or to expand capabilities, helping individuals and collectives to lead the lives they have reason to value (Sen 1999). Moreover, it has been shown that the constitutive elements of CA and decoloniality, in particular their understandings of social justice, are indeed aligned.

Several stages and various principles of Democratic Capabilities Research were presented in Chapter Four. The assumption is that by following these principles we can begin to democratise participatory

practices from a Global South perspective. This is one way, among many others, to promote more socially just knowledge generation in higher-education institutions. This is mainly due to the centrality of co-researchers' capabilities and the expansion of the process in order to enhance them. Moreover, other elements, such as ecologies of knowledge or the promotion of more democratic spaces for knowledge production within the Western academic system, are essential to allow different ontological positions to be recognised.

This section will thus focus on and review the principles discussed in previous chapters. This section not only highlights their contributions to more socially just practices from a Global South perspective, but also explores how these principles were implemented in the South African DCR project.

8.2.1 Process as Capabilities Expansion

The first principle discussed here is the notion of the participatory process, DCR, as a space for capabilities expansion and achievement, which has two constitutive levels, prospective and evaluative. 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 a normative positionality, from a non-ideal perspective. That is to say, we are not trying to expand these capabilities perfectly, but to explore the structural conversion factors, such as colonial conversion factors, that impede individuals from enjoying their valuable freedoms and assist them to enhance them. Equally, as argued in previous chapters, DCR research did not use universal or general lists. Rather, it identified valuable capabilities and insurgent capabilities that have enabled me, in my role as facilitator, to take strategic decisions about the DCR participatory project without compromising the collaborative research process. Therefore, this principle has two dimensions when applying a DCR process: the prospective and the evaluative dimension. Both are strategic, in the sense that they orient the DCR facilitator in their practice.

Focusing on the prospective aspect of this principle, Chapter Five 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 elements that the members had reason to value, thus orienting the process to the preservation of diverse valued lives, and therefore to social justice, in an imperfect way.

On the other hand, the evaluative perspective was partly presented in Chapter Six and in Chapter Seven. These chapters presented the individual and group explorations among the members, which helped the facilitator to better understand the effects of the DCR project for each co-researcher. Chapter Seven explored the potentialities of evaluation through a capabilities lens, not only by understanding the valuable capabilities and insurgent capabilities, but also by exploring whether these individual capabilities had been enhanced or achieved by the project. This, to some extent, guides us to assessing our practices and identify them as more just than others, but also to situate them in a Global South context and perspective. In this way, by contextualising our capabilities we can understand Southern perspectives and worthwhile Southern ways of living that are not yet known to the Global North. This is proven by the identified Ubuntu capability and the means by which this group of undergraduates have valued, in different ways, the life that they want to pursue, and how insurgent capabilities played out in their preferences and experiences. This is not a unique Global South perspective, but it opens up new avenues for investigation of much more diverse Southern conceptualisations of capabilities from other geographical locations and other cultural cosmovisions.

As we have seen, the DCR project was able to achieve and enhance some of the valued and insurgent capabilities of this group, thanks to their involvement in the participatory project. Through a capabilities lens, this is one way to advance towards social justice, by enhancing or achieving valuable freedoms and functionings.

8.2.2 The Voiceless as Knowledge Creators

Moving on to the second principle, the term ‘voiceless’ is common in the participatory approaches literature (Cornwall & Jewkes 1995; White 2003). However, there are other ways to refer to certain voiceless groups,

such as 'oppressed groups' (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, as these students have identified. Voicelessness relates to non-humiliation, a capability of control over one's environment in the political sense (Nussbaum 2011), diminishing one's effective participation, or their epistemic freedoms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

These capabilities are central to the process of knowledge creation as a means of removing injustices, such as epistemic barriers that impede individuals from having epistemic access and/or becoming epistemic contributors (Fricker 2015). However, from a capabilities perspective, and also from the participatory or decolonial viewpoints, epistemic injustice has an impact on the achievement of global justice as a whole. De Sousa Santos claims that 'there is no global social justice, without global cognitive justice' (2014, 8), which is here referred to as hermeneutic and epistemic justice. Furthermore, linking these two ideas, Fricker argues (2015) that, beyond being receivers or having epistemic access, epistemic justice is integral to thinking about epistemic contribution as a central capability:

> 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, 21)

Fricker (2015) links the idea of epistemic justice, which is heavily defended by participatory debates and decoloniality, to the Capabilities Approach, suggesting that it needs to be included as a central capability. What is important here is not that Fricker or other scholars say that, but rather that these students' valued freedoms align with this capability, and are therefore central for their insurgent capabilities. This leads us to the assumption that in order to advance social justice from a Southern perspective, as well in this case as epistemic justice, we must include individuals as epistemic contributors.

However, to see co-researchers as knowledge creators, especially those that are most excluded, we first have to recognise that they are dignified humans (Mpofu & Steyn 2021), and that they are not voiceless. Here 'voiceless' does not mean that these individuals are not epistemic

contributors. They certainly are epistemic agents, in their own ways, epistemic frames and systems in the Global South, which differ from the scientific and Eurocentric epistemic frames. That is why these ideas are especially relevant in discussions of formal knowledge production by professional scholars. If we accept that they are epistemic contributors, the discussion here guides us towards a more flexible and inclusive approach to understanding research and knowledge production. Research is then seen as a capacity to 'make systematic forays' beyond our current knowledge (Appadurai 2006, 179). Therefore, considering this broad perspective, it makes sense to promote knowledge production and research beyond a scientific frame or context. It is about leading research with those who are excluded from these processes and constrained in their own access to powerful epistemic systems. We refer, therefore, to those who have been marginalised from becoming epistemic contributors in these privileged spaces (Fricker 2015). The point is that they are epistemic contributors and exercise their epistemic freedoms, but in marginalised spaces or subject to hierarchical epistemic structures, thus, the angle shifts towards inclusion and recognition from powerful epistemic positions.

In the DCR case, a group of undergraduates were selected as co-researchers of the project in a South African university. This decision was guided by the aforementioned main DCR principle. In terms of participation in knowledge production, these undergraduate students were mostly treated as passive receivers of their 'teaching and learning' university programmes, as their stories and experiences have shown. They appeared highly passive until reaching post-graduate level, whereupon they were considered as academic knowledge producers. Moreover, various examples illustrating this can be found in the interviews and data collected for this research project, 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, second interview). Amahle stated: 'we all sit right at the back, moving from the back forward and then the lecturer speaks, then it's done, and maybe they try to force us to answer a question to show that we are actually involved' (Amahle, second interview). Minenhle

mentioned how she perceives the lecturer: '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, second interview).

All of this highlights the secondary role of these particular undergraduate students in this specific context, and their participation as listeners and empty recipients of an epistemic system that is external and strange to them. They seem not to have anything to contribute to the university context (Freire 1972). This applies not only to the classrooms, but also to their undergraduate programmes and their informal culture, which is very different from the cultures they come from and the cosmovisions with which they grow up. This is important to be aware of, not only for Global South institutions and academics but also, even more so, for colleagues and institutions in the Global North. Global South students' knowledge matters.

In conclusion, a research process should consider the voices of students who are excluded from formal knowledge creation processes, and who are not considered as worthy epistemic contributors. This is a means of challenging knowledge inequalities, as well as paying attention to a central capability, as Fricker (2015) has highlighted above, and the students of this group have also corroborated. It is a means of fighting against epistemic barriers and expanding the capability of these individuals as knowledge producers in pursuit of social justice.

8.2.3 Injustice as an Initial Issue

The third principle arises from the decolonial debate, along with elements discussed in Chapter Four, such as diatopic hermeneutics (De Sousa Santos 2010). 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, 81)

What De Sousa Santos (2010) is trying to highlight is that, as argued above, we need alternative ways to create knowledge, as Appadurai defends (2006)—collective processes in which we can come together with a common interest, guided by injustices against which we want to fight. These injustices are important because they are translated across cosmologies. They are the spaces in which different individuals and groups with different ontological and cosmological perspectives can achieve mutual understanding and advance knowledge in a multi-epistemic foundation.

The Capabilities Approach is aligned with this idea, in the sense that our agency is our focus on the pursuit of things that 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, as the case of these students has shown (Sen 1999).

Nevertheless, this principle presents a challenge to how academia works and funding is allocated, and impedes practices that are fully participative or collaborative, as has been explored in this book. Understanding research in this way means that it is the group of individuals decide the object under research and guide the process together. The group needs to decide which injustices are important to them and are worthy of research. This is well defined by one of the categories of participatory approaches, Community-Based Participatory Research. Vaughn 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. (Vaughn et al. 2017, 1457)

Therefore, this is how this principle is conceptualised in the DCR process: through research of injustices that matter to the team members. In this way, DCR demands not only the methodological space—the strategies

to create knowledge—but also the democratic formulation of the issue under research; it is an ontological, cosmological and metaphysical matter. This significantly assumes that the conceptualisation of the research issue is an ontological statement that might strongly influence the research process as a whole, and thus a substantial element in democratising research from a Global South perspective. This is because the decision on the issue under research normally comes from the dominant voices in the North, although the cosmovisions and cultures in the South might see these same challenges differently, or even consider them irrelevant. Hence, providing an incomplete ontological space is part of the democratisation of knowledge and the inclusion of Southern perspectives and knowledges. The point is to allow different perspectives—Southern perspectives—at this ontological level, and not only from a method or methodological level.

Furthermore, as the South African case has presented, having the freedom to decide which issue to research, by themselves, had a significant impact on the DCR participants, expanding the capabilities linked to their research, and making them view the project as something personal. It positioned agency and their insurgent capabilities at the core, and this was visible throughout the interviews, in statements like 'We choose topics that are relevant to us' (Iminathi, second interview); or 'It's very, like, personal' (Lethabo, second interview).

In conclusion, the principle of injustice as an initial issue seems rather central for advancing social justice and democratising knowledge, as the question of who decides which issue to research is important for an understanding of unfair power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South. It is even more important in order to preserve epistemic freedoms in the Global South and to allow populations in the Global South to theorise and understand the world according to their own cosmovisions (Connell 2014).

Nevertheless, this does not deny the importance and relevance of participatory approaches and the use of other methods and methodologies in academia. Conversely, it highlights that when using the Capabilities Approach and participatory practices to create a practice such as DCR, it is better directed to the advancement of social justice. It does not only expand capabilities but considers individuals as capable of identifying, investigating and resolving their own concerns. Furthermore, it recognises their power to fight the social injustices they

experience, but also to understand and theorise them according to their own frames of reference (Chilisa 2012).

8.2.4 Uncertain Horizon (Democratic Space)

The concept of an uncertain horizon is apt for the previous section in the sense of providing democratic spaces where decisions are taken together. I have discussed in this book whether 'participatory' is an ambiguous word within the field of participatory approaches. This is intimately related to the different schools of thought on participatory practices. DCR was conceptualised in a clear way, in the sense that it is not a practice to include co-researchers in several stages of the researcher's project but to allow them to be the protagonist, along with us, as explored above. To defend this idea, I used the Capabilities Approach and the concept of democracy, as we need to move in the direction of more inclusive frameworks, in which co-researchers do not participate in the research. Conversely, members are sharing spaces of knowledge creation with scholars. Here, knowledge creation is not only for the sake of contributing to the expansion of a discipline's knowledge, but also for the sake of using different knowledges in combination to bring about a change in members' lives. It is the capacity to influence members' lives and future horizons.

Therefore, this principle is aligned with the previous principle highlighting that DCR is 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 for research. It is a way to start, create and finalise a research project with others in a broad sense. This collaborative aspect is discussed in detail in Chapter Six. It involves exploring how decisions were taken during the project and demonstrating that the members of the group were making these decisions over time, by walking through the process together. Only some actions were undertaken by the facilitator during the DCR process, as a way to either expand or achieve members' capabilities and to follow the prospective plan designed from the capabilities analysed at the beginning of the project.

In conclusion, participatory practices and more democratic practices like DCR seek to advance socially just higher education by fighting

knowledge inequalities and epistemic injustices. DCR is here situated in a space, which is more closely related to the expansion of capabilities for the co-researchers than other participatory practices in the broader field. DCR allows the agency and capabilities of the participants to be at the centre of the process, guiding the project towards the things that matter for us, creating more democratic (although imperfect) spaces for knowledge production. This allows Southern populations to really engage in genuine collaborations as opposed to paternalistic or instrumental practices that do not enable them to make sense of their world from their own perspectives.

8.2.5 Internal or External Diversity (Ecology of Knowledges)

The principle of internal/external diversity is more intricate than the previous ones. 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 definition of what inclusive public scrutiny would look like (Sen 1999). This position was aligned in Chapter Four with the term 'subjectivities of intersubjectivities' (Dussel 2007), showing how both positions talk to one another. This perspective represents what knowledge production is when we are able to understand knowledge beyond the scientific discipline contribution (Appadurai 2006), or equally, when we understand it as also contributing to the social pool of knowledge (Fricker 2015). In this sense, as noted in earlier chapters, by including as many knowledges as possible we are able to investigate better. The process fosters an 'ecology of knowledges', the epistemic diversity needed to challenge the dominant structures of knowledge creation (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 to explore practical examples of how they have been understood by scholars in the past. In this case, the ecology of knowledges was implemented through the Popular University of the Social Movements (UPMS).

The UPMS looked for the 'potential to exchange knowledge, alternating with periods for discussion, study and reflection as well as leisure periods' (UPMS proposed methodology, 4). Throughout the workshops this will involve a shared space made up of militant intellectuals (one third), such as scholars or artists committed to

social movements, and activists, or leaders of social movements or NGOs (two thirds). The idea of this itinerant[1] university is to confront the different perspectives of each collective on the same issue, as a way of building epistemic bridges between groups, and in order to 'overcome the separation between academic and popular knowledge and between theory and practice' (UPMS proposed methodology, 2). That is why the UPMS 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' (UPMS proposed methodology, 4). This way of implementing ecologies of knowledge will be considered (in the terminology of this study) as internal diversity, where different individuals sit together to explore their common concern.

The DCR project was slightly different. It used four groups of very different commitments, taking one as the principal. The first of these was the group of undergraduate students, who primarily decided the issue to be researched and formed the internal or permanently active group. Secondly, four more collectives were externally added, 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),[2] as well as the knowledge from local communities introduced later on in the project.

As explained above, the UPMS brings together different groups for knowledge creation in one space, which according to 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

1 I refer to the UPMS as itinerant because it is not framed as being located in a campus, particular institution or space. The UPMS can be proposed by any individual and can be organised in different places around the world, as has been the case since 2000 (see http://www.universidadepopular.org/site/pages/en/about-upms/history.php for more information).

2 See Chapter Five for more information about these individuals/groups and their participation in the DCR project.

expansion of their capabilities. However, due to the passive role of the undergraduate students on campus (in terms of their 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 external diversity. In this way, the central group that represents the most marginal position, in this case the undergraduate students, is situated at the centre of the process, guiding it by themselves and bringing different groups to the conversation.

In conclusion, whether we use the internal or external epistemic diversity—as I did in this DCR case—as a way to introduce an 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 decoloniality. It highlights how we can create more democratic spaces for knowledge creation, including other knowledges, especially those from Southern locations and historically ignored or marginalised locations.

8.2.6 Final Remarks

The five principles discussed above highlight how DCR is a participatory practice that aims to advance socially just higher education from a Global South perspective, even though it is situated in an imperfect context. DCR generates a context that continuously interacts with members' capabilities and with the impossibility to create a 'perfectly just' research processes, whilst aiming to preserve and enhance Southern cosmovisions in the process of knowledge generation. To a certain extent, this 'imperfect practice' is not a limitation but a particular perspective of understanding what counts as knowledge, and what research is, orienting us to 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), we refer to broad principles that can guide us towards a research practice that is more rooted in the South. And this assists us in advancing towards more just (rather than less just)

higher-education systems. Hence, this is achieved imperfectly and not necessarily via major structural changes, but rather through changes to a level that makes sense in the precise context and the Southern location where relations and human relationalities are defined by local cosmovisions, such as Ubuntu.

Furthermore, now that the principles have theoretically been revised after the case study in South Africa, these five principles also 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.

8.3 Democratic Capabilities Research and Beyond

Initially, DCR was conceptualised as a collaborative research project that, although specifically conceived for this South African DCR case, could be implemented in different ways, thanks to the flexibility of its principles. However, this book has also presented certain stages to be undertaken by the facilitator. This has highlighted the fact that there are two central roles in the DCR process: the facilitator's role, and the DCR group members' role. Perhaps it is this division that is not yet clear in many participatory processes and much of the participatory literature, which lacks a clarification of how the facilitator might guide the process and to what extent she or he is able to modify or intervene in the process.

After the implementation and exploration of DCR in this book, this division is clear. The facilitator in this particular DCR process assisted a group of students to research a topic of interest to them in different ways, guided by the principles explored in the previous section. Furthermore, the role of the facilitator included valued capabilities exploration at the beginning of the project and designing a frame to guide the process according to the group's valuable capabilities, as shown in Chapter Five. In addition, the facilitator explored the evaluation of valued capabilities after the implementation of the project (Chapters Six and Seven). Therefore, two main roles are identified: the facilitator conducts capabilities-centred exploration or promotion of locally valued capabilities, and assists with the collaborative practice and what the group decides to do.

However, beyond acknowledging the separate roles required to implement a DCR project, we should consider DCR as an integrated tool, as we have done in this book. Moreover, DCR can also be used separately if the facilitator exploration is applied to any other participatory practice, as a prospective-evaluative framework. DCR can be used at two levels that can be combined or applied separately, depending on the interest and circumstances surrounding the research project, as a case study exploration.

In some ways, this division resolves the scientific tensions that have been discussed throughout this book, whether we are following scientific lines of research or using a more radical research approach. Both are valid and necessary, but might not be so in all cases and all situations. Certainly, the tension between both lines is resolved by the provision of a rigorous research process that is able to accommodate the scientific standards of disciplinary contribution, i.e. the facilitator's roles. In this case, DCR is a tool for identifying locally rooted capability as a scientific contribution to the field of capabilitarian scholarship. Furthermore, DCR also innovates in finding ways to analyse and evaluate our participatory practices within the AR literature, providing an alternative theoretical framework to equip us with other frames of reference that might be more adequate for Southern locations and experiences of oppression. Secondly, DCR provides a flexible research process, challenging traditional approaches and including groups traditionally marginalised from accredited networks of knowledge creation, thereby understanding knowledge as the expansion of co-researchers' knowledge frontiers, which is the participants' role. In this second aspect, the lines of research will be determined by the participants, so they will decide how conventional or transgressive our practices are and what will be the most adequate means to disseminate our findings and conclusions.

8.4 A DCR Reflection: Challenges and Opportunities from the South African DCR Project

This section explores some of the key issues and opportunities that arose from this group involved in a DCR research project at a South African university.

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 and opportunities that are probably familiar to the reader, as some of them have been mentioned previously in other parts of this book.

In relation to the co-creation of the process with the participants, this was not an easy stage, as explored in Chapter Six. Although theoretically ideal, in that it allows new elements and ideas coming from the group to be a central focus of this research process, it was a tremendous responsibility for the members of the group. Iminathi mentioned the difficulties of adapting to a new way of working and learning, coming from a 'given' system. The participants noted difficulties in appropriating and leading the project. They were not used to autonomous or self-driven learning-work, and this delayed and obstructed the transfer of leadership throughout the project. This was not only caused by their being part of a highly hierarchical and culturally external education system, but also by the substantial deprivation in certain of their insurgent capabilities, such as human recognition and epistemic capability. For instance, the participants did not feel confident enough to talk, especially at the beginning, mentioning that they felt that they had insufficient knowledge due to a constant deprivation of their freedoms which had affected their self-perception, as I have explored in other sections of this book. To a certain extent, this was resolved by long-term engagement with the participants. However, this highlights that understanding the freedoms of the communities we work with can help us, as facilitators, to identify these limitations in the early stages of our projects and to put forward measures that allow the group to overcome 'unfreedoms' that impact ownership and active participation within the project.

In terms of power structures within the group, active participation seemed at the time to be unequal, especially for the female group-members. As raised in Chapter Six, when meeting together, the imbalances in terms of the freedoms they enjoyed as part of their human recognition 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. During the interviews, the female members—especially those

who tended to participate less—justified this imbalance 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 to reflect on the internal dynamics of the group, exposing the conversion factors to which they are subjected in their daily lives and experiences on campus. Debating unfreedoms was a gain that the capabilities analysis provided for the group. Despite the facilitator having taken responsibility for this aspect of the project, debate is a potential tool for discussing power inequalities within the group, rather than erasing unequal relations, which in any case will not be fully possible. However, the point is to bring awareness about these dynamics to the group and to debate with them about how to minimise them as far as possible, given the circumstances.

Perhaps one of the major limitations for this DCR project was its being situated in a specific timeframe, as the project was envisioned to last throughout the 2017 academic year so that I would conclude the 'official' project by the beginning of 2018.[3] This timeframe created a challenge with several unforeseen consequences. For instance, it made me rush at times, owing to being overwhelmed by deadlines and occasionally forcing decisions within the group, such as the decision to finalise the official project at the end of 2017. This was certainly a major limitation, as the group had a particular timeframe and they were confident in continuing the project for as long as they envisioned. However, the need to set aside time for interviews, transcriptions, and analysis in order to conclude my individual analysis in 2018 affected the project in several ways. Initially I thought that agreeing with the members to continue with the project but on a more informal basis would resolve the challenge, however, this did not work well. It created a feeling among the co-researchers that the project was finished, although the agreement was to continue informally during the following year. Indeed, respecting group time is essential for DCR practices and something to take into careful consideration when we are constrained by funding schedules or submission timeframes. Perhaps, if we are unable to avoid this, an option could be to anticipate this situation with the group, and to ask the group about what we should do if we have to suddenly conclude

3 In South Africa, the academic year begins in February and ends in December of each year.

the project. Therefore, although this limitation could be resolved by applying these practices and considering a flexible timeframe which could adapt to different circumstances and processes, as DCR requests, when this is not possible we will need to have some conversations and anticipatory planning strategies.

Another limitation observed during the DCR project was the participation rate. Participation dropped slightly towards the end of the project, causing two members of the group to leave the project, although only provisionally, as they kept in contact and came back for the late meetings in 2017 and early 2018. When exploring the causes of this issue in the interviews, although responses focused on motivation in general, they were more specifically concerned about their academic calendar, in the sense that the students viewed the second semester as being extremely demanding. They reported struggling to combine their academic responsibilities with the project duties. This might be a central point when starting a group, i.e. bearing in mind that whilst the facilitator might have the time available to guide the process, this might not be the case for the co-researchers. Again, it seems essential to have some strategic conversation before starting the project, in order to anticipate challenges such as this, or constrained timeframes that have to be met by the facilitator. A process such as DCR is time-consuming and we should be conscious about that from beginning to end.

In terms of capabilities expansion and achievements as a crucial part of the facilitator role, analytically, capabilities are difficult to identify. They are dynamic components of an individual's life and those categories that are not achieved are ascribed 'potential' status, as Chapter Five has explored. In this sense, we could say that, empirically speaking, we can create approximations of the enjoyment of a particular capability through functionings (achieved capabilities) or subjective accounts of capabilities expansion, as explored in Chapter Seven. In the project, these functionings reflected the available choices for the individual, as well as those of the participant to achieve it, providing valuable outcomes in order to assess our practices. However, we know it will be difficult to accurately measure a particular capability for a particular individual beyond subjective perceptions. It is exactly this subjective perception that we use as a frame of reference in addition to their achievement and perceptions of achievement, as this book has explored. Thus, when using capabilities and functionings to evaluate

our participatory practices, and practices such as DCR, we can only talk about approximations of their valued capabilities through their subjective perceptions and facilitator observations. In these cases, it would be what we need and what we need to know to acknowledge and respect the fluid aspect of capabilities and fluctuations in valued capabilities. We are not aiming for a precise measure as that would contradict our basic understanding of capabilities as dynamic. What we do is to take a picture of the valued capabilities at the time we meet with the individuals, review them again collaboratively in order to prevent our own cultural assumptions, and assess their expansion after the project. We are not claiming that these capabilities are infinite, or central for every human being. Contrary, these capabilities are instrumental for understanding contexts, as in the Global South, where perceptions of the world and knowledges have been marginalised and therefore are unknown to many scholars in the North. Investigating capabilities in this way, we claim their partial observations and thus, more contextually and culturally related explorations and results.

Regarding the Ubuntu capability for this group and the implications of it as a group insurgent capability, students mentioned this concept of Ubuntu during the interview and the project. They explained how the meaning of this African philosophy directs their lives towards caring for others, or seeing themselves as interconnected individuals. This caused the Ubuntu capability to form part of their capability list and made me carry out a follow-up interview after the project had ended (2019) in order to better understand its relevance. However, it is necessary to acknowledge some limitations of this notion being conceptualised as a single capability. The capability of Ubuntu presented here seems limited and conditioned and in need of richer exploration and consideration. For instance, and as highlighted in Chapter Five, we need to understand the extent to which this capability impacts other capabilities, or the extent to which it could be considered as an especially generative, fertile capability or a cosmovision that is a meta-level, as an Ubuntu agency. The data shows that Ubuntu is a foundational capability for these students, and we see how aspects of Ubuntu are presented in other valued capabilities. Hence, this Ubuntu aspect needs to be explored, not only due to the literature gap, in which these types of capabilities are residual, but also so as to carefully consider and question the real implications of Southern cosmovisions from a capabilities perspective.

Thus, this presents a necessary avenue to examine more deeply in future questions such as: Are there different capabilities levels for Southern populations? How can a Southern cosmovision such as Ubuntu come into a real and horizontal conversation with the Capabilities Approach? Is Ubuntu a type of agency for these students?

To finally conclude this section, I would like to focus on the challenges presented by the ecology of knowledges in the DCR process, exploring the difficulties when this is applied to a real and non-ideal participatory experience. To promote an ecology of knowledges, where all knowledges are treated as equal, requires a perfectly equal society (which does not exist), as well as a deep and critical understanding of knowledge and academic knowledge production. However, our societies are complex and our terms of reference are different from place to place, to the extent that it is a challenge even to share an understanding or a basic agreement about what knowledge is and how epistemic inequalities take place. This seems to be even more difficult to maintain when working with a group of individuals that are not familiar with these debates, despite embodying much of this epistemic marginalisation. In the DCR project, students came to the research with their own ideas and beliefs, which were very different from each other. Some students from biochemistry or the natural sciences generally understood the positivist scientific method as the only way to achieve truth, although their knowledge about how to do so was limited and their epistemic access to this system was constrained. Other students relied on and believed in witchcraft, and the majority had a combined vision, mixing different knowledge systems but relying heavily on their spiritual, localised and experiential knowledge. This multiplicity of perspectives seems to highlight that the main element when talking about an ecology of knowledges outside of the academic and theoretical scope, is not necessarily about equal evaluation of knowledges, but about introducing and assessing different knowledge systems—including scientific truths—according to the circumstances of the group. It relies on questioning the limitations of each knowledge system presented during the research project. It is about presenting their potentialities and deciding which one is adequate or which combination of various knowledges is adequate for us as a group, respecting our frames of reference. Hence, in a DCR practice, we will need to have conversations about what we believe, what other groups believe, what we want to believe, and what the criteria to consider something

believable, as a group, are. This is in order to promote an ecology of knowledges, not to represent all types of knowledge and present them as equal, but to reflect and decide together about the knowledge systems available and which ones we want to use in order to bring justice to our positionalities and contexts. Therefore, in the DCR case, experiential, cultural and spiritual knowledges were much more frequently used than scientific knowledge, due to the composition of the research group. In this way, an ecology of knowledges seems to have been achieved not by the extent to which 'all' knowledges are presented equally in a project, but by the way in which 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 collective rationality (Sen 2009). Thus, this rationality is not understood in a modern rational frame, but instead is considered in an extended manner.[4] In this ecology of knowledges the research project would question any knowledge presented, but at the same time would use the types of knowledge that were more appropriate and relevant for the participants involved in the process.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has mainly discussed challenges and lessons in promoting Southern perspectives of social justice and capabilities expansion in this DCR project. In doing so, the first part of the chapter has focused on the five principles since their application in this South African project. It has reviewed each of them by exploring their implications for social justice from a Southern perspective. 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 involved in the DCR practice by separating the facilitator's role (identification and evaluation of valued capabilities) and the participant's roles (leading the research process on those things that matter to them).

4 As for instance Hoffman and Metz refer to rationality, as understood by Sen: 'If rationality were a church [...] It would be a rather broad church' (Sen 2009, 195 cited in Hoffman and Metz 2017, 2).

The second part of the chapter investigated more general challenges and lessons that emerged from the case study. It has explored aspects such as the intricate academic space of DCR, the challenges of co-creation, the difficulties in equal participation among the members, the time constraints, the challenges to capabilities identification and expansion, the incompleteness of the Ubuntu capability, and reflections on the use of an ecology of knowledges in this case study.

Therefore, after concluding with this chapter, Chapter Nine will summarise the argument of this book, focusing on the contributions of this research, methodological challenges, dissemination, and potential directions of future research. It brings about possibilities to contribute strengthen (rather than weaken) the democratisation of knowledge production, especially for those situated on the wrong side of the epistemic line.

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