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Article abstract

The main goal of this paper is to describe and analyze the individual and collective empowerment process of a group involved in a participatory evaluation project developed during 2012 in Badia del Vallès (Barcelona, Spain). The steering group was composed of university evaluators, neighbours of the municipality and local technicians or community workers, who attended 13 face-to-face sessions, focused on the evaluation of two different areas of community action: the area called «anti-crisis» and the area of non formal education. Results show that some attitudes changed radically during the process: for instance, the idea of participation shifted from a dependent vision towards a more active idea. Within the group, an important element was the acknowledgment of the other as a source of learning, which made possible the creation of a strong team. Moreover, the process facilitated the improvement of the members' self-image, and consequently their self-esteem.

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From target group to actors of collective action: The empowerment process throughout a Participatory Evaluation project

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Le but principal de cet article est de décrire et analyser le processus de responsabilisation individuelle et collective d'un groupe impliqué dans un projet d'évaluation participatif développé en 2012 à Badia del Vallès (Barcelone, l'Espagne). L'équipe de direction était composée d'évaluateurs universitaires, de voisins dans la municipalité et de techniciens locaux ou d'animateurs socioculturels, qui ont assisté à 13 entretiens réalisés dans deux volets de l'action communautaire: la mobilisation «anti-crise» et l'éducation informelle. Les résultats montrent que certaines attitudes ont radicalement changé pendant le processus: par exemple, l'idée de participation a muté d'une vision dépendante vers une conception plus active. Dans la dynamique de groupe, un élément important fut la reconnaissance de l'autre comme source d'apprentissage, qui rend possible la création d'une équipe forte. De plus, le processus a facilité l'amélioration de l'image de soi des membres et par conséquent leur respect de soi.

Mots-clés: évaluation participative; pouvoir d'agir; Espagne.

The main goal of this paper is to describe and analyze the individual and collective empowerment process of a group involved in a participatory evaluation project developed during 2012 in Badia del Vallès (Barcelona, Spain). The steering group was composed of university evaluators, neighbours of the municipality and local technicians or community workers, who attended 13 face-to-face sessions, focused on the evaluation of two different areas of community action: the area called «anti-crisis» and the area of non formal education. Results show that some attitudes changed radically during the process: for instance, the idea of participation shifted from a dependent vision towards a more active idea. Within the group, an important element was the acknowledgment of the other as a source of learning, which made possible the creation of a strong team. Moreover, the process facilitated the improvement of the members' self-image, and consequently their self-esteem.

Keywords: participatory evaluation; empowerment; Spain.

El objetivo principal de este artículo es de describir y analizar el proceso de fortalecimiento individual y colectivo de un grupo complicado en un proyecto de evaluación participativo desarrollado durante 2012 en Badia del Vallès (Barcelona, España). El grupo de dirección fue compuesto de evaluadores de universidad, vecinos del municipio y técnicos locales o trabajadores comunitarios, que asistieron 13 cara a cara sesiones, enfocó la evaluación de dos áreas diferentes de acción de comunidad: el área llamó «anticrisis» y el área de la educación informal. Los resultados muestran que algunas actitudes se cambiaron radicalmente durante el proceso: por ejemplo, la idea de participación forma cambiada una visión dependiente hacia una idea más activa. Dentro del grupo, un elemento importante era el reconocimiento del otro como una fuente de estudio, que hizo posible la creación de un equipo fuerte. Además, el proceso facilitó la mejora de la autoimagen de los miembros, y por consiguiente su amor propio.

Palabras clave: evaluación participativa; fortalecimiento; España.

Introduction

This paper is framed within a research project, named “Participatory Evaluation of community actions as a learning methodology for personal and community empowerment”¹, and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The project seeks to answer a question related to social education, community participation processes and socio-educational work in the community. We wondered if participatory processes, developed in the framework of community actions, generate learning that enables people to empower themselves. To answer this question, we used the intervention methodology of Participatory Evaluation.

This project started in January 2010 and will be finishing in December 2013. We organized the project into three phases corresponding to the three years of the research. The first year was dedicated to build the theoretical framework about Participatory Evaluation, and to develop a set of indicators of empowerment from the analysis of international literature. In the second year we selected three communities of Catalonia -our research cases-, where we developed the processes of PE.

We are currently in the third and last year, and we aim to know what the derived learning outcomes from the PE processes are. We seek to connect these learning outcomes with the set of indicators of empowerment built in the first year, to know the individual and community empowerment.

In our research, Participatory Evaluation is presented as a social and educative methodological strategy that favours knowledge and experience of the people from each community. This is a strategy to evaluate the community actions and projects; but it also generates shared learning that stimulates people and groups, and that enables the structuring and transformation of the territory. Participatory evaluation combines the researchers’ expertise in evaluation with the community members’ knowledge about their own lives and circumstances.

The involvement of different actors in evaluation processes (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009; Mathison, 2005; Withmore, 1998) is a more and more emerging trend in the field of community development, as funders and public sponsors of intervention projects look at the PE as a way to improve evaluation results (Withmore, 1998). Through the PE, these results can have a greater internal validity, and they can be really significant to the people to whom the evaluation is addressed. Moreover, PE stimulates democratic dynamics, and personal and communitarian empowerments (Lennie, 2005; Smits, Champagne & Brodeur, 2011; Plottu & Plottu, 2009).

Learning is an important outcome of Participatory Evaluation. Amo and Cousins (2007) distinguish four uses of PE processes that affect the importance of learning: (a) promoting learning through the development of knowledge about the objectives of a program or organization, experiences, etc.; (b) change in actions or behaviors, as changing an organization’s practices or the integration of evaluation protocols in the organizations’ daily practices; (c) change of attitudes, which is expressed in the professional development of the involved agents, and it is translated into an increase in their commitment to the project; and (d) other effects, such as the notion of social justice and networking.

1. The research group is directed by X. Úcar and composed of researchers from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Barcelona, University of Girona, and Citilab: A. Ciraso, E. Crespo, E. Gil, P. Heras, H. Núñez, A. Llana, P. Pineda, A. Planas, L. Sánchez and P. Soler.

Participatory Evaluation processes imply and suggest that people assess, individually and collectively, the activities and community projects in which they participate, and that they value the results that which affect them. From our point of view, this thoughtful and deliberative process, which consists of valuing people's actions and projects, is above all a socio-educational process. Thus, we are talking about learning, education, and empowerment.

The main goal of this paper is to describe and analyze the individual and collective empowerment process of a specific group, involved in a Participatory Evaluation project developed during 2012 in Badia del Vallès (Barcelona, Spain). During this process, we perceived some changes in the way that the stakeholders acted, collaborated, made decisions, and took the control of the project. And at the end, we clearly noticed a shift in the locus of control (Themells-Huber & Grutsch, 2003), towards the participants. The members of the groups expressed that they felt more like "being a group"; they perceived they had "tools" in order to act collectively; that they learned much more than expected. They realized that they previously didn't believe themselves to be able to do what they eventually did; and that people in their neighbourhood should feel as the "main characters" of their social life.

These were hints of empowerment; but we wanted to go deeper. Some of the questions we would like to answer in this study are: What is the key learning that allows people to make collective decisions? How these elements evolve? Is there any pivotal moment in this process of empowerment?

Context

Badia del Vallès is a town located in the region of Vallès Occidental, in the province of Barcelona. It has a population of 13,643, with an extension of less than one square kilometer. This gives it a population density of 14,669.9 inhabitants/km², one of the highest ones in Catalonia.

The town is bounded by two neighbouring towns, a river, a railway and several roads and highways. The municipality was created in the early 60s, in the framework of the "National Housing Plan". The purpose of this plan was to decongest Barcelona metropolitan area from the arrival of the immigrant population from the rest of Spain. Although initially depending on the neighbouring cities' councils, in 1994 the town became a municipal entity of its own.

As physical characteristics of urban type, we emphasize that the rapid growth of Badia in the 60s caused a type of dense housing, vertically integrated without many green spaces, and isolated from other localities. The boundary of the municipality makes it unfeasible to build new housing and facilities, due to lack of land.

It must be said also that Badia's population has a strong tradition of community actions. Throughout its short history, a great importance has been given to its people, who have been engaged in many neighbourhood's protests and struggles to achieve better services in the city and enhance the quality of life of the population.

This is the frame where we configure the steering group who had to lead the Participatory Evaluation. The group was composed of 18 people; 13 face-to-face sessions were carried out, during 12 months (between December 2011 and January 2013); in which we evaluated four main dimensions related to community actions in town: a) context; b) evolution; c) development; and d) results.

As part of the work done by the steering group, these four variables were evaluated related to two different areas of community action: the area called “anti-crisis” and the area of non formal education.

Method

One of the strategies to describe and analyze the individual and collective empowerment processes of the steering group involved in a PE project was the systematic analysis of the community meetings, identifying the variables and indicators of empowerment processes and results.

The main objective of this part of the study was to analyze and understand the processes of empowerment, throughout the development of Participatory Evaluation in the territory where it has been developed. We settled then the following specific objectives:

1. To know the presence and/or lack of variables and indicators throughout the process of PE.
2. To observe the order of appearance of the variables and indicators for the development of PE.
3. To analyze the presence of variables and indicators in each of the sessions of PE, taking as a reference the subject worked and discussed in each of them.

The primary sources, from which the data were obtained for the content analysis, have been the semi-literal transcriptions of the community Participatory Evaluation meetings, as well as the fieldnotes taken by the university evaluators’ team. Sentences and paragraphs were the units of the primary sources selected to be analyzed.

The analysis units were classified in different categories. These variables and indicators were developed from the theoretical basis of empowerment (among others, Benford et al., 2008; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2007; Holte-Mc Kenzie, Fordes y Theobalo, 2006; Laverack, 2001; Maton, 2008). These categories were subsequently revised by staff of three communities (technicians, university and neighbour evaluators).

In Table XX we present the list of dimensions and variables for this analysis. A mixed categorization was carried out, as it was initially started with deductive categorization (taking the theoretical framework and the technicians’ revision as a reference) and later complemented by the inductive categorization (extension through the content analysis).

The content analysis of each of the transcriptions was performed with the programs Excel and SPSS. At first, the units of analysis were introduced and classified using the Excel program. Quotations were categorized into different variables and indicators, which had been converted into numerical values. In this way, once the data were classified, the SPSS program was employed to do the counting and the tables.

We created an Excel table, in which we organized the information in the following way: (1) community; (2) main document; (3) person which the quotation is attributed; (4) quotation; (5) variable; (6) sign; and (7) indicator. In addition, in another tab of the same matrix, the attendance of university evaluators, community members and technicians were also registered to each one of the meetings.

Dimensions	VARIABLES AND INDICATORS
Individual intrapersonal	1. Self-esteem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1. Satisfaction with oneself 1.2. To feel that you are alright, although people say the opposite 1.3. To face with confidence situations and commitments 1.4. Ability to appear in public without fear 1.5. To believe in oneself
	2. Responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1. To take on tasks and commitments consciously and voluntarily 2.2. To know and understand one's role in the community
	3. Efficacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1. Ability to make appropriate decisions in opportune moments 3.2. To maintain a personal discipline during tasks
	4. Critical capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1. Ability to question situations (evaluation) 4.2. Self-reflection ability (self-evaluation)
	5. Freedom <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1. Initiative 5.2. To have one's own criteria 5.3. Ability to establish rules to function (self-management) 5.4. Intuition about reality 5.5. Learning awareness
Individual interpersonal	6. Acknowledgment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1. Knowledge and appreciation among participants 6.2. To show respect for others 6.3. Self-concept
	7. Assertiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1. Communication ability
	8. Teamwork <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1. To show involvement and participation in teamwork 8.2. To have a constructive personal role in teamwork 8.3. Identification and sense of belonging
Communitarian – TO BE	9. Community inclusion and integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9.1. Community's integration capacity 9.2. Relationships among persons or groups 9.3. Reception of newcomers
	10. Community identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.1. Personal and collective sense of belonging 10.2. Consciousness of being a community 10.3. Awareness of the historical route 10.4. Awareness of shared problems 10.5. Social cohesion 10.6. Shared culture
	11. Self-image <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11.1. Community profile: attribution of characteristics 11.2. Awareness of being unique
	12. Community knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.1. To know the services, the resources and the equipments available in the community 12.2. To know the relationships among different actors in the community 12.3. Discrepancy between knowledge perception and the real situation of the community

Communitarian – TO BE AT	13. Organizational structures
	13.1. Community capacity to organize
	14. Community responsibility
	14.1. Organization, planification and participation capacity
	14.2. Community decision-making capacity
	14.3. Ability to act communally
	14.4. Community resilience
	15. Resources mobilization
	15.1. Capacity for rapid response to events that affect community life
	16. Strengthening relationships
16.1. Ability to work in partnerships, to negotiate, to agree and to build synergies among different actors	
Communitarian – TO DO	17. Participation
	17.1. Attendance to community activities or projects
	17.2. Organization of communitarian actions or projects by the community
	17.3. Community responsiveness
	17.4. Generation or existence of social capital
	17.5. Creation or provision of spaces for participation
	18. Evaluation capacity
	18.1. To recognize the importance of evaluation
18.2. To have the needed skills to evaluate community processes	

Table 1. Dimensions and variables used in the analysis.

The categorization of the analysis units was carried out in couples. Two university evaluators, who were in charge of the analysis, selected together the units of each of the primary documents; they also categorized them taking as unique reference what was quoted in the text, thus reducing the risk of bias.

After selecting the analysis units and classifying them into different variables and dimensions, it was proceeded to make their enumeration, by using the SPSS program. In this way, it was possible to know the global evolution of the entire process of Participatory Evaluation in the community, as well as the evolution per session, and to observe which variables and indicators appear in each one of the meetings that were carried out. From all this, the following has been analysed:

- The presence or absence of variables and indicators of empowerment;
- Their frequency;
- Their direction or sign;
- The order of appearance,

Some methodological limitations in the analysis emerged during its development, from which we highlight one: even if the most relevant contributions of the participants have been reflected in the sessions of community work, we should consider that part of the process of PE was made in other areas: e.g. during the multiplications² of group activities, individual or group interviews with different agents, etc. Therefore, transcriptions are necessarily limited to collect moments of the PE in which most of the members of the steering group agreed. We must consider this fact in some specific aspects in particular, such as in variables containing indicators and evidences about the conflicts and their resolutions, since they took place outside of community meetings. To avoid

2. We call multiplication the replication of the Participatory Evaluation sessions conducted by members of the steering group with other community groups.

this limitation, we suggest for future studies the possibility for university evaluators to draft a field journal, where significant events occurring outside the meetings can be registered.

In this process, we identified 210 units of analysis; a different indicator was given to each unit.

Results³

The PE team is composed of a very variable number of people. Although there is a stable core of members, other persons join the team just for certain themes or periods; also due to the role of the community technician, who calls people that may be interested in give their opinion about some areas of the communitarian actions.

Attendance ranges from a minimum of 7 persons (2 university evaluators and 5 community members), to a maximum of 18 (5 university evaluators and 13 community members). The average attendance in every session is 13 persons. In total, the members of the PE teams are 5 university evaluators, 6 local technicians (who are working in the community), and 20 neighbours.

Emerged variables

The variable that appeared more often is “freedom” (variable 5); more specifically, in its indicators “to have one’s own criteria” and “initiative”. It is notable that we found just one sentence that indicates a lack of initiative, while all the other quotes were categorized positively. Some examples are:

“After the war, there were values such as cohesion, responsibility, collectivity. All this is lost, throughout the welfare state [...] and now I think, that one of the strengths that we are recovering is this feeling of unity, group, because it’s obvious that at an individual level, we are nothing”⁴

“We ourselves could address them. Maybe, this way they could engage themselves [into voluntary service]”⁵

Other variables that appear in most sessions, and always with a positive sign, are variables 4 (critical capacity) and variable 12 (community knowledge). Regarding variable 4, and most particularly indicator 4.2 (self-reflection ability), we have to point out that it is not just personal related, but it refers to a group and community dimension too. This example shows a self-evaluation capacity, meant as a reflection process about the action of the steering group during the Participatory Evaluation:

“[He is very concerned about] the next steps, the work we did this year inside the group was great but we have to find the way to go out.”⁶

The following quote is another example of self-evaluation action, but referring in a broader sense to the community as a whole:

3. The research groups translated all the quotes reported in this paper to English. In footnotes, the original quote (in Spanish or Catalan), the person and the reference to the session are reported.

4. “En la postguerra había unos valores de cohesión, de responsabilidad, de colectividad. Esto, a través del estado del bienestar se pierde [...] y ahora pienso que uno de los puntos fuertes es que se está recuperando este sentimiento de unidad, de grupo, porque está claro que a nivel individual no somos nada.” (Josep, 23/05/12).

5. “Nosotras mismas podríamos dirigirnos a ellos. A lo mejor así se implican.” (Mercedes, 18/01/12).

6. “[Li preocupa el fet de] donar els següents passos, que la feina desenvolupada al llarg d’aquest any dins del grup format ha estat molt bona però s’ha de trobar la forma de sortir” (Josep, 18/12/12).

“Disagreement, inequality in a lot of things, conflicts... Where is the improvement, where is the change, where is that resurging solidarity that we mentioned as a strength? What move us, it’s the same vanity as usual.”⁷

We also extended the concept that lies beyond indicator 5.3 (self-management). As it was originally defined, it was an intrapersonal indicator; nevertheless, we saw that it could have a more interpersonal dimension, referred to the relationships among the steering group’s members, and even communitarian. The following quotes can exemplify these dimensions:

“Maybe it would be interesting to define this itinerary, a meeting with the people from the community and without the members of UAB [Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona].”⁸

“I’m suggesting that this commission go and see every organization; it’s you, the academics, who have to go to the associations”⁹.

“I’m not speaking about a worker from the town council. [...] This way, the external worker could train people, who finally can do it by themselves”¹⁰.

Among the variables that appear mostly with negative sign, we should highlight in first place variable 1: self-esteem. It just appears sporadically; nonetheless it is relevant that it indicates more often a lack of self-esteem than an evidence of it. e.g. *“I’m ashamed not to know it”*¹¹.

In second place, we mention variable 10 (community identity). Within this variable, we have to distinguish between:

- Indicator 10.3 (awareness of the historical route), that appears often and with positive sign. Quotes that were categorized into this indicator are basically narrations of past events in the community, associations, institutions and relevant groups.
- Indicator 10.5 (social cohesion), that appears with less frequency, but almost always with negative sign. Most of the quotes labeled with these indicators refer to a very particular aspect: the flow and interchange of information among groups, associations and people in the community. For instance: *“The visible persons in the NGOs don’t share information among them”*¹²

Thirdly, we point out that indicator 9.2 (relationships among persons or groups) appears sporadically, but always with negative sign. This occurs in two sessions: the third one, when a woman from Maghreb was present, and some group participants talked about conflicts, attitudes or rumors: *“I hear a lot of xenophobe commentaries”*¹³. And in session 7, when some group members describe problems related to associations and community projects: *“Little leadership capacity, to enroll more people from the projects”*.¹⁴

And finally, variable 17 (participation) emerged as a mostly negative variable, indicating lack of implication among the population in general. Within this variable, two indicators are highlighted:

7. “Desacuerdo, desigualdad en muchas cosas, conflictos... ¿Dónde está la mejora, dónde está el cambio, dónde está esa solidaridad que está resurgiendo que ha salido en los puntos fuertes? Nos mueven las mismas vanidades de siempre” (Jordi, 23/05/2012).

8. “Potser seria interessant que per a definir aquest full de ruta es poguifer una reunió amb persones de la comunitat i senseels-membres de la UAB” (Antonio, 18/12/12)

9. “Yo sugiero que esta comisión visite a cada entidad; sois los universitarios los que tenéis que ir a las asociaciones.” (member of the neighbours’ association, 19/12/11)

10. “No me refiero a un técnico del ayuntamiento. [...] En este sentido, el dinamizador externo formaría a las personas para que finalmente ellas pudieran hacerlo por sí solas.” (Iván, 23/05/2012)

11. “Me da vergüenza no saberlo” (Mercedes, 18/01/2012).

12. “Las personas visibles de las entidades no quedan entre ellas para compartir información” (Mercedes, 14/03/2012).

13. “Escucho muchos comentarios xenófobos” (Samira, 18/01/2012).

14. “Poca capacidad de liderazgo para captar más personas desde los proyectos” (community worker, 23/05/2012).

- 17.1 (attendance to community activities or projects): some participants refer to a lack of participation in associations and projects: *“Sometimes, projects start with 20 people and they end with 5 of them”*¹⁵;
- 17.4 (generation or existence of social capital): it appears just one time, and with negative sign, suggesting a lack of reliance or to corresponsability problems: *“I was referring to the little trust in people”*¹⁶.

Empowerment evolution

In order to have some hints about the empowerment process throughout the Participatory Evaluation, we observed the variables evolution from session to session.

We found out that there are specially two variables that got an important evolution throughout this process: self-esteem (variable 1) and participation (variable 17). As we already presented, these emerged mostly with negative sign; nevertheless, we can observe their conversion to mostly positive at the end. Some examples for the first case are the following quotes, labeled as self-esteem:

*“Their fear is not being able to contribute anyway, because they have had no education”*¹⁷. (first session)

*“I didn’t imagine that I would have learned so many things, I didn’t know that there were so many activities in Badia. Moreover, I realized that I’m able to do a lot of things”*¹⁸. (second last session)

We can detect a similar evolution regarding the participation variable. Although in this case it is noticed that a perception of lack of participation remains; and the evolution regards indicator 17.5 (creation or provision of spaces for participation):

*“There aren’t young people. We are always the same people, this is not enough valued in Badia.”*¹⁹ (second session)

*“It is also important to keep the group alive, as it worked as a junction space for different people and organizations of the village, and one problem that we know we have, is the lack of communication among associations.”*²⁰ (second last session)

*“Now it is a good moment, because we created in the municipality some thematic councils where participatory evaluation can ingrain as a work strategy.”*²¹ (second last session)

After the first session, that aimed to “break the ice” and where doubts among the participants raised, during the second session (which focused on building the PE steering group) variable 8 (teamwork) and variable 5 (freedom, especially initiative) already emerged.

It is also interesting to point out that the third session-when the evaluators from the university presented a map of the communitarian projects in the village, and the steering group had to take decisions about which parts of it they wanted to evaluate-gave the opportunity to let group self-evaluations emerge, about past actions and the current situation of the projects.

15. “A veces los proyectos comienzan con 20 personas y acaban con 5” (M. Carmen, 18/01/2012).

16. “Yo me refería en la poca confianza en las personas” (community worker, 23/05/2013).

17. “La seva por és no poder aportar-nos res perquè ells no tenen estudis” (elder people, 01/12/2011).

18. “No me imaginaba que iba a aprender tantas cosas, no sabía que había tantas actividades a Badia. Además me he dado cuenta que soy capaz de hacer muchas cosas” (Mercedes, 18/12/12).

19. “No hay jóvenes. Estamos siempre los mismos, no está suficientemente valorado en Badia” (M. Carmen, 19/12/11).

20. “També és important continuar donant vida al grup, ja que ha funcionat com a un espai de confluència de diverses persones i entitats de la localitat, quan una problemàtica que sabem que tenim és la falta de comunicació entre les entitats.” (Alex, 18/12/12).

21. “Ara és un bon moment ja que a nivell de municipi s’han creat un conjunt de consells temàtics on l’AP podria arrelar com a estratègia de treball.” (Marta, 18/12/12).

In the fifth session, the group selected and adapted the evaluation indicators to their territory and communitarian projects. This is the moment when we detected the first quote that refers to the self-management capacity (indicator 5.3), with a community dimension:

“We don’t have to wait for the public administration to build the bridge among people.”²²

The seventh session was particularly important in the evolution process of the empowerment indicators. In this session, the group actually evaluated the development and the results of the communitarian projects against crisis, by working on an adaptation of SWOT diagram. We labeled 21 quotes with variable 5 (initiative, to have one’s own criteria, intuition about reality, self-management): which suggests that the groups is active, its members participate actively in the evaluation activity, and they are willing to give their opinion on the communitarian projects. Also, in the seventh session we found the first quote identified as self-esteem in a positive sense; and it refers in particular to the PE process and the multiplications:

“This is the greatest satisfaction that you can give to me. This is participation! [...]”²³

Finally, it is notable that in the two last sessions we detected no variables with a negative sign. These last meetings took place after the public presentation of the evaluation results; possibly, this would be linked to a general satisfaction with the visible products of the group.

Learning

During the analysis of the transcriptions we added a new variable (19), to highlight quotes that refer explicitly to the awareness of participants’ learning. We think that this can focus a relevant part of empowerment: not only to learn something, but also to know what we learned, and its importance. Mainly, this variable appeared during the last meetings of the steering group; and in particular in the 11th session, whose subject was the evaluation of the PE process itself.

According to the participants, the main content area where they learned are the services, resources, relationships and community projects in town. For example:

“Among the projects, I only knew Fundació Tallers and the food distribution, which are the oldest ones.”²⁴

But also, we noticed that the steering group members learned some other kind of lessons. First of all, the importance of the other persons in this community work, and their own role:

“The person who’s in front of you can teach you something, whoever it is.”²⁵

“You have the ideas and she [pointing a community worker] is the pencil. You bring a value, your experience, that if you don’t bring it, nobody will.”²⁶

Another relevant learning refers to the clear perception that a social change is possible, because the needed resources are available:

“I saw that there are still people who believe in Badia, and they are willing to pull ahead”²⁷

22. “No hay que esperar a que las distintas administraciones hagan el vínculo entre las personas” (Samira, 14/03/2012).

23. “Esta es la satisfacción más grande que me podéis dar a mí. ¡Esto es la participación! [...]” (Manuel, 23/05/2012).

24. “De los proyectos solo conocía a la Fundació Tallers y el reparto de alimentos, que son los más antiguos” (Iván, 23/05/2012).

25. “La persona que tienes delante puede enseñarte mucho, sea quien sea.” (27/11/2012, p. 3).

26. “Tú tienes las ideas y ellas [en relación a las técnicas locales] son el lápiz. Tú aportas valor a nivel de experiencia que si no la aportas tú no la aporta nadie.” (27/11/2012, p. 5).

27. “He visto que aún hay gente que cree en Badia y está dispuesta a tirar hacia adelante” (27/11/2012, p. 3).

“We have tools and a common goal”²⁸

Moreover, participants talked about the Participatory Evaluation as a way to empower and transform reality. They learned some methods and tools to develop a PE process; but also, and above all, they now know and understand its main goal:

“It’s about planning things that we can do. Here we imagine, here we want to make proposals”²⁹

“We have to empower people so that they can feel the main characters in their projects, and they participate more”³⁰

Especially the elder women who took part in the process were aware of their own learning, and of the possibilities that they have. The following quotes are evidence of an improvement in self-image and self-esteem; but also, they offer to us hints that these persons are ready to learn more:

“When I was a housewife, I never imagined that I could work at these themes. My school education is very basic. I’ve always wanted to learn. And here, I learned so much!”³¹

“What happened to us, the past generation, is that we don’t believe ourselves to be capable, and we repress ourselves.”³²

In the 11th session, the researchers could collect the participants’ opinions about which elements facilitated their learning and improvements. Some of the opinions pointed out that the PE process allows visualizing the communitarian actions related to change and the transformation of the community:

“Through the time-line [a technique used to evaluate the evolution of community actions], the most relevant thing that emerged was the neighbours’ fights to achieve things for Badia.”³³

Besides, every member could bring his/her own knowledge and experience to the group; and the PE process develops from this knowledge. The participants felt this freedom to expression, thanks to the good climate in the group:

“Our experience is the best base to achieve our goals”³⁴

“A process when everybody could express oneself”³⁵

The third element that we focus on is the creation of a special space, that people and groups can use to think about their actions and about the town:

“Most of us, we did this exercise, to distance ourselves and see the everyday of the town, and its whys”³⁶

Conclusions

In general, it can be concluded that most of the variables have been present during the process of PE. None of them appears classified as negative at the end of the project. Moreover, at about

28. “Tenemos herramientas y un objetivo común” (27/11/2012, p. 3).

29. “Se trata de plantear cosas que podamos hacer. Aquí nos lo imaginamos, aquí queremos hacer propuestas[...].” (27/11/2012, p. 4).

30. “Hay que empoderar a la gente para que se sientan protagonistas de los proyectos y participen más”. (27/11/2012, p. 2).

31. “Cuando yo era ama de casa nunca me imaginaba que podría trabajar en estas cosas. Mi enseñanza de colegio es básica. Yo siempre he tenido ganas de aprender. ¡Yo aquí he aprendido bueno, bueno, bueno!” (27/11/2012, p. 4).

32. “Lo que nos pasa a la generación de atrás es que no nos creemos nosotros mismos que estamos capacitados y nosotros mismos nos reprimimos.” (27/11/2012, p. 5).

33. “A través de la línea cronológica lo que más salió fue la lucha de los vecinos para conseguir cosas para Badia” (27/11/2012, p. 2).

34. “Nuestra experiencia la mejor base para alcanzar nuestros objetivos”. (27/11/2012, p. 2).

35. “Un proceso donde todos hemos podido expresarnos”. (27/11/2012, p. 2).

36. “La mayoría de personas hemos hecho este ejercicio de coger un poco de distancia para ver el día a día de la ciudad y el por qué.” (Acta Grupo Motor 27/11/2012, p. 2).

the midpoint of process, some quotes referring to the autonomy of individuals and groups in the community started to appear.

Results allow us to see how some attitudes changed radically during the process: for instance, the idea of “participation”, which shifted from a dependent and passive vision, towards a more active idea. Another important element in this empowering process was the community knowledge about the resources, services and relationships among projects and associations.

Through the Participatory Evaluation process that has been developing over a whole year, a group was created; and, in the last meetings, it has been functioning as a stable working group. There have been many outcomes as products of this ongoing community work. From the definition of a set of empowerment indicators we have tried to discover which are the changes and the learning that both, individually and collectively, were produced in the community of Badia del Vallès.

The process of Participatory Evaluation has increased people’s sense of belonging to the steering group that, over the months, has been leading the process of PE. It is true that this group is not representative of all community groups, but it must be said that it achieved the joint work of local technicians and neighbours; these latter who are also involved in social and cultural associations of the city.

Participants felt that the Participatory Evaluation process has been very helpful. For their part, local technicians confirm the validity of the PE process as a strategy to address issues that cut across various services and resources of the locality. One of the most positive outcomes of the process of PE in Badia del Vallès are the individual and collective learning that this process has generated; some learning that participants have identified and assessed.

Related to individual learning, the PE led the involved people to improve their self-image, and consequently their self-esteem. This was especially relevant for the participants who had a low instructional level: they could achieve more confidence, by participating within the steering group and giving their contributions as members of the community.

We can say also that in the work of the steering group an important element was the acknowledgment of the other as a source of learning; which improves the group synergy and the potential for horizontal and collaborative learning. In addition, we created bonds between the people involved in PE, which is extremely positive to consolidate relations between people, groups and associations in the community.

Another outcome of the Participatory Evaluation was a significant collective learning. The community work in the PE process, and the organization that was raised to achieve its goals, generated a collective learning which is very valuable for future projects in the community. And the participants greatly appreciated it. The group also learned that community work is a process that need and count on the contribution of each person. An idea that initially seemed unattainable can become a reality through together working.

The obtained results allow us to conclude that PE methodology empower people who are engaged in this kind of processes. The methodologies used in Participatory Evaluation contribute to develop a set of skills that lead to their empowerment both as individuals and as a group.

We believe that this study can contribute to a reflection on the conditions for different stakeholders to participate effectively in a participatory process, as a prerequisite of a real democratic society.

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