

Active Participation Methods in Social Innovation for Sustainability

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Abstract

In a world composed of societies in constant evolution where the use of resources, lifestyle and needs of the human being must increasingly be addressed in a sustainable manner, Social Innovation (SI) emerges as the process of developing new ideas (processes, products, services) that simultaneously satisfy social needs, create social relationships or collaborations that contribute to society and also improve its functioning. This study aims to provide a better understanding of the characteristics of Social Innovation, its framework in the process of Transition to Sustainability and the role that Active Participation can have in Social Innovation processes. A number of methods were selected to meet the above objectives, including literature review on Social Innovation, Active Participation and the various subjects that integrate the theme of this study. Subsequently, existing methods and techniques of Active Participation were analyzed, considering both presential and non-presential contexts. Based on the research done, a methodological approach was proposed to integrate the Active Participation in Social Innovation processes. Based on the proposed approach, strengths and challenges resulting from the suggested integration process were assessed. It can be concluded that Active Participation offers potential for both presential and non-presential contexts of Social Innovation. However, there is a need to develop initiatives to encourage good participation practices and an investment in the training of Active Participation staff with the capacity to understand Social Innovation processes with creativity and leadership.

Keywords: Active Participation, Social Innovation, Transition to Sustainability, Participation Methods

1. Introduction

The identification of Active Participation (AP) methods suitable for specific cases is an important tool in the development of conceptual models. The application of these models will be the most effective way to conduct a Social Innovation (SI) process, which translates into the change of routines and behaviors of individuals resulting from an awareness of the importance of a sustainable future.

Social Innovation (SI) is one of the most discussed and studied themes of the last decades. Its complexity makes it a field characterized by a great diversity of definitions and ambiguity of concepts.

From the history of this concept, there seems to be a natural connection between the occurrence of major changes and the appearance of SI as a response. From Hubert's [18] perspective, the increase of interest in this area arises as a way to face the consequences of economic restructur-

ing, changes introduced by the evolution of IT and mass unemployment. New opportunities, changing values, different forms and patterns of work and human beings with healthier lifestyles and different family organizations emerge.

SI can be defined as the process of developing new ideas (processes, products, services and models) that simultaneously satisfy social needs (more effectively) and create social relationships or collaborations. In other words, innovations that not only contribute to society but also improve its functioning [18].

SI arises to meet social/societal needs and to respond to the new existing challenges brought by change. Hubert [18] states that new technologies imply the development of new attributes and the empowerment of people to make the most of them. It is also necessary to combat social inequalities, promote social inclusion and prepare society for aging by ensuring care for the older population.

AP does not have a universal scientific definition and varies according to the context in which it is ad-

dressed. In this dissertation and in the context of SI, the AP can be understood as a genuine possibility for an individual, or set of individuals, to shape the environment in which they live and to determine/influence the rules to which they are subject, doing so on their own initiative.

The development of the AP and its methods can be considered fundamental for a better understanding of the needs of a society and of the different groups that compose it and, as such, indispensable to the process of SI. This study aims to explore the relationship between Social Innovation and Active Participation in contexts of transition to sustainability, namely by exploring the potential of SI through Active Participation, considering also the current reality in which we find ourselves (COVID-19). It has as specific objectives, from a conceptual point of view:

- Explore and understand the characteristics of Social Innovation (SI) and its framework in the process of transition to sustainability;
- Understand the concept of Participation and how it can relate to IS through AP;
- Propose a methodological approach to integrate AP in SI processes;
- Understand the strengths and challenges of the approach, suggesting possible improvements that promote better responses;

2. Methodology

The methodology applied in this work followed a qualitative and exploratory approach. Initially it was planned to apply an innovative proposal for active participation in social innovation initiatives within the research project TRUST ('social innovation sTRategies for Sustainability Transitions') coordinated by Professor Maria do Rosário Partidário. However, given the current reality of COVID-19, there was a need to adjust the work plan and change the methodological approach of this research. The following presents the methodological process followed, duly justified.

In a first moment, the study, revision and updating of the existing literature regarding the concepts and fundamental notions of this research - Social Innovation, Active Participation, Transitions to Sustainability - was carried out, retaining those that matter most to address the proposed objectives. For this purpose, scientific databases (e.g. ScienceDirect and ResearchGate) were used, from which the main scientific articles for analysis were taken.

Then, with the three concepts analyzed and reviewed, we tried to identify and decipher the existing relationships between them. The study was

based on more comprehensive concepts, such as the Transition to Sustainability, up to the specific case of the AP, passing through the historical framework of SI and its connection with major structural changes. The role of SI as a response to social needs and the new challenges brought by change is studied. The interest in understanding the emerging challenges was then sharpened, thus opening the door to the notions of transformation and TS, states that were found to be driven by the IS process. The next step was to identify the points of convergence between the two concepts, which was achieved by studying two different approaches to IS: Cartesian and disruptive. It was also considered relevant to make an analysis of the situation of SI in Portugal and Europe, where research projects were identified and briefly explained whose purpose is SI and whose results include concrete proposals of methods and techniques applied to SI.

With the intention of inferring how participation as a general concept contributes to SI, the various types of participation were scrutinized. The concept of participation as a relational space and its agents of action (people and goods) developed by Low [22] was selected for study. This choice is due to the importance of the "relational arrangement of social goods and people in spaces" [22] in the study of interactions related to the processes of participation, considered indispensable to respond to social challenges and changes.

After the analysis of the concept of participation, and active participation, the methods of participation were explored. The intention behind this process was to understand what concrete participation methods were available that could be applied to the active involvement of citizens and their contribution to SI.

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As a result, an adjustment was made to the subject under study for the proposal of a methodological approach composed of a set of methods for active participation in a non-presential context. The need arose then, through consultation with existing studies and literature, to analyze which are the new forms of participation, to identify which are the essential factors for the existence of active participation at a distance, both from a technological and human perspective.

Finally, research was done in order to understand the factors conditioning the success of this

type of intervention and how to mitigate them, using a critical analysis of the main benefits and constraints to its application.

3. Concepts

3.1. Transitions to Sustainability

ST is usually defined as a radical transformation towards a sustainable society that emerges as a response to a set of contemporary and persistent problems in modern societies [16]. These problems are often associated with dominant practices and structures related to particular regimes or fields of activity. If they are to be resolved in a way that enables more sustainable social, economic and environmental systems, a transition process is needed that may imply major structural and political changes. It is identified as a general rule that these changes are not likely to occur without political intervention. For this reason, long periods are expected until the transition is visible and concrete impacts measurable [2].

According to [21], transitions can be seen as the highest degree of innovation in systems. However, while system innovation refers to transformations within specific subsystems (the above mentioned domains of specific sectors of activity), the transition represents deeper changes that go beyond individual systems encompassing different types of innovation, occurring at different scales and over long time periods.

In order to arrive at the definition of TS, it is important first to understand that the concept of transition varies from school of knowledge to school of knowledge. Geels and Schot [15] define the transition as "a change from one socio-technical system to another", Kemp [21] goes further and defines it as "a fundamental change in structure, culture and practices" that results in "technological, cultural, economic, ecological co-evolution and institutional evolution at different scales".

The concepts of transition and transformation are often associated and may suggest a certain interchangeability between them. We can consider that these concepts refer to changes within systems more or less complex and of greater or lesser degree of uncertainty.

3.2. Social Innovation

SI can be defined as the creation, renewal or transformation of social relations in the development of new ways of working together to achieve certain goals and the satisfaction of common social needs and aspirations [4, 5]. Understands the processes and arrangements needed to identify, assess and address these interests, and to empower groups in society [4], encouraging the system to adapt and evolve [10]. It can also be used, according to [3], to propose new cultural guidelines.

The SI can be seen as a driving force for the necessary transformation in the ST. It is possible to identify two approaches to IS, composed of two distinct groups of authors: a Cartesian approach and a disruptive approach [11]. The first one is defined as an analytical approach, more conventional, measurable-based and oriented to measuring the impacts of IS initiatives. The second approach comprises the literature that adopts a condition-based systemic approach to IS associated with the viability of transformative and systemic change in society.

The disruptive approach is the one that seems to have the greatest capabilities to deal with the challenges associated with the transitions to sustainability. For example [19] identifies four relevant aspects of transitions and transformation with a direct relationship to IS disruptive and which it is important to retain here:

- Systemic focus based on large-scale social processes related to socio-ecological or socio-technical interactions.
- Behavior patterns and institutional relationships that characterize complex and uncertain systems.
- Change in the system more focused on generating fair, equitable and safe spaces.
- Processes characterized by a system of multiple actors, where their motivation and individual and collective values are recognized as essential to promote transition processes.

Mulgan [23] proposes a systemic thinking model to IS, with characteristics associated to the disruptive approach, where six phases of IS are identified: Inspiration and Diagnosis, Proposals and Ideas, Prototypes and Pilots, Sustaining, *Scalling* and Diffusion and Systemic Change;

SI initiatives are often confronted with the hostility and barriers of dominant companies and organizations in their respective areas. [6] defines four main barriers to the success of any SI:

- Limited access to financing;
- Limited examples of scale;
- Insufficient skills and training/staff;
- Missing networks and intermediaries;

3.3. Participation and Active Participation

Participation can be considered as a vaguely defined concept with multiple interpretations by various authors, introduced to solve different types of problems [14]

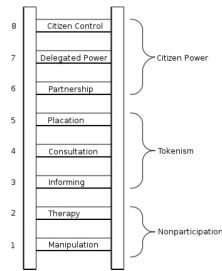


Figure 1: Modelo da Escada de Arnstein [1].

Arstein categorizes eight uses of the term "participation" into a ladder pattern where "the higher the level of participation, the better". It is a one-dimensional model in which participation occurs according to the power offered by powerholders.

Later, Pretty [24] identified 7 typologies of participation by cataloguing them according to the way people participate in development programs and projects.

Manipulative Participation: Participation is simply a pretense, with "citizens" representatives in official councils, with no decision-making power associated with them.

Passive Participation: The public participates by being told what has already been decided or what has happened without any influence.

Consultive Participation: The public participates by being consulted or answering specific questions. Facilitators are not obliged to take into account the opinions obtained.

Participation for Material Incentives: The public participates by contributing resources, for example, labor, in exchange for food, money or other material incentives.

Functional Participation: Participation is seen as a means to achieve the objectives of a specific project, especially cost reduction.

Interactive Participation: The public participates in the joint analysis, development of action plans and training or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right and not just a means to achieve project objectives.

Auto-Mobilization: The public participates by taking independent initiatives from external bodies to change the systems.

Even with expressly mentioned rights of participation, the involvement of citizens and participation put into practice are not easy and organic processes. Citizen passivity in local communities and existing opposition to new ideas and plans by dominant institutions or bodies can constitute social and institutional barriers to participation, which can be avoided.

One of the factors generally determining the analysis of participation is the intention associated with it. Fiorino [13] presents an alternative model

to those mentioned above, distinguishing 3 types of participatory practices:

- **Normative:** Participation whose purpose is itself;
- **Instrumental:** Participation oriented to the guarantee of private interests;
- **Substantial:** Inclusive participation in order to obtain better results;

White [27], goes further and identifies 4 types of participation: Nominal, Instrumental, Representative and Transformative, also exposing that participation can take multiple forms and serve many different interests. According to the author, there are two main conditions for participation policies to be an integral part of society's development processes. The first is the identification of the participant and the second is related to the level of participation. Table 1 illustrates these types of participation.

Forms	Top-down	Bottom-up	Function
Nominal	Legitimization	Inclusion	Exhibition
Instrumental	Efficiency	Cost	Means
Representative	Sustainability	Leverage	Voice
Transformative	Empowerment	Empowerment	Means/End

Table 1: Interests in Participation (Depoliticization of Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation - [27])

The above models are useful as a starting point to understand degrees and types of participation. However, they fail to explain why, in different contexts, the processes of participation evolve differently.

3.4. Participation as a Relational Space

In order to better understand the dynamics of participation and the relationships between participants, Low [22] proposes a new approach: *Participation as a Relational Space*. For Löw, relational space can be defined as "a disposition of people and goods in places". According to the approach, the opportunities that constitute a "space" are restricted or prevented by:

1. Limitation or increase of possibilities of the use of social goods;
2. More or less limited knowledge or credentials;
3. Possibility or limitation of the use of the social statute;
4. (Non)-Filiation/Association;

In order to study the spaces of participation, it is necessary to observe the characteristics of the actors and social assets and study how they both

position themselves and interact with each other. Low [22] argues that physical and social spaces should be conceived as two elements of a concept of integrating space, produced and transformed through the performance of the individuals who occupy them. Thus, the spatial arrangement is simultaneously divided between two aspects that make up Relational Space: the arrangement (*order*) and the process of arrangement (*ordering*).

As we can see in Figure 2, the arrangement represents the structural dimension, composed by rules/standards and resources. The process of arrangement represents the elements that promote the creation of those structures that are divided into Synthesis (*Synthesis*) and Spacing (*Spacing*). Rather, it is necessary to understand that spaces do not exist naturally. Synthesis consists in the creation of those spaces to which the actors - people and social beings - are associated through processes of imagination, perception and memory. Both Synthesis and Spacing are processes dependent on action situations composed of symbolic materials and components.

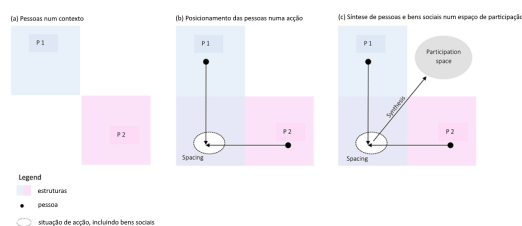


Figure 2: Constituição de um Espaço de Participação Relacional [14]

4. Methods and Techniques to promote Active and Relational Participation

As mentioned, this study aims to explore the potential of IS through active (and relational) participation, being also considered the current reality in which we find ourselves (COVID-19). With the concepts of IS and PA defined and revised in the previous Chapter, the question that arises will naturally be **what is the importance of the AP for SI?** Before answering this question it is necessary to understand what kind of participation and involvement citizens have in the specific case of IS.

4.1. Importance of Active and Relational Participation in Social Innovation

Davies et al. [9] believes that in the early stages of developing an innovation, citizens can be involved through research and consultation or more informal activities such as idea development workshops. Citizen participation does not stop at the early stages. Three main functions of citizen involvement in IS are analysed and identified by [9],

briefly described below.

- **Provide information and resources:** The information provided by citizens about their needs, preferences and opinions is critical at all stages of an innovation process. The collection of information and feedback at each stage is essential to the process of developing new solutions.
- **Troubleshooting:** The participation and involvement of citizens can occur with the aim of solving social problems. Some challenges require the **cooperation** of all and the **inclusion** of citizens with different origins and perspectives contributes to a diversity of thinking.
- **Make and influence decisions:** This function goes beyond deliberation and relates directly to activities in which citizens have direct involvement, control or influence over the decision-making processes and their implementation.

It is now clear what kind of participation and involvement citizens can have in IS and how important it is, but what methods of participation exist? A review of the literature reveals a variety of methods and guidelines that can be included in categorizing public participation. Row [25] analyzes 8 approaches more formalized in current practices, referred to in Table 2.

Participation Method	Nature of Participants	Temporal Scale/Duration	Characteristics/Mechanism
Referendum	Potentially every member of the population realistically, only a significant proportion.	Votes expressed in a single moment.	The vote is normally the choice of one of two options. All participants have the same influence. The result final is binding.
Inquiries / Public Hearings	Interested citizens, limited in number by the size of the site. The real participants are specialists and politicians who make presentations	Can last for several weeks/months or years. Generally performed during the working days/ hours of work	Includes agency presentations about plans in open forum. The public can express opinions but has no direct impact.
Polls of Public Opinion	Large sample (e.g. 100's or 1000's), generally representative of population segments of interest.	Single event, usually with duration not exceeding a few minutes away.	Often promulgated through written questionnaire or telephone survey. You can involve a variety of questions. Used for the collection of information.
Norms Negotiation	Small number of representatives of stakeholder groups (may include public representatives).	Uncertain: strict deadline generally established: days/weeks/months.	Working Committee of the representatives of the parties interested (and the sponsor). Consensus needed on a specific question (usually, a regulation)
Conferences of Consensus	Generally, ten to sixteen members of the public (without any knowledge on the subject) selected by a committee director as "representatives of the general public.	Demonstrations and preparatory conferences (etc.) to inform the panel members on the subject, and then three-day conference.	Panel of lay people with witnesses specialized in questions independent facilitators chosen by the panel of parts interested. Open meeting to a wider audience. Conclusions on key issues made through a report or press conference.
Jury of Citizens / Panel	Generally, twelve to twenty members of the public selected by stakeholder panel to be more or less representative of the local population.	No need, but usually involves meetings during a few days (for example, four to ten).	Panel of lay people with witnesses specialized in questions of independent facilitators chosen by the panel of parts interested. Meetings generally not open. Conclusions on key issues made through a report or press conference.
Public Advisory Committee	Small selected group by the sponsor to represent points of view of various groups or communities (may not include members of the real public).	It takes place during a period of time prolonged.	Group called by sponsor to examine any question significant interaction with industry representatives.
Focal Groups	"Small group from five to twelve selected to be representative of the public; various groups can be used for a project (including members of subgroups).	Single meeting, usually up to two hours.	Free discussion on the subject general with video recording and little contribution/direction of the facilitator. Used for evaluate opinions/attitudes.

Table 2: Participation Methods - Adapted from Rowe [25]

5. Innovation and Participation in a Non-Presential Context

One of the objectives of this work would be to study a set of methods and techniques and proceed to their application and testing in a real case of SI.

However, the unexpected appearance of a global pandemic meant that some adaptations had to be made and also raised some issues that may be relevant to the study, namely active participation in a non-presential context.

Public participation has been a constant in the planning processes of the last 40 years. With the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, we are witnessing the proliferation of high-speed internet networks and their widespread use along with the emergence of social networks. According to Evans [12], this has allowed an entirely new generation of forms and practices of public participation that can change the way innovation processes work.

Cheung et al.[7] conceptualized participation in social platforms *online* as one of the components of participant behavioral involvement.

We can say that, in a way, Evans-Cowley would be right when he predicted that there could be a radical change in planning with new forms of participation. but **What tools are these and how are they used? Has the number of participants increased with the new tools?** We try to answer these questions below.

While tools such as the internet or social networks allow information to spread quickly and groups of thousands of people to come together online in a single meeting, online engagement directly reflects offline engagement. In other words, individuals who were no longer interested in getting involved in public participation issues in person at the outset are unlikely to get involved because they have access to them online [17]. The internet can be more useful for some forms of public participation than others.

Tippin [26] suggests that remote engagement can be as productive as face-to-face engagement and identifies three key factors that are indispensable for an effective prospect of remote engagement:

- **Work Groups** – All groups have a form that the working strategy should take into account.
- **Tools** - It is necessary to reach an agreement to define the essential technology.
- **Techniques** - It is essential to rethink the methods for remote work.

Real Time Communication	See and hear everyone during the meetings.	Recommendation: Zoom Alternative: Skype, Bluejeans
Communicate Asynchronously	Define a group before the meeting and keeping in touch between sessions.	Recommendation: Slack Alternative: SMS, HipChat
Content Sharing	Set a location to store videos, PDFs and other necessary files.	Recommendation: Google Drive Alternative: Dropbox, Box
Organization	Control resources, events and tasks.	Recommendation: Trello Alternative: Asana, Basecamp
Think Visually	Collaborate, launch ideas, share and interact as would be done in person at the same space	Recommendation: MURAL Alternative: UxPin, Invision

Table 3: Five Key Resources for Remote Workshops - Adapted from [26]

5.1. Constraints to Active Participation in a Non-Presential Context

As we have seen before, individuals who would not be interested in participation issues at the outset will hardly show interest due to the possibility of doing so online. It is relevant to point out that, on the contrary, not all individuals with an interest in public participation will be able to do so digitally.

Usually, only users who already perform other types of activities on the Internet, research, shopping, entertainment, use of social networks and communication, are involved in this type of enterprise.

In a pandemic environment due to the coronavirus (COVID-19), since March 2020 preventive measures to the transmission of the new virus have been introduced by governments. Measures such as social distancing, quarantine, teleworking and the recommendation that inhabitants stay at home have caused severe social and economic restrictions, as well as a sudden increase in the need for digitization [8].

In general, digitally isolated citizens - which at this stage represents a form of social isolation - are identified as civically disconnected citizens, citizens of ethnic minorities, socially isolated young people, young people with disabilities and young people who are not studying, working or in training.

Interestingly, these are the groups that are most often 'targeted' by IS initiatives, so it is important to find ways to attract the citizens that make them up to participate.

6. Main Lessons, Advantages and Challenges

SI represents new solutions to existing social problems and presents itself as an impetus for TS, which arises as a response to a set of contemporary and persistent problems in modern societies. There is a growing interest in the theme "SI" with the increase of crisis situations and global problems that require changes and adaptations of social systems and individuals. However, four fundamental barriers of IS have been identified throughout this work: limited access to funding, limited ex-

amples of scale, lack of skills and sufficient personnel and, finally, lack of networks and intermediaries.

AP presents itself as a potentially very important element in the reduction of IS barriers. Several forms of participation are identified, which can be classified into 4 types: Nominal, Instrumental, Representative and Transformative. Transformative participation is, however, the one that brings the most benefits to participants and decision-making bodies and the type of participation that is ideally intended in the AP context, since its function is to obtain means that lead to a certain end while giving power and benefits to both participatory agents and facilitators and/or decision-making bodies.

Citizen involvement can bring benefits to SI in that citizens, both as a group and as individuals, can be a link in communication between governing bodies and communities, or a source of resources and information useful for solving specific problems in their communities, and their influence and power of decision can be pivotal in giving a voice to groups of lesser social representation and alerting them to situations that would not otherwise be taken into account. It was also demonstrated that the motivation of participants and their interest in participatory processes is one of the key factors for the degree of involvement in AP processes and that the intensity of each element's involvement is inversely proportional to the number of individuals involved.

In order for AP to be engaging and achieve the effects of change it desires, certain conditions and structures are necessary. We look at the model of participation as Löw's relational space, defined as "a disposition of people and goods in places" where the importance of creating specific spaces of participation where people and social goods come together is highlighted. Clear rules are defined to analyze this type of participation as the very norms of relationship between the "actors" (participants), routines of functioning and interaction, evaluation and distribution of resources, types of actors and material goods, how they position themselves among themselves and in the space and the role they play. These conditions are thus largely influenced by aspects such as the possibilities of using social assets, the actors' knowledge or credentials, and the use of social status or association between them.

The current context of social detachment clearly conditions this already complex process. Under normal/presential conditions, clear barriers to both PA and IS have been identified. Therefore, the addition of the physical distance imposed by COVID-19 makes it more difficult to think of SI through AP in these circumstances.

There is an increase of interest in SI and AP by government entities. However, there is a marked decline in citizen involvement in these matters [20]. One of the causes of this decline is the obsolescence of traditional methods of participation and the passivity and disinterest of individuals who could participate. At the same time, the new methods and their digital adaptation do not include the entire population, excluding elements that are usually actively involved.

The construction of digital participation spaces requires greater preparation on the part of all those involved, which is difficult to guarantee in advance. It is necessary to adapt techniques and ensure that all participants have access to tools to do so, which represents a factor of exclusion.

Another factor to take into account is the applicability and concrete benefits of the various participation methods to be used. Whether traditional or innovative methods, in person or at a distance, it is imperative to conduct tests and experiments with them in real situations. This is the only way to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each method and which scenarios enhance the different methods, also facilitating their adaptation according to what is intended in participatory moments.

The legitimacy of the systems depends on the active and direct participation of citizens. Lack of participation will lead to a decrease in the systems' credibility, thus increasing the risk of crisis scenarios and social problems.

For the AP to remain a reality in today's context, it is essential to find a middle ground between the classical methods and the new digital methods. It is necessary to ensure the creation of structures that facilitate and promote the inclusion and participation of citizens in the processes of collective decision-making and administration. This is only possible with investment in equipment and technological training in schools, investment in training programs for adults and senior citizens, creation of incentive programs that promote involvement and facilitate the acquisition of computer equipment and Internet connection. Since the implementation of these measures is only possible in the medium/long term and the implementation of activities involving PA at a distance is far from being optimized, this process would ideally be complemented with on-site or hybrid activities, as long as it is possible to ensure the safety and distance conditions of all those involved.

How should Active Participation in Social Innovation be designed then?

The first step required to integrate the AP in SI is to understand what kind of SI you want to implement. This can be done by starting by identifying the objective to be achieved and the reason for this

need.

The objective of SI will determine the next steps and identify who are the potential participants in an eventual session. The nature of the participants will influence the choice of the type of participation appropriate to the case.

Then, a participation space must be created in which the elements necessary for the session - identified according to the nature of the SI - and the set of relevant individuals or a representative of them must be included. In the creation of the space of participation, the patterns in which it will take place are defined, and can be: face-to-face, hybrid or non-face-to-face. This choice will be made based on a previous evaluation of the context of the session and the topic addressed in it.

If the topic involves a total or partial face-to-face meeting between the participants, in addition to evaluating resources, studying their application and defining what results are expected, it is necessary to ensure the conditions of safety and social distance.

When a face-to-face participation is not required, in addition to the requirements made previously, it is also essential to ensure all the conditions for it to take place virtually. If this is done in hybrid format, it is added to the previous premises to attest that the two activity spaces are in tune.

The stage of the SI process at which the initiative is at is one of the relevant aspects in terms of the type of methods to be applied. In an initial phase, certain methods that may not be suitable or indispensable will be applied in an implementation phase or in an evaluation phase of SI. In order to ensure a truly active participation, it is necessary to ensure that, regardless of the phase of the project, the context and the methods used, there is a real interest in the contribution made by the participants. That is, that this participation does not happen only as an instrument to guarantee particular interests, legitimize decisions already taken or to obtain benefits, but that both the facilitators and the participants have the intention that their action will contribute to the development and satisfaction of common needs.

7. Critical Analysis of Active Participation Integration

The first step identified as important, to integrate the AP in SI is to define the objective to be achieved and the need for it. This will be a crucial factor that may dictate, right from the start, the success or failure of IS. A plan designed to meet a non-existent need or problem has no *raison d'être* and will be fruitless. It is therefore essential that entities seeking to develop an IS initiative dominate the issue and the area in which they intend to intervene, or that they are associated with individuals or

entities that do so.

The same is valid for the identification of participants. Who is the innovation for? Who is a barrier to SI? Who can provide solutions? Who can finance it? A wrong answer to these questions can destroy the success of an intervention. This will be one of the biggest challenges to overcome in terms of AP and SI development. There will certainly be cases where answers are easily obtained and relevant individuals are readily available to collaborate and participate. These cases will be more likely to influence decisions, promote transformation scenarios, build the capacity of social groups, and create networks and intermediaries that may be useful in developing new SI.

There will be situations in which the necessary information or resources do not exist or there is no interest in their holders to make them available. This may occur due to conflicts of interest or to conceal situations of illegality. Another issue already addressed in the previous chapters is the possibility that the actors considered indispensable have no interest in participating - because they do not recognize the usefulness of their participation - or do not have the required faculties to do so. Regardless of all the planning done in the development of an IS, if it is not possible to overcome this issue, it will be difficult to promote significant changes. However, the intervention of this type of participants is one of the main objectives of the IS, which is to give a voice to disadvantaged groups / with less representation in society, so it is important to find alternative strategies and solutions to make this happen.

Another relevant aspect to be addressed will be the suitability of the participants. There will be cases where it may not be easy to guarantee this scenario due to the existence of interests that raise questions about decisions taken and conflict with the common good. We have also noted that participation can be used only as a pretence, or passively by administrations or project managers to receive material incentives, legitimization or as a means to achieve objectives. These are questions to which there will not always be a direct or immediate answer.

It is up to the facilitators and those responsible to do what they can to mitigate as much as possible the situations that may compromise the success of IS and to study alternatives or new methods to overcome the barriers whose solution is still unknown.

8. Conclusions

It is concluded that, from a theoretical point of view, the AP offers the potential for the occurrence of SI at both face-to-face and non-face-to-face lev-

els. There are, however, a number of barriers that need to be overcome, and for this to happen, conditions must be created that benefit the proliferation of IS initiatives and encourage the AP. Active participation defined as a genuine possibility for an individual to shape the environment in which he or she lives and determine/influence the rules to which he or she is subject, doing so on his or her own initiative, is at this time still a distant reality.

In addition to the lack of real interest in the contribution made by the participants already seen in some of the cases presented in this work, there is also a general lack of interest on the part of individuals - potential participants - to become involved on their own initiative in matters of participation even if they are given the opportunity to do so. It has also been found that interest in participation increases when material or financial benefits are offered to the individual in exchange for their participation. It follows that participants do not recognize the benefits and added value that their participation alone can mean to themselves or to their communities. The lack of active participation is mainly due to people's lack of awareness related to the lack of real policies to change mentalities and attitudes.

It is necessary to invest in the training of specialists and technicians in learning processes in order to understand the benefits of active participation and its added value for social innovation. The faster this awareness is, the more often and quickly social innovation processes will take place. Simultaneously, it is also necessary to understand the applicability and concrete benefits of each method of participation. This is only possible by applying them to real cases, and by making tests to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each, and thus know how to adjust them according to what is intended in participatory moments. Beyond the knowledge in AP and SI, it is important to involve in these tests and adjustments people with the capacity to formulate assertive, original and creative thoughts.

With an increased awareness of the importance of PA and the application of the right methods, it is expected that ordinary citizens will gradually become, first, involved in issues related to themselves and their routines, and then become an PA agent itself, contributing to changing mentalities and practices.

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