



Epistemological breaks for social work training and practice: Participatory Research through Photovoice in disadvantaged neighborhoods

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Abstract:	<p>The capabilities approach and participatory research are effective means to promote epistemic justice in higher education. Both have important roles, given the current commoditization of University knowledge and professional practice, which do not promote inclusive epistemes that take into account the social problems of disadvantaged groups. Facilitating educational experiences that generate epistemological breaks and promote epistemic justice is a necessary task. Contributing to it was one purpose of the teaching innovation project carried out by the University of Jaén (Andalusia, Spain). The project aimed to stimulate collective reflection and dialogic encounters between complementary knowledge fields. It had three focal points: developing capabilities in students; fomenting participation and collective reflection in the community; heightening the visibility of people living in disadvantaged areas and conveying these realities, and people's knowledge and concerns, to policymakers. The results show that co-production of knowledge by universities and local communities favours learning and practical reasoning; increases recognition and respect for diversity; foments participation and the environment necessary for citizens to exercise their political capabilities. This paper presents only the project's first focal point; specifically, it shows how horizontal knowledge production using Photovoice can enhance in students certain capabilities of great relevance in their future profession.</p>

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Epistemological breaks for social work training and practice: Participatory Research through Photovoice in disadvantaged neighborhoods

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The capabilities approach and participatory research are effective means to promote epistemic justice in higher education. Both have important roles, given the current commoditization of University knowledge and professional practice, which do not promote inclusive epistemes that take into account the social problems of disadvantaged groups. Facilitating educational experiences that generate epistemological breaks and promote epistemic justice is a necessary task. Contributing to it was one purpose of the teaching innovation project carried out by the University of Jaén (Andalusia, Spain). The project aimed to stimulate collective reflection and dialogic encounters between complementary knowledge fields. It had three focal points: developing capabilities in students; fomenting participation and collective reflection in the community; heightening the visibility of people living in disadvantaged areas and conveying these realities, and people's knowledge and concerns, to policymakers. The results show that co-production of knowledge by universities and local communities favours learning and practical reasoning; increases recognition and respect for diversity; foments participation and the environment necessary for citizens to exercise their political capabilities. This paper presents only the project's first focal point; specifically, it shows how horizontal knowledge production using Photovoice can enhance in students certain capabilities of great relevance in their future profession.

Keywords: higher education; capabilities approach; participatory action-research; Photovoice; social work; epistemic justice.

1 Introduction

2 At its best a university education is an instrument for the personal development and
3 autonomy of students and, through them, it can be an instrument for the betterment of
4 society. Types of research and knowledge production that are horizontal, participatory,
5 democratic and equitable can help develop capabilities in students and instructors, thus
6 expanding their professional horizons and improving the practices of social agencies,
7 whilst promoting epistemic justice. To the extent that this occurs, academic knowledge

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3 8 and graduates will be better able to contribute to the autonomy and development of the
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5 9 groups with whom they work, especially the most vulnerable. This is essential in the
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7 10 current context of utilitarianism and commoditization of university teaching, research
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9 11 and professional practice and, while important for all disciplines, it takes on greater
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11 12 relevance in disciplines closely linked to disadvantaged populations, such as social
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13 13 work.

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15 14 In this regard, and in the words of Walker and Boni (2020), with this paper we
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17 15 intend to 1) show “the potential to expand people’s multi-dimensional capabilities and
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19 16 functionings in and through participatory processes and projects” from the sphere of
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21 17 higher education; and also to 2) determine the most relevant capabilities and
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23 18 functionings for social work that should therefore be developed by students.

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25 19 This paper describes a teaching innovation project undertaken by the
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27 20 Universidad de Jaén and some of the lessons learned from it. Most work took place
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29 21 during the academic years 2019-20 and 2020-21, coordinated by faculty members who
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31 22 teach in the undergraduate social work programme. The project, based on participatory
32
33 23 research and the Photovoice method, combined both methodological-practical learning
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35 24 and theoretical-conceptual reflection. It provided the opportunity to initiate participatory
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37 25 processes in both the classroom and the community and also to reflect on the
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39 26 capabilities reinforced in the participants, namely, social work students and faculty,
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41 27 citizens and –to a lesser degree– social workers and policymakers.

42
43 28 The experience has shown how participatory research and the capabilities
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45 29 approach can, through commonalities in their epistemological underpinnings, assist
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47 30 each other in the sphere of university teaching and research. It has also revealed the
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49 31 potential of these approaches to contribute to improved professional practice, especially
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51 32 regarding the relationship between public agencies, citizens in general and society’s
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53 33 most vulnerable groups.

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55 34 Below we present a brief review of the recent context of social work training
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57 35 and practice in Spain. It is followed by a synthesis of the epistemological
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59 36 presuppositions of participatory methodologies and the primary features of the
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61 37 Photovoice method. Then the teaching innovation project implemented in alignment
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63 38 with these ideas is described. The last two sections focus on results, particularly the
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65 39 capabilities developed by social work students and the main conclusions.

42 **Social work practice and training in Spain: a critical overview**

43 In the 1970s the adaptive model of social work became the object of
44 considerable criticism by a number of different ideologies. In Spain, the criticism put
45 forward by the Reconceptualization Movement, which arose in Latin America, was
46 particularly important. Much of the criticism shared a transformative and emancipatory
47 framework and sought epistemological ruptures with the paternalistic charity/assistance
48 model prevalent in the final years of the Franco regime. Although these approaches
49 were more a theoretical and political reflection than practical applications, they did have
50 the effect of orienting some social services towards community social work, which –in
51 alliance with working class movements– advocated giving subjects greater protagonism
52 and achieving horizontality in relationships between professionals and communities.
53 Such ideas, which were closely related to the rediscovery of popular knowledge by PAR
54 (Fals-Borda, 1991), the incorporation of “absent agents” (Santos 2018) and the concept
55 of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2013), were transferred to the academic world in the
56 adoption, by some social work schools, of this transformative conceptualization of the
57 field. Despite these interesting antecedents, in Spain this orientation has not been
58 dominant, in either academic training or professional practice.

59 It is well known that social work praxis is conditioned by the institutional
60 context of the social services agencies. And in Spain, although the ideological
61 constructs vary in intensity depending on the political parties in power in the different
62 autonomous communities, in general neo-liberal objectives are what shape social policy
63 (García and Rendueles, 2017). This has led to a culture of austerity and the
64 managerialism of the New Public Management (NPM) approach, which introduces
65 market techniques and procedures to public administration, orienting it towards outputs,
66 viewing citizens as clients and favouring the outsourcing of services, all with a high
67 level of bureaucracy. The DEC Report on Social Services (2021) indicates that in Spain,
68 far from improving, the bureaucratisation of the system has worsened over the years;
69 “bureaucratic complexity and cumbersome red tape have increased and constitute real
70 barriers that prevent people from effectively using benefits and social services when
71 they most need them” (AEDGSS, 2021, 26).

72 In consequence, social work itself has to a certain degree incorporated neo-
73 liberal objectives, organisational culture and professional praxis. This translates into
74 increased distance between policymakers, front-line workers and citizens. Rather than

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3 75 accompaniment and care, the relationship that this elevated bureaucracy promotes
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5 76 between social workers and their clients is one of control and supervision. Jones, from a
6
7 77 very critical stance, puts it this way: “Too often today social workers are often doing
8
9 78 little more than supervising the deterioration of people’s lives” (Jones et al, 2004). This
10
11 79 state of affairs is not conducive to proximity or empathy and certainly not to the co-
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13 80 construction of knowledge proclaimed in the commentary notes of the Global Definition
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15 81 of Social Work (IFSW, 2014).

16
17 82 Additionally, the 2008 economic crisis and Spain’s austerity policies and
18
19 83 budgets cuts aggravated exclusion and inequalities, and sparked a new wave of debate
20
21 84 about professional practice. The high number of petitions and the reduction in
22
23 85 resources led to widespread discontent. Part of this professional frustration gave rise to
24
25 86 social movements and demonstrations known as “Tides of citizen revolt in defence of
26
27 87 social welfare” and, among them, the “Orange Tide” which purported to defend the
28
29 88 social services system. The impact of these movements was limited but interesting
30
31 89 because they questioned the *status quo* of the profession. However, in the end their
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33 90 critiques did little more than call for a return of the system as it was and, as indicated by
34
35 91 García and Rendueles (2017), they rarely examined the role of social intervention in
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37 92 social reproduction and the power relations linked to the role of the expert, individualist
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39 93 methodologies and the control functions of social work. We believe these questions are
40
41 94 key in bringing a new focus to academic research, deeper reflection in the classroom
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43 95 and the opportunity for instructors and future professionals to develop their critical
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45 96 capabilities.

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47 97 But, as mentioned above, this neo-liberal context, although it is not explicit in
48
49 98 most of social work’s academic discourse, is certainly reflected in the orientation of
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51 99 university studies. The Bologna Plan, the competency approach and, in short, the
52
53 100 adaptation of public university training to match market demands, are the corollary of
54
55 101 the neo-liberal shift.

56
57 102 Thus, the managerial orientation is becoming increasingly prevalent in training,
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59 103 which focuses more on functions of control, supervision and resource management, and
60
104 less on the accompaniment and care of vulnerable people and the development of their
105 autonomy and social participation capabilities. The symbolic professional frame of
106 reference (shown, for example, in widespread use of the business term “client”) makes
107 it difficult to consolidate the social worker’s support role through horizontal
108 relationships, trust and the capability of empathy. And, further, it does not take into

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3 109 account the power asymmetry underlying the “expert” and “supervision” role that
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5 110 predominates in relationships between social workers and members of society who seek
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7 111 out social services.

8
9 112 In short, in Spain, as in other parts of Europe, the late 20th century saw the
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11 113 entrenchment of professional and knowledge production models that hinder the
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13 114 incorporation of different knowledges, the promotion of epistemic justice and the
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15 115 development of capabilities of fundamental importance in social work.

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17 116 Along these lines, Boaventura-de-Sousa Santos reminds us that the University is
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19 117 an institution of great relevance for meeting society’s needs but that such needs are not
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21 118 limited to the market’s needs. On the contrary, the University’s goal should be to “form
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23 119 full human beings and full citizens and not just human capital subjected to market
24
25 120 fluctuations like any other capital” (Santos 2010, 55). There is thus a need for
26
27 121 “epistemology of absent knowledge”, of the incorporation of the “absent agents” of
28
29 122 traditional-dominant academic knowledge (Santos 2018) and of a reconstruction of
30
31 123 knowledge in which these actors become epistemic-suppliers (Walker, Martínez-Vargas
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33 124 and Mkwanzani 2019). This would have a decisive impact on the design of academic
34
35 125 curricula (Santos 2010), which could lead to a new relationship between teaching and
36
37 126 research and reinforce the role of education as a means to strengthen democracy and
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39 127 social participation (Boni, Lozano and Walker, 2010).

40
41 128 In our opinion, orienting higher education towards the capabilities approach
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43 129 would lead to a better response to the changes in how the profession is understood and
44
45 130 practiced and also the challenges that social workers face. For Abad and Martín (2015),
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47 131 this requires a paradigm shift based on an exercise in reflection and professional self-
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49 132 conceptualization. This is why careful consideration must be given to which capabilities
50
51 133 need to be strengthened during training, so that in the future social work praxis can
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53 134 contribute to greater epistemic justice and more inclusive social services.

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55 135 In terms of methodology, the theoretical-practical training provided by
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57 136 Participatory Action Research (PAR) also generates ruptures that promote epistemic
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59 137 justice and participatory decision-making, issues that are especially valuable for
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138 research and work with disadvantaged groups. The next section offers a synthesis of the
139 epistemological presuppositions of participatory methodologies and the Photovoice
140 method.

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3 142 ***Methodological approach: participatory research and the Photovoice method***
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5 143 Epistemological inclusivity is grounded in and can be pursued using different
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7 144 approaches. Post-positivist approaches such as the dialectical perspective and the
8
9 145 participatory paradigm contribute valuable elements to epistemological inclusivity and
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11 146 epistemic justice. These approaches promote processes that are crucial for the
12
13 147 development of critical, reflective and emancipatory knowledge. Such knowledge, when
14
15 148 generated through collective reflection, can provide consensus-based solutions to social
16
17 149 problems or to research contexts, helping to build more just societies.

18
19 150 The theoretical contributions that nourish the participatory approach are multiple
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21 151 and varied (Fals-Borda, Freire, Habermas, Lewin, Maturana, Villasante, Galtung...).

22 152 Moreno and Espadas (2009) point out five basic presuppositions found in the work of
23
24 153 these authors and that have become the foundations of this approach: a) deconstruction
25
26 154 of the subject/object relation in research b) awareness, self-reflection, emancipation c)
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28 155 participation d) rediscovery of popular knowledge and e) scientificity.

29 156 With these epistemological underpinnings, Villasante (1994) has pointed out
30
31 157 that when participatory research processes begin there is an epistemological break with
32
33 158 traditional social research. This early break constitutes the first “leap” away from other
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35 159 methodologies and it happens when the group starting the process engages in “self-
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37 160 reflection” (Caballero, Martín and Villasante 2019). This reflective stage involves
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39 161 profound thinking about the group’s ethical positioning and the project’s *why* and *for*
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41 162 *whom*, and it must take place collectively and from the project’s very outset. It is a leap
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43 163 towards the construction of a shared framework for research that cannot be reversed,
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45 164 because it represents an advancement and a rupture with other methodologies and
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47 165 because it serves as a guiding line (flexible but clearly defined) for subsequent steps in
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49 166 the process. This exercise in collective reflection also helps establish mutual trust,
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51 167 which enhances and facilitates later work and deepens the involvement of the
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53 168 participants.

54
55 169 In short, the starting point is neither the methodology nor the techniques but
56
57 170 rather the paradigm upon which the process is based. Other techniques are used but not
58
59 171 with the methodologies and epistemes usually used; instead it features implicative and
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172 participatory positions (Villasante 2002). That is the reason that such a wide range of
173 methodologies and techniques can be implemented when using this paradigm (Red-
174 CIMAS 2015). One of them is Photovoice.

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3 175 Even though the creator of Photovoice herself has described it at times as a
4 176 method (Wang, 1999, 185), in the subsequent development of her writings it is
5 177 understood as a Participatory Action Research methodology. According to Wang,
6 178 Photovoice enables people to identify, represent, and enhance their community through
7 179 a photographic technique. Its has three main goals: “to enable people (1) to record and
8 180 reflect their personal and community strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical
9 181 dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through group
10 182 discussions of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers” (Wang, 1999, 185).
11 183 According to participatory paradigm underpinnings regarding the rediscovery of
12 184 popular knowledge, Wang highlights that Photovoice must carry out programmes and
13 185 policies "by and with" the population instead of "on" the population, valuing knowledge
14 186 grounded in experience and communities' intelligence. She points out that Photovoice is
15 187 a methodology that enables communities and disadvantaged groups to express, reflect
16 188 and communicate their everyday lives and is thus an alternative to positivist ways of
17 189 knowing, in that it listens to and learns from people's own portrayal of their lives (Wang
18 190 1999). In the project presented herein Photovoice is conceived as a method within the
19 191 theoretical framework of PAR, which gives knowledge production a transformative
20 192 intentionality and political influence, in this case to improve the conditions of two
21 193 disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Andalusia. Photovoice clearly has a pragmatic
22 194 orientation. Its validation depends not only on the appropriate use of techniques but also
23 195 on its usefulness for the people involved and for its ability to solve their problems.

24 196 Using the PAR approach makes it possible to promote epistemic justice for
25 197 vulnerable people and groups involved in processes of co-production of knowledge
26 198 between University and society (Leivas-Vargas et al. 2020). The knowledge produced
27 199 is conditioned by “how” it is built, and also by “for whom” and “why”. The techniques
28 200 used in Photovoice-Jaén were guided by the premises of collective production of
29 201 knowledge, the horizontality of teams and the recognition of “daily-life expertise”.
30 202 Group reflection and participation in public discourse have contributed to the
31 203 development of capabilities that heighten personal autonomy, recognition and dignity
32 204 among participants. In this project Photovoice was not used as a mere technique for the
33 205 extraction of information for subsequent analysis by researchers, but rather as a method
34 206 with transformative power thanks to the inclusion of “absent” knowledge and its focus
35 207 on creating emancipatory knowledge (Santos 2000). Likewise, the researcher’s role has
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3 208 been to facilitate processes while the participants had an active voice in the process and
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5 209 the use of information. The following section discusses the details of the project.
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8 210 **Voicing Individual and Collective Experiences (VOICE) in our**
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10 211 **neighbourhoods: objectives and procedure**

11 212 This section describes the process undertaken and some of the lessons learned in
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13 213 the project called “The participatory approach and the Photovoice tool as a technique
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15 214 for research and intervention in vulnerable contexts and disadvantaged areas”.

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17 215 It was a teaching innovation project with research objectives in three categories: a)
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19 216 developing student capabilities; b) fomenting participation and collective reflection in
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21 217 the community, offering vulnerable segments of the population the opportunity to take
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23 218 part in decision-making processes; c) increasing the visibility of conditions in the city’s
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25 219 more disadvantaged neighbourhoods and conveying this information to the authorities
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27 220 responsible for public policies.

27
28 221 The project involved two neighbourhoods in Jaén that are considered
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30 222 disadvantaged areas. It was innovative in both its theoretical-conceptual learning and its
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32 223 practical dimension and provided the opportunity to engage in participatory
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34 224 methodologies in the classroom and the community.

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35 225 In each neighbourhood a team was organised, consisting of students, faculty
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37 226 members, adult residents and children aged 11 or 12 and, in some activities, social
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39 227 service workers and policymakers. Information was produced and analysed using the
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41 228 Photovoice method (Wang and Burris 1997). A series a training workshops were held,
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43 229 with sessions devoted to taking photos, selecting topics and analysing images. The
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45 230 photographs taken by the citizens themselves were the visual-narrative resource
46
47 231 (Martinez-Vargas, Walker and Mkwanzani 2019) used to promote collective reflection
48
49 232 and self-analysis about the themes selected by the participants. These narratives became
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51 233 “specifically epistemic forms of justice” (Walker and Mathebula 2020, 193) that led to
52
53 234 the creation of action proposals that were later conveyed to policymakers. Students took
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55 235 part in the preliminary processing and analysis, the return of information to community
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57 236 members and also the transfer of results.

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56 237 Although the project achieved significant results in terms of community
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58 238 activation, this paper presents only the results related to the training of social work
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60 239 students. All together, 320 people participated in different ways, with varying levels of

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3 240 involvement. Fifty-five work sessions took place, both in and out of the academic
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5 241 schedule (Table 1).

6 242 The logic of PAR was followed, although the methodological design had
7
8 243 different phases: self-reflection; recruitment of participants; training of trainers; field
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10 244 work; diffusion and wrap-up. In practice, however, project design is a spiral process that
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12 245 undergoes continual adjustment (Ander-Egg 1999).

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15 246 ***Phase one. Reflection, ethical positioning and configuration of driving group***

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17 247 This phase was devoted to collectively building a shared framework for research and
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19 248 mutual confidence, based on the premises of epistemic justice, the social utility of the
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21 249 University and the participatory approach. It was a period of epistemological rupture,
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23 250 involving joint reflection by community members and the faculty members organising
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25 251 the project. Numerous meetings took place between the project organisers and a variety
26
27 252 of neighbourhood actors to talk about the *why* and *for whom* of this kind of project, and
28
29 253 also to promote the use of participatory strategies in local community planning
30
31 254 (Espadas-Alcázar 2017). All of this contributed to the project's final design.

32
33 255 ***Phase two. Recruiting and training the trainers***

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35 256 According to Boni and Walker (2013), capabilities are the real opportunities that
36
37 257 students have to acquire the functionings they value. Therefore, the teachers decided
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39 258 that the first student selection criterion would be whether the candidate valued the
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41 259 opportunity to develop capabilities that would promote the acquisition of functionings
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43 260 related to the facilitation of community processes using participatory methodologies.
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45 261 Non-probabilistic sampling was performed with the following criteria (1) being a fourth
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47 262 year student of social work; (2) having a positive view of the implementation of
48
49 263 participatory methodologies in community research; (3) being willing and able to
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51 264 commit to the project. Gender inclusion criteria was not used but because of the strong
52
53 265 professional and academic feminization of the field of social work¹ the team ended up
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55 266 being composed entirely of women. To recruit participants from the community,
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57 267 informative sessions were held with neighbourhood residents and directors of a primary
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59 268 school. Then there was a public presentation of the project to all the social agents

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60 ¹ In the 2019/2020 academic year women 84% of social work students at the University of Jaén were women.

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3 269 involved.
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6 270 Next, we focused on training the research team so that its members could subsequently
7 271 assume a role of facilitators in the target communities. The activities in this phase were
8 272 intended to promote in students the group of individual capabilities related to
9 273 knowledge in the framework of PAR. Training workshops about PAR, the Photovoice
10 274 method and basic photography were held. In addition, *transectos*² took place in the
11 275 neighbourhoods and a cognitive mapping technique was used (Francés et al. 2015).
12 276 These techniques allowed for a rupture with testimonial injustice (Fricker 2013) by
13 277 promoting in students the capability of establishing “horizontal social relationships” and
14 278 that of “respect, dignity and recognition” of vulnerable groups.
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23 279 ***Phase three. Fieldwork. Analytical and proposal dimension: contact with the***
24 280 ***community, analysis, idée-force and prioritization of proposals***
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26
27 281 The taking of photographs followed different strategies in each neighbourhood. The
28 282 students acted as facilitators and accompanied the participants during the process,
29 283 helping or advising, in a horizontal relational plane. The photo-sessions were followed
30 284 by analysis and group discussion in order to discover the principal issues of concern in
31 285 each neighbourhood. The research team used the SHOWeD question method
32 286 (Hergenrather et al. 2009) to facilitate content analysis, debate and discussion of the
33 287 photos. Finally, consensus was reached regarding the most relevant topics and the most
34 288 representative photos were selected to create a community narrative. These techniques
35 289 promoted the development of hermeneutical capabilities (Fricker 2013) such as “critical
36 290 thinking” and “co-production of knowledge”. The students then took charge of
37 291 gathering, processing the images and narratives in order to systematize it all and prepare
38 292 it for an information return workshop with participants in subsequent sessions.
39 293 Performing these roles helped students to develop the capabilities of “knowledge”, “co-
40 294 production of knowledge” and “autonomy” which are extremely valuable in social work
41 295 practice.
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55 ² According to Francés et al. ‘Operationally *transectos* constitute graphic representations of a route taken
56 for purposes of field reconnaissance, which is generally done by the research team together with the
57 inhabitants of the territory involved in the research. This technique can be classified within the set of
58 participant observation techniques, in that as the group moves along the route it stops periodically,
59 wherever the participants, who act as key informants, point out places with a special wealth of
60 information (historic landmarks, conflictive areas, gathering places, etc.)’

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3 296 A second round of dialogic workshops delved deeper into the narratives of the
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5 297 participants. The participants discussed and tried to reach consensus regarding the main
6
7 298 community problems and how to tackle them, in a process that sought to ensure that
8
9 299 community members made the decisions, thus promoting proposal-making capabilities.
10
11 300 With these techniques students strengthened the capabilities of “critical thinking”, “co-
12
13 301 production of knowledge” and “autonomy”. The proposals were included in a report
14
15 302 presented later to policymakers.

16 17 303 ***Phase four. Sharing visions from within the neighbourhoods***

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19 304 For a participatory process to have any political impact, it is vital that society in general
20
21 305 receive information about the results. To heighten the visibility of these disadvantaged
22
23 306 areas, an exhibition was organised in the *Museo Íbero*. Students designed a
24
25 307 communications plan. They also georeferenced the places appearing in the photos of
26
27 308 Photovoice-Jaén. These activities promoted the capabilities of “autonomy”,
28
29 309 “knowledge” and “horizontal social relations” in students and at the same time
30
31 310 facilitated the development of the “voice” and “aspiration” capabilities in the
32
33 311 participating communities.

34 35 312 ***Phase Six. Close***

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37 313 In PAR methodology, due to the circularity of the action, there must be space for the
38
39 314 ongoing evaluation of the process, which facilitates the review, fine-tuning and
40
41 315 reconsideration of strategies. The research team decided that a triangulation of different
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43 316 techniques would be used for evaluation, because this would give a broader field of
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45 317 analysis, the chance to contrast and verify results and also the opportunity to develop
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47 318 new ideas if different results were obtained (Creswell et al. 2007). Both main
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49 319 researchers conducted a continuous assessment by recording observations through the
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51 320 field diary tool. For the final evaluation two strategies were used. To promote the
52
53 321 students’ self-evaluation of their attitudes and participation, we used the Visual
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55 322 Thinking learning model (Moss and Brookhart 2016) in which participants use a target,
56
57 323 or dartboard, to measure their learning. To further explore subjective experiences, Focus
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59 324 Group (FG) sessions were held to collect student perceptions of the impact that the PAR
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325 methodology had on their teaching-learning process and of PAR as a means to develop
326 the capabilities that higher education supposedly promotes. These techniques reinforced

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3 327 the capabilities of “critical thinking” and “co-production of knowledge”.

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6 328 **The development of capabilities through the Participatory Action Research**
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8 329 **conducted as part of the Photovoice-Jaén project.**

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11 330 In this section the main results are discussed. The data was organised into two blocks: i)
12 331 capabilities developed by students; ii) capabilities promoted in the community. As
13
14 332 already mentioned, this paper discusses only the results related to students.

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16 333 In this regard, and in line with the work published by Walker and Boni (2020),
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18 334 this paper seeks to: 1) show the potential of PAR and participatory processes
19
20 335 implemented by universities to develop student capabilities and functionings; and 2)
21 336 describe the capabilities and functionings that this project promotes in students and will
22
23 337 be most relevant in their chosen profession.

24
25 338 To create categories for the analysis and evaluation of the promotion of valuable
26
27 339 functionings, we took as reference some of the capabilities described by Walker (2006,
28
29 340 179-180) that we considered especially relevant in the framework of social work:
30
31 341 autonomy; knowledge; social relations; respect and dignity; aspiration; voice; and
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33 342 emotional integrity (Figure 1). Also, during the research, new categories of analysis
34
35 343 emerged in relation to capabilities that had been promoted through previous categories.
36
37 344 This was how the capability of “empathy” was identified in relation to the development
38
39 345 of “respect and dignity” and “social relations”. Likewise, the capability of “knowledge”
40
41 346 promoted the development of associated capabilities such as “co-production of
42
43 347 knowledge”, “critical analysis” and “practical reasoning”. Following Maxwell (1992),
44
45 348 the analysis criteria looked at: (1) *descriptive validity* “frequency with which the
46
47 349 concept is cited”; (2) *theoretical validity* “consistency of the data with the theoretical
48
49 350 contributions of epistemic justice and the capabilities approach”; (3) *interpretative*
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51 351 *validity* “consistency in the attribution of meanings to the concepts associated with
52
53 352 capabilities, functionings and epistemic justice”. Following Guba and Lincoln (1985)
54
55 353 the validity criteria used were: i) credibility, ii) transferability, iii) confirmability; iv)
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57 354 dependency.

58
59 355 The results show that learning based on the capabilities approach and PAR
60
356 promotes functionings such as “collection of valued capabilities” for the future career of
357
358 social work students (Frediani, 2015). Learning based on horizontal paradigms
promotes epistemic justice because it allows for the participation of other actors in the

1
2
3 359 creation of knowledge. In this regard, the project has promoted research and
4
5 360 intervention practices that incorporate the popular knowledge of ordinary citizens in the
6
7 361 design of public policies and professional activities, fomenting a deliberative democracy
8
9 362 and empowering vulnerable people.

10 363 In connection with the capabilities promoted, the data collected through
11
12 364 observation and recorded in the field diary also showed a progressive increase in
13
14 365 valuable functionings for social work practice.

15 366 The data collected with the dartboard evaluation technique was encouraging. It
16
17 367 showed that students had a very positive perception of how participating in the project
18
19 368 had influenced their achievement of academic and personal goals, and also community
20
21 369 goals, especially regarding different aspects related to the promotion of self-
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23 370 development, emancipation, autonomy and critical thinking in the teaching-learning
24
25 371 process, the potential of PAR methodology as both a pedagogical instrument and a
26
27 372 means to personal and community empowerment.

27 373 The objective of the FG was to gather the qualitative perceptions of the students
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29 374 regarding the impact of the PAR methodology on the development of capabilities
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31 375 supposedly promoted in higher education. The discourses collected suggest that using
32
33 376 PAR provided students with opportunities to develop several capabilities in work-
34
35 377 related functionings. The most relevant results of the analysis appear below, in the
36
37 378 following two blocks of reinforced capabilities.

39 379 ***1) Reinforcement of respect, dignity and recognition through horizontal social***
40
41 380 ***relations and empathy***

42
43 381 This section details how students developed functionings valuable for the professional
44
45 382 practice of social work by strengthening the capabilities of “respect, dignity and
46
47 383 recognition” of diversity through “horizontal social relations”, “empathy” and “active
48
49 384 listening”.

50 385 In consonance with Belda-Miquel and Avella-Bernal (2020, 77), a key means for the
51
52 386 expansion of these epistemic capabilities was the construction of “relationships of trust
53
54 387 with community actors” through the creation of multiple opportunities and spaces for
55
56 388 dialogue with communities. In line with the observations of Caballero, Martín, and
57
58 389 Villasante (2019), techniques such as training workshops, guided walking tours through
59
60 390 the neighbourhoods and the cognitive mapping technique, besides contextualizing the

1
2
3 391 research, served as an opportunity for further reflection and to facilitate the “leap” to
4
5 392 community processes, uncovering past assumptions that hindered horizontality among
6
7 393 the actors involved.

8 394 Especially worth noting is the development of functionings connected to the
9
10 395 capability of “respect and recognition of the dignity” of people in situations of
11
12 396 disadvantage, in all their human diversity. Particularly, respect and recognition of the
13
14 397 cultural difference of the Roma ethnicity increased. Corroborating the results of earlier
15
16 398 studies (Leivas-Vargas, et al. 2020), reinforcement has been observed in functionings of
17
18 399 egalitarian epistemic outcomes that involve cultural respect and recognition in processes
19
20 400 of “co-production of knowledge” by University and society.

21 401 The aforementioned capability takes on relevance for professionals who will be
22
23 402 working with disadvantaged populations in the future. Functionings connected to the
24
25 403 capability of “respect, dignity and recognition” and “empathy” for different ways of
26
27 404 understanding the world, of knowing and doing, which had been reinforced through the
28
29 405 “co-production of knowledge”, were mentioned by students in relation to the acquisition
30
31 406 of professional knowledge during the project.

32 407 For example, in the FG, Natalia, in relation to one child's aspiration to become a
33
34 408 police officer, reflected on the inequality of opportunities of children from vulnerable
35
36 409 communities and the responsibility social workers have to reduce these social injustices:

37 410 Obviously their situation is not conducive to becoming police officers, for instance, but
38
39 411 that is also part of our job, isn't it? Trying to make sure that these neighbourhoods have
40
41 412 possibilities and that the children here are like the ones in the rest of Jaén. And I think
42
43 413 that is what the project did for us at the professional level: it helped us to see that they
44
45 414 are people just like the rest and they should have the same possibilities (...) that they
46
47 415 can start out with the same possibilities. (Natalia).

48 416 ***2) Reinforcement of knowledge and autonomy through co-production of*** 49 417 ***knowledge, critical thinking and practical reasoning.***

50
51 418 In this section we explain how this PAR achieves an epistemological rupture with
52
53 419 hegemonic knowledge production by promoting the capabilities of “knowledge”,
54
55 420 “autonomy”, “co-production of knowledge”, “critical thinking” and “practical
56
57 421 reasoning”.

58
59 422 Considering, like Fricker (2017, 53), that “epistemic injustice is fundamentally a
60

1
2
3 423 form of (direct or indirect) discrimination”, our findings indicate that PAR has favoured
4
5 424 the group of capabilities linked with knowledge, co-production of knowledge and social
6
7 425 transfer of the kind discussed by Santos (2010, 2018) and Walker (2006) by
8
9 426 contributing to the autonomy and the development of the vulnerable communities
10
11 427 involved.

12
13 428 With regard to the *discriminatory epistemic injustice* defined by Fricker (2013),
14
15 429 by incorporating people’s subjectivity (knowledge and experiences) in educational
16
17 430 processes, a rupture in epistemic injustice is achieved through the co-production of
18
19 431 knowledge. This, as Freire indicates (1970), is “the action and reflection of men and
20
21 432 women upon their world in order to transform it. Without it, overcoming oppressor-
22
23 433 oppressed is impossible” (p. 32). In this regard, “active listening” has been one of the
24
25 434 reinforced capabilities that is most valuable for future professional activity. As Fricker
26
27 435 points out (2017, 58) “the more actively a hearer listens the more the speaker’s
28
29 436 hermeneutical marginalization is thereby eroded”. Students reported having learned to
30
31 437 act more inclusively, valuing and considering the points of view of other people with
32
33 438 empathy, comprehension, dialogue and active listening. Tíscar put it this way: “They
34
35 439 told us their stories, and about their neighbourhood, and we listened. And that’s
36
37 440 important to them”. This underlines the importance of establishing consistent social
38
39 441 relations that favour the creation of mutual support networks, not just for solving
40
41 442 community problems but for self-realization and personal wellbeing. The students also
42
43 443 value the non-hierarchical, horizontal and dialogic relationships with the faculty
44
45 444 members involved and the creation of a stable group bond.

46
47 445 The results show that the participatory praxis strengthens the students’ capability
48
49 446 to carry out effective and efficient collaborative projects. As pointed out by Maldonado
50
51 447 (2007), such projects facilitate the reaching of goals established by consensus and with
52
53 448 respect for individual contributions. So, the project has given rise to an interactive
54
55 449 learning model based on the creation of new spaces for human and technological
56
57 450 interaction, facilitating the strategic planning of actions in order to meet objectives and
58
59 451 establish satisfactory group dynamics.

60
61 452 Individual work you can do whenever you want, you do it when you can, but working
62
63 453 as a group requires time and organisation. Here, if you don’t work as a group it is
64
65 454 impossible to obtain the results we obtained. We didn't realize how important it is to
66
67 455 work as a group... (Laura)

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2
3 456 Also, an increase can be seen in the capability of critical thinking regarding the
4
5 457 situations and needs of people living in vulnerable areas. The empathy and greater self-
6
7 458 confidence acquired during the participatory process help break the constructs based on
8
9 459 prejudices and stereotypes, facilitating emotional regulation and integrity and reducing
10
11 460 the anxiety, even fear, of working with people and communities that are socioculturally
12
13 461 different, as expressed by Alba:

14 462 At the beginning I was kind of afraid to go to the neighbourhood. Of course, it's the fear
15
16 463 people create in you! My friends said "You're going there? My goodness! You don't
17
18 464 know what you're getting into!". In fact, I said to myself more than a few times "Oh,
19
20 465 my, I don't know if I am going to be a good social worker!". I know I tend to be overly
21
22 466 fearful and that these things shouldn't make me afraid, but the truth is I was kind of
23
24 467 afraid. And then I went there and realized that everything was fine, that they weren't
25
26 468 going to do anything to me. The important thing was that they didn't perceive us as a
27
28 469 threat, right? And so they were fine with us.

29
30 470 One aspect that really stands out in the students is their awareness and self-evaluation of
31
32 471 the knowledge obtained and the development of critical thinking that reinforces and
33
34 472 stimulates this aspect and the recognition of difference. For them, the participatory
35
36 473 experience has enabled them to get closer to the "other" and see the reality of other
37
38 474 contexts with the eyes of that "other", thus increasing the professional empathy so
39
40 475 necessary when working with other people. This is how Laura expressed it:

41
42 476 This project has allowed me to see that you don't work for people but rather with people
43
44 477 and this is something you really have to keep in mind. We are used to thinking, in other
45
46 478 contexts, from the perspective of here, instead of there. For example, we normally think
47
48 479 about things from our perspective of privilege, from here, and not from their
49
50 480 perspective, there. And this has made me open my eyes about a lot of the stuff they
51
52 481 talked about (...). In other words, seeing the other perspective and not just your own.

53
54 482 Finally, it is important to remember that in the training sessions students worked
55
56 483 on the skills they needed to act as "facilitators" in the workshops with neighbourhood
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58 484 residents. As indicated by Leiva-Vargas et al. (2020, 94) 'the capability of *doing* is the
59
60 485 opportunity to participate in knowledge co-production processes and to communicate
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487 knowledge and experiences'. So, PAR, with its emphasis on horizontal relationships
488
489 among the actors taking part, enhances mutual trust and strengthens the participants'
related to the capability of 'voice' understood as awareness of self-worth and

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3 490 confidence in one's aptitudes and skills, as regards both professional and human
4
5 491 qualities. In this respect, and as mentioned by Walker (2006, 173), it is clear that "Voice
6
7 492 also supports the capability of autonomy". Occupying, within the team, a position with
8
9 493 capacity for meaningful and horizontal interlocution helps participants make progress in
10
11 494 reasoned decision-making and in taking responsibility for the consequences, thus
12
13 495 promoting personal and professional empowerment.

14 496 In the practicums done as part of the regular curriculum, you don't feel like a
15
16 497 professional doing a job. You feel like you are in the background. But here we
17
18 498 planned, we decided how to act. We were part of the working team; we were on the
19
20 499 front line. (Alicia)

21
22 500 A student's awareness of such progress contributes to a proactive, dynamic and flexible
23
24 501 attitude towards learning, in consonance with what Boni et al. (2010, 126) define as
25
26 502 "being an active enquirer" and having an attitude that breaks with traditional teaching-
27
28 503 learning methods such as knowledge transmission and the competencies model.

29
30 504 The problem is that we are used to being comfortable, to sitting in class with our
31
32 505 arms crossed, listening, and when the time comes for exams, studying and that's it.
33
34 506 We knew this class would take up more time, but I think it should be a required
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36 507 class, because it is an experience that those who have been sitting in classrooms
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38 508 listening to the lecturer are just not going to have. (Alba)

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4 510 *[Figure 1 here]*

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6 511 Figure 1. Conceptual network of capabilities developed by students in the Photovoice-Jaén³.
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37 ³ Note: The letters E and D inside the codes indicate the following information of the results of Focus Group: Rooting (E) or number of citations that have been linked to that
38 code which indicates the saturation of the discourse. Density (D) or number of links to other citations. Source: authors. Network created with the software Atlas.ti V.8.
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512 **Conclusions**

513 The educational experience of taking part in the Photovoice-Jaén project has been an
514 epistemological break with the traditional pedagogical models of higher education and
515 has allowed for a more inclusive methodological approach to interventions involving
516 vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups. Immersion in this PAR has contributed to
517 greater epistemic justice, for both students and the communities that took part, because
518 it started out with a necessary political intentionality. We share the valuable critique
519 made by Martínez-Vargas et al (2022) of some PARs which often, although they apply
520 tools horizontally and strive to involve the subjects, do not contemplate in their
521 episteme an explicit political intention to transform vulnerable groups. In our case,
522 reflection on the ‘for whom’ and ‘what for’ of the research generated a debate that
523 turned out to be pivotal in making decisions regarding the use of the techniques at
524 different stages of the project and that has enriched all participants considerably. We are
525 aware of the limitations pointed out by Martínez-Vargas et al. (2022) with respect to the
526 complexity and impositions of a research model linked to different power structures and
527 believe that the research agenda on the incidence of PAR requires deeper reflection in
528 this direction.

529 By addressing the three analytical levels -*Methodology level, Cosmological*
530 *level, Method level* - proposed by Martínez-Vargas et al. (2022) in relation to the
531 capability participatory paradigm (CPP), the current action-research process has
532 shown that PARs are a suitable tool for the generation of both knowledge and praxis in
533 the Capability Approach. At the methodological level, this process has identified and
534 increased communities' valuable capabilities. At the cosmological level, it has
535 contributed to: i) the construction of epistemic communities capable of developing
536 collective ontological knowledge about themselves; ii) identifying their human
537 development goals based on both their own worldview and the deep meanings they
538 attribute to the concept of well-being. Finally, at the method level, this process,
539 ideologically close to the CPP, has shown how research in the field of Social Work can
540 contribute to the achievement of these community objectives, while enhancing the
541 capabilities of (future) social workers as facilitators of community processes.

542 Regarding methodology, the primary objective was to connect with the

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2
3 543 communities in two important regards. On the one hand, in relation to academic goals,
4 544 the methodology focused on achieving functionings by strengthening the individual
5 545 capabilities of autonomy and knowledge. It thus promoted the comprehension, analysis
6 546 and resolution of the specific problems of each community. On the other hand, the use
7 547 of PAR made it possible to analyse problems from a critical perspective, propose
8 548 solutions in a participatory manner and have a political impact. This generated different
9 549 opportunities for dialogue and exchange between students and communities in which
10 550 everyone involved developed individual capabilities (critical thinking and practical
11 551 reasoning) and collective capabilities (co-production of knowledge, respect, dignity and
12 552 recognition, horizontal social relations and empathy).

21 553 From the community perspective, the project has created in both
22 554 neighbourhoods a space for participation and group reflection by residents and for
23 555 dialogic encounters between the knowledge of the University and that of citizens. Such
24 556 *epistemic communities* have made it possible not just to analyse and increase the
25 557 visibility of the problems perceived by their protagonists (such as inadequate urban
26 558 planning, environmental degradation, economic difficulties, deterioration of social
27 559 fabric), but also to construct a community narrative around these problems and to
28 560 decide jointly on specific proposals with which to address them, to be conveyed to
29 561 policymakers, contributing in this way to epistemic justice as well.

37 562 As for the students, from a capabilities perspective, not only has the project
38 563 promoted a teaching-learning model based on strengthening capabilities that are
39 564 fundamental in the profession of social work, it has, beyond the Photovoice technique,
40 565 promoted the skills needed to engage savvily in social and political activity; in short, to
41 566 exercise their rights as citizens. Several valued functionings was identified: 1) Respect,
42 567 dignity and recognition based on horizontal social relations. The establishment of
43 568 horizontal relations instead of hierarchical ones, in both the academic context and the
44 569 community, has increased the students' confidence in themselves and others, promoting
45 570 recognition of and respect of the dignity of all through horizontal social relations and a
46 571 collaborative spirit. 2) Knowledge and autonomy. The students' participation as active
47 572 agents in knowledge construction has promoted the functionings of co-production of
48 573 knowledge, critical thinking and practical reasoning with which to infer and draw
49 574 conclusions from real life situations. This constituted an epistemological rupture with
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3 575 hegemonic knowledge production, which has helped the students to deconstruct the
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5 576 traditional hierarchical vision of the “expert” role in the relations between service users
6
7 577 and front-line social workers. This issue is very relevant in that it aids in the
8
9 578 consolidation of professional practices that will promote epistemic justice. Additionally,
10
11 579 having their voice listened to in decision-making processes has heightened the
12
13 580 autonomy, self-esteem and empowerment of the students.

14 581 Furthermore, this paper highlights how important it is to work and educate with
15
16 582 a focus on capabilities, not deficits. In this respect, this research shows that education
17
18 583 using a capabilities approach and participatory methodologies can provide social
19
20 584 workers with a better understanding of situations, problems and needs in disadvantaged
21
22 585 communities, and also with the emotional integrity necessary to address them
23
24 586 effectively. Social workers who show empathy may be able to compensate the tendency
25
26 587 of Social Services agencies to give an overly administrative focus to social work, which
27
28 588 dampens society’s confidence in the field’s professionals.

29 589 The development of these capabilities will contribute to greater epistemic justice
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31 590 in the realm of social work intervention promoted, in this case, by the University.

32 591 Our findings referring to a particular socio-political and academic context, so
33
34 592 they cannot be generalized to higher education as a whole. However, the international
35
36 593 universality of the epistemologies that support the work (promoting valuable operations
37
38 594 in the area of epistemic justice) is a good starting point for social work practices that are
39
40 595 socially fair and replicable in other contexts, both Spanish and European. Shaping the
41
42 596 research and teaching agendas along these lines, plus the funding of more projects of
43
44 597 this type, will help to reorient the University's commitment to and engagement with
45
46 598 society, a question of fundamental importance, particularly in public universities.

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Table 1. Phases of Project-data

PHASES	Date	Session (n)	Task	S*	V*	M*	T*	P*	C*	F*
Reflection	2019		Reflection and recap of previous ideas		2		1		1	2
Recruitment of participants	May 2019	1	Informative session	128						2
	Sept. 2019	1	Presentation of the project	16	8		6	2	3	2
Training the trainers	September-	1	Workshop on participatory photograph method	12	8		3	2	3	2
	October 2019	3	Workshop on Photovoice technique	12	11	11	1		3	2
		3	Workshop on introductory photography	8					1	1
Fieldwork	October 2019	2	Transect-technique, walks through neighbourhoods	12	3	7		3	1	2
		3	Group outings for picture-taking	8		7	3		1	2
<i>Contact with the community and definition of themes</i>		3	Organisation and planning	12						1
		2	Design and definition of themes	8	11		2		2	2
		5	Workshop for analysis and discussion of photographs	6	8	10	4		2	2
<i>Analysis, central ideas and prioritisation of proposals</i>	November 2019	5	Data analysis and processing	12						1
		2	Workshop for the selection of photos	6	12				1	2
		1	Day of team-building activities	7		9	3		1	2
		2	Workshop on community self-diagnosis	6		10	2		2	2
	December 2019	2	Workshop for analysis and discussion of photographs	6		10	2		1	2
		1	Preparation of report on results	11						2
Dissemination	September 2020-	5	Organisation of the photo exhibition	14		4	1			2
		1	Inauguration of the photo exhibition	5	6		12	3	2	5

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	February	6	Dissemination in media	1	1	-	-	-	1	1
	2021	2	Dissemination at scientific conferences	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Close	March-April	3	Creation of proposals	2	3	-	-	-	-	2
	2021	3	Evaluation of results	6	7	-	-	-	-	2

Note. S* students; V* neighbours of El Valle; M* children of La Magdalena; T* professionals in the community (teachers, social workers, etc.); P* politicians; C* Collaborator staff; F* Faculty

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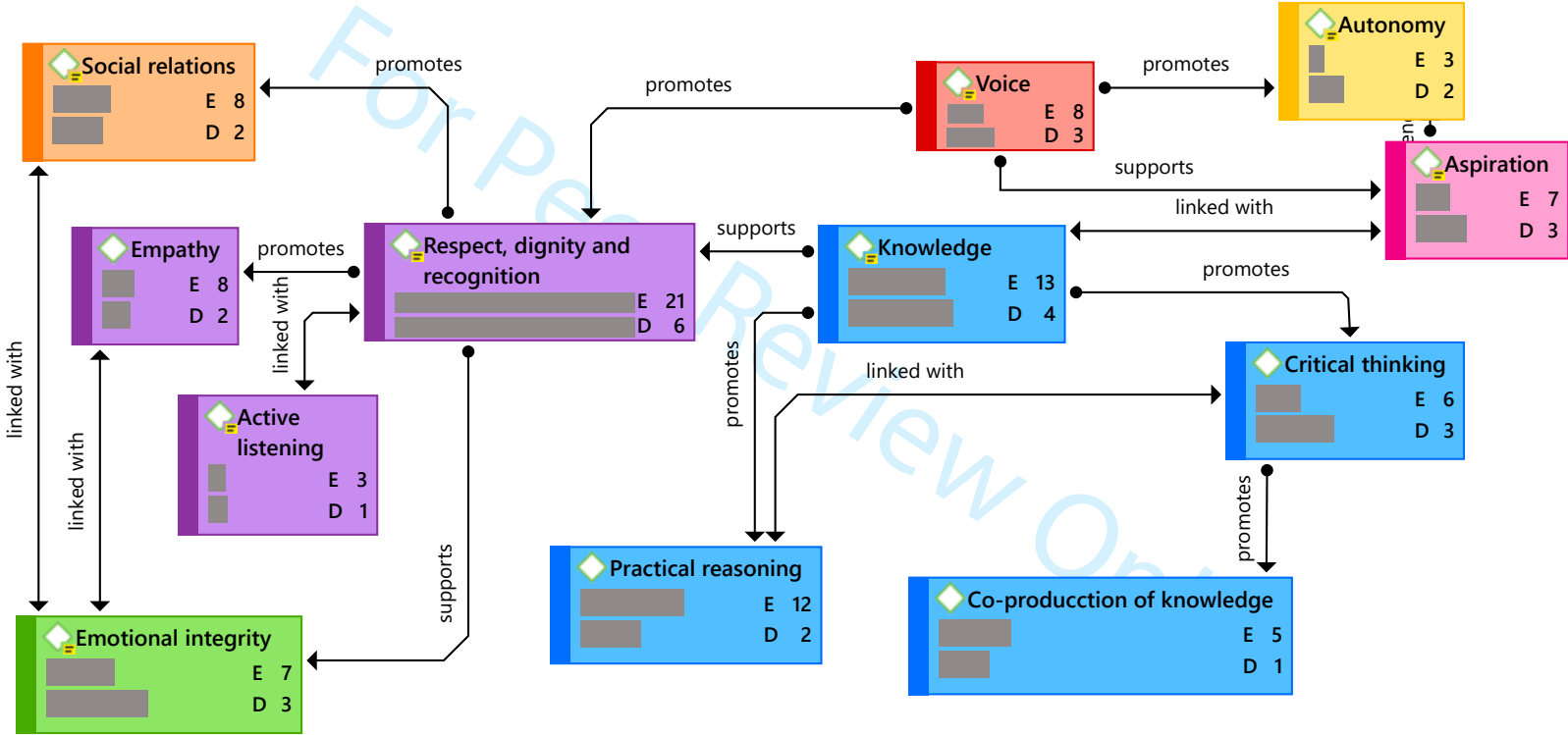


Table 1. Phases of Project

PHASES	Date	Session (n)	Task	S*	V*	M*	T*	P*	C*	F*
Reflection	2019		Reflection and recap of previous ideas	-	2	-	1	-	1	2
Recruitment of participants	May 2019	1	Informative session	128	-	-	-	-	-	2
	Sept. 2019	1	Presentation of the project	16	8	-	6	2	3	2
Training the trainers	September-October 2019	1	Workshop on participatory photograph method	12	8	-	3	2	3	2
		3	Workshop on Photovoice technique	12	11	11	1	-	3	2
		3	Workshop on introductory photography	8	-	-	-	-	1	1
Fieldwork	October 2019	2	Transect-technique, walks through neighbourhoods	12	3	7	-	3	1	2
		3	Group outings for picture-taking	8	-	7	3	-	1	2
<i>Contact with the community and definition of themes</i>		3	Organisation and planning	12	-	-	-	-		1
		2	Design and definition of themes	8	11		2	-	2	2
<i>Analysis, central ideas and prioritisation of proposals</i>	November 2019	5	Workshop for analysis and discussion of photographs	6	8	10	4	-	2	2
		5	Data analysis and processing	12	-	-	-	-	-	1
		2	Workshop for the selection of photos	6	12	-	-	-	1	2
		1	Day of team-building activities	7	-	9	3	-	1	2
	December 2019	2	Workshop on community self-diagnosis	6	-	10	2	-	2	2
		2	Workshop for analysis and discussion of photographs	6	-	10	2	-	1	2
	January 2020	1	Preparation of report on results	11	-	-	-	-	-	2
Dissemination	September 2020-February 2021	5	Organisation of the photo exhibition	14	-	4	1	-	-	2
		1	Inauguration of the photo exhibition	5	6	-	12	3	2	5
		6	Dissemination in media	1	1	-	-	-	1	1
		2	Dissemination at scientific conferences	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Close	March-April 2021	3	Creation of proposals	2	3	-	-	-	-	2
		3	Evaluation of results	6	7	-	-	-	-	2

Note. S* students; V* neighbours of El Valle; M* children of La Magdalena; T* professionals in the community (teachers, social workers, etc.); P* politicians; C* Collaborator staff; F* Faculty