DELIVERABLE 4.3

CONCEPTUAL GUIDE FOR THE PARTICIPATIVE RESEARCH

“A common framework for participative research in local Youth Policy from a Capability perspective”

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Conceptual Guide

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1. Introduction

“Social Innovation – Empowering the Young (SocIEtY) for the Common Good” both focuses on and integrates disadvantaged young people into the research process to improve their quality of life and to foster social innovation. The aim of this conceptual guide is to design a participative research agenda which allows us to identify in a participative way what kind of inequalities and disadvantages matter to young people and what kinds of public action should be set up.

This raises the question of “who decides” which inequalities are relevant and ought to be tackled through public action. We argue that this should not be the prerogative of policy-makers or the public administration, nor should there be a specific privilege for researchers in this respect. Moreover, SocIEtY reflects an approach that innovation - as an emerging idea to tackle inequality - cannot be defined outside the perspective of young people or outside of the specific local, cultural and historical context. At the same time, attention must focus on how the interests of marginalized groups can be accommodated taking account of wider systems of political, social and educational relationships.

As such, the focus of the participative research within SocIEtY is on the collection of data for an “alternative” – in the sense of deepened and broadened - informational basis for social policy. Bringing forward and confronting pluralistic “spheres of justice” (Walzer 1983), by giving voice and light to invisible actors and practical knowledge, social inquiry can turn into “deliberative inquiry” (Salais, 2009, p. 25).

Taking this seriously requires not only questioning mainstream evidence and its normative underpinnings. It implies first and foremost a particularly demanding conception of democracy (Bonvin 2005), by which social diagnoses, elaboration of tools and propositions for securing the capabilities to lead a good life should emerge from the lived experiences of persons, rather than from decontextualized agendas imposed in a top-down way. In that vein, building knowledge on a particular topic represents more than a mere occasion of adding a new stone to the vast scientific edifice. One can see it as a unique opportunity to engage with the experiment of democracy, understanding the conception of democracy as “a permanent deliberative or bargaining democracy” (Bonvin, 2009, in Ley, 2013, p. 76). As such, SocIEtY has a “constructive value” (Bonvin, 2009, in Ley, 2013, p. 76), aiming to result in a reconfiguration of the informational basis of judgements of justice and enhancing our understanding of...
the everyday situation of young people. We will argue for participatory research as a methodological approach to pursue the transformative potential of participation.

Rather than perceiving participatory research as a clear method, we address it as a practice of reflection. Therefore, we propose a methodological guideline for reflection on the participatory nature of our research, since as a process of knowledge construction and production, doing research requires scrutiny and reflexivity by the researcher, which means that “the researchers should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same critical scrutiny” (Mason, 1996, p. 6). As such, this guide in no sense comes as a readymade methodical manual, but aims at opening up methodological avenues and raising some reflexive questions about our research with regard to a conceptualisation of democracy and participation which is in line with the Capability Approach. Obviously, that will need to be further elaborated and developed in our coming work in the SocIEtY project.

2. Participation and participatory research in a capability perspective

Research, policy and practice concerning marginalized and powerless groups is often firmly rooted in the concept of participation. Participation has been widely addressed in the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999). Also several contributions in the final conceptual report “Inequality, Disadvantage, Social Innovation and Participation” of the SocIEtY project (2013), extensively addressed the concept of participation, which is often perceived as a vague “catch all” term and “buzzword”, but is in the same time far from being a value-free concept (Beuret, Bonvin & Dahmen, 2013). We will highlight some thoughts about participation and democracy, also elaborated in the above mentioned report, because these will function as building blocks for this conceptual guide concerning participatory research.

2.1 Participation linked to democracy

2.1.1 Participation as a conformist social act

In the final conceptual report “Inequality, Disadvantage, Social Innovation and Participation” (2013), it was explicitly stated that participation is intimately linked to the concept of “democracy” and seems to be a constitutive characteristic of democratic societies and welfare regimes. Nevertheless, in its predominant (language) use, this concept focuses mainly on the articulation of interests and the (formal) involvement of citizens into political decision-making processes (Ley, 2013). Within such minimalist
definitions, democratic deliberation requires only the removal of external impediments and the granting of basic citizenship rights, such as freedom of speech, while tending to neglect the equal access to (political) power and social rights, goods and resources, freedom and security (Ley, 2013). From this point of view, democratic citizenship is foremost perceived as a matter of individuals and their knowledge, skills, dispositions and individual responsibility and democratization is perceived as an inclusion process into the existing democratic order, by facilitating a transition from a pre-rational and pre-democratic stage to a stage where entry conditions for future participation in democracy are met (Biesta, 2009, 2011a). As such, participation is translated in social terms, that is, in terms of “good, socially adaptive and integrative behavior”, containing the potential danger of both pinning down citizens to a particular civic identity, in accordance with a well-defined and singular order of the democratic political game, and the erosion of more political interpretations of democratic citizenship, that see the meaning of citizenship as essentially contested (Biesta, 2011a, 2011b). Therefore, participation should not be viewed as something necessarily positive, as it might function as an affirmative or conformist social act. Or as mentioned by Beuret, Bonvin and Dahmen (2013, p. 50): “Under the umbrella of active citizenship and empowerment, politics of participation may coincidence with discourses of activation, which stress individual responsibility for one’s own integration”.

2.1.2 Participation as a collective and transformative learning process

Within the Capability Approach, capabilities are not confined to psychological aspects of human “functionings” but capabilities rely on an arrangement of living conditions of a material, symbolic, legal and normative kind that are necessary to allow the “flourishing” of individual capabilities. Bringing together those conditions (barriers and opportunities) and connecting them to the individual “problem situation” requires the careful and comprehensive research of change processes that characterize human communities (Lorenz, 2013). In this vein, our aim is to link endogenous aspirations, claims and views with exogenous dynamics. Sen points to the spaces of public deliberation (Sen, 2004) and is very aware of the role of public policies in promoting capabilities:

> Freedom has many aspects. Being free to live the way one would like may be enormously helped by the choice of others and it would be a mistake to think of achievements only in terms of active choice by oneself. A person’s ability to achieve various valuable functionings may be greatly enhanced by public action and policy, and these expansions of capability are not unimportant to freedom (Sen, 1993, p. 44).

Freedom should not be understood as a positional state or stabilized condition, but as a process of interactions and power relations occurring through permanent doing (Zimmermann, 2012). In such an
active rather than descriptive understanding of freedom (the capability for action), which engages agency and environment in a dynamic and interactive way (Zimmerman, 2012), participation is thus not simply about the distribution of resources or formal rights and the freedom to exercise them, but to guarantee the necessary conditions for their effective exercise (Bonvin, 2005, p. 24). As such, participation requires not only the removal of external impediments on individual action, but also certain material and symbolic conditions and access to a public space, since more ambitious definitions of democracy see it intimately linked to processes of “public deliberation” and a “collective learning process” (Beuret, Bonvin & Dahmen, 2013), rather than a socialization process. As Sen (1990, pp. 9-10) recognizes: “democracy is a demanding system, and not just a mechanical condition taken in isolation”, it is going beyond formal rights within an existing order (Bonvin, 2005, p. 24). As such, democratic inclusion [and participation] should not be understood in terms of adding more people to the existing order, but rather as a process that necessarily involves the transformation of that order (Biesta, 2009, p. 111). Therefore, participation – in its broadest and subject-orientated sense – can be defined as a special form of human interaction, which (tries to) influence the situation as a whole (from the perspective of the subject) and therefore the perpetuation or increase of the conception of a good life is tackled and aspired. If participation is not related to the preservation or improvement of the quality of life, it seems to be a conventional social action rather than participation in a broader and transformative sense. Crucial for the attribution of human action as “participation is not a catalogue of forms and modes, but the exercise of influence on the entirety – which can be a political or a social entirety – and therefore it is always tending to the (re)arrangement of the social” (Ley, 2013, p. 65). The moment of democracy is therefore not merely an interruption of the existing order, but an interruption that results in a reconfiguration of this order according to the logic of equality, into one in which new ways of being and acting exist and new identities come into play (Biesta, 2011c, p. 4).

2.2 Participatory research to which end?

Hence, from a research perspective, the concept of participation has the impetus to reconfigure the power relations implicated in knowledge production (Krumer-Nevo, 2005, 2008; Krumer-Nevo & Barak, 2008). As Bergold and Thomas (2012) aptly argue:

The unity and justification of participatory research are to be found not so much on the level of concrete research methods. Rather, participatory research can be regarded as a methodology that argues in favor of the possibility, the significance, and the usefulness of involving research partners in the knowledge production.
Freire, a much quoted author in both Capability Approach literature and literature about participatory research (see Apsan Frediani, 2010), argues that people who are the focus of research have the universal right to participate in the knowledge production: “In this process, people rupture their existing attitudes of silence, accommodation and passivity, and gain confidence and abilities to alter unjust conditions and structures”. In that vein, Salais (2009, p. 23) argues that the Capability Approach can contribute to the renewal of social criticism: “the situation represents possibilities for alternate ways of being and doing that offer the promise of capabilities for people. The political challenge is to bring these possibilities to light, to make them achievable and ultimately accessible”. We do not aim at determining what should be done, but rather, in order to do something, what do we need to know and how can we find it out (Salais, 2009). In other terms, “it concerns the informational basis of judgements related to the situation” (Salais, 2009, p. 24).

Our democratic and participatory research aims to deliver an empirical foundation to inform and broaden the informational basis of the judgments of justice (Sen 1990), which determines the content and practices of collective choice in a democracy (Salais, 2009) by a bottom-up perspective, privileging a situated appraisal of living conditions, identity constructions, opportunities for meaningful participation, etc. in socially unequally structured settings and by including the voice and aspirations of young people.

Gaventa and Cornwall (2001, p. 74) state that “those who are directly affected by the research problem at hand must participate in the research process, thus democratizing or recovering the power of experts”. In the same vein, Frisby, Maguire and Reid (2009, p. 23) focus on the engagement in “participatory processes that are inclusive of those usually marginalized from more formal processes of theory production”. These are only some quotes which illustrate that the ambition of participatory research is often the ambition of emancipatory research. Emancipatory research is frequently claimed to be democratic research: it does not involve the unilateral knowledge production by the researcher (and the correspondingly implementation of changes desired by the researcher in a social reality), but it involves a democratic research process in which not only the researcher but also policymakers and clients take part in knowledge production, that can possibly bring a societal change along (Roose & De Bie, 2003, 2009). Summarizing, participatory research is often described as an essentially “democratic process that also contributes to the empowerment of people” (Snoeren, Niessen & Abma, 2011, p. 190).
2.2.1 From participatory research as a tool…

However, recently, participatory methods have been strongly criticized as being too context specific and localized, as being instrumental to predetermined objectives, rather than an end in itself, as addressing the manifestation of poverty rather than the underlying causes of deprivations, as reproducing local power relations, rather than challenging the nature of discrimination; as being a “tyranny”, rather than a means for transformation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Arielī, Friedman & Agbaria (2009, p. 287) clearly illustrate that building participatory research relationships involves “a potential paradox that may stymie projects and cause participatory researchers to behave contrary to their espoused values”. The paradox of participation reflects the danger that the use of concepts like “participatory” may mask the influence of power relations on what people think, see, hear, and do (Hall, 2001).

In accordance with participation as a social conformist act as addressed above, it is stated that participatory research is sometimes used merely as a tool for achieving pre-set objectives rather than it is a process to empower groups and individuals to envision their futures and improve their lives (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, Hickey & Mohan, 2004).

Along with Noffke (in Altrichter & Gstettner, 1997, p. 61), we perceive a tension between “democracy and social engineering, which continues to be worked out in changing configurations in the practice” of participatory research”. From a social engineering perspective, emancipatory objectives might imply a conception of participatory research as a process of innovation aimed at a specific Bildungsideal (Masschelein, 1991), namely that of a state of emancipation to be reached through the implementation by the researchers of a democratic model, rather than through a democratic research process. Then, dialogue becomes a kind of window dressing in which participatory techniques are applied as a strategy for achieving one’s own objectives (Van Diesen, 1998). A strong critique sounds that this pragmatic social engineering approach might hold the risk of being co-opted by dominant interest and adjusting people to the existing situation and reinforcing (dominant) structures, rather than transforming and changing the situation (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). In the same vein, Arielī, Friedman and Agbaria (2009) conclude by not longer assuming that the more participation the better, to avoid the installation of “pseudo-participation”. Instead, they argue that the level of participation ought to be freely and openly negotiated between researchers and community members. A democratic research process implies an open research process to which various actors make their own contribution.
2.2.2 … to participatory research as transformation process

We agree with Apsan Frediani (2010) that “the success of participatory research is not merely measured in relation to the efficiency of the implementation of a project or research”. We claim that participatory research – instead of being part of a strategic plan – should involve in the experiment of democracy, in which the transformation of private troubles into public issues is at stake (Wright Mills, 1959). Participatory research from a capability perspective must focus on the process of sharing understandings and exerting agency. It is about questioning the nature of knowledge, facilitating collaborative learning and looking at a group’s ability to act and achieve change. In similar lines, we refer to Friedmann (1992, quoted in Apsan Frediani, 2010) when stating that participatory research should contribute “to a plan of realizing human rights, civic rights and human flourishing”. Participatory research can contribute to knowledge constructed through deliberation: “it organizes and weighs, it creates the facts and thus provides an incentive, in certain configurations, to reformulate the issues and choose other ways to [address] the problems” (Salais, 2009, p. 26).

This critical orientation allows for more attention to be paid to dissension, tensions and conflicts, as the basis for transformation (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). The researcher’s role, based upon a Freirian-like pedagogy, “makes it possible to pay attention and listen to overt disagreement as well as trying to trace covert disagreement through an interpretation of (speech) actions” (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008, p. 101). The central purpose of the critical orientation is emancipation, not to be understood as a process of innovation aimed at a state of emancipation to be reached, but in line with the pedagogical thinking of Paulo Freire (1970), who emphasized cooperation rather than the expectation that people should emancipate themselves through this cooperation (Van Hove, 1999). This approach is tied to Freire’s (1970) notion of “conscientisação”, referring to the collaborative reflections on the situation that people find themselves in (Thompson, 2000; Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). Paulo Freire’s central message is that one can know only to the extent that one “problematizes” the natural, cultural and historical reality in which both the individual and the collective are immersed. Problematizing is the antithesis of the technocrats “problem solving” stance (Roose & De Bie, 2009). It is by raising questions across many facets of social life, including lived experience, identities, social structures and cultural discourses, that the gaps in existing explanatory frameworks are revealed (Davis, 2008) and that our understanding of the situation can grow (Bouverne-De Bie, 1988). Within this critical approach, participatory research at least tries to destabilize established views, gives voice to unacknowledged groups and interests, or points to some alternative perspective, however vague and utopian but contributing towards changing the situation for the better (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). As such, participatory research is emancipatory as it leads to new abilities to create knowledge.
and can open up new ways of thinking and acting (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). We agree with Reason and Bradbury (2001, p. 2), interpreting knowledge as “a living evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience, it is a verb rather than a noun”. Rather than being a large-scale empowering project, participatory research is a type of minor politics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) in which reality as we experience it is questioned and the roles we play are reviewed critically. Moreover, emancipatory research is subject to several preconditions and it is the researcher’s task to help to materialize these conditions. This presupposes a modest attitude linked to a strong involvement with the problem situation that is the subject of research.

3. Areas of choice in relation to participatory research

As stated by Reason & Bradbury (2001, p. xxvii) the primary “rule” on the creation of quality in participatory research practice is to be aware of the choices one is making, their consequences and the limitations that come as a result of these choices, since research is inherently normative and political rather than neutral and value free (D’Cruz & Jones, 2004). The production of any knowledge is “an outcome of social position, location or situatedness producing a particular way the world is understood, the way questions are formulated, the methods chosen to answer the research question and the interpretation of the results” (Genat, 2009, p. 108). Therefore, it is important to understand the political dimension of generating knowledge, as participatory research (and also the theoretical perspective of the Capability Approach) has a commitment to social justice and social change. As a process of knowledge construction and production, doing research requires scrutiny and reflexivity by the researcher (Roose et al., submitted). However, as Mehta (2008, pp. 236-237) points out, too often “the entire process of research and fieldwork, so crucial for knowledge generation, along with the experiential elements of research are banished from the final text”. As participatory researchers, “we face tussles and huge contradictions”, but too often, the experiential aspects and dark bits of knowledge and the choices made in knowledge production are not articulated in the final account (Mehta, 2008, p. 236). Therefore, in line with Mehta (2008, p. 238), we keep a plea to

unbanish all those messy and tricky questions around ethics and the politics of research dilemmas to examine: marginality and powerlessness; the politics of knowledge and situating the researcher, his/her identities and key experiences in the research process; the impact of various methodologies on research outcomes; and the ethical dilemmas of researching on citizenship while working with citizens alongside the challenges of dealing with power relations within the wider network.
These messy and tricky questions, dilemmas, contradictions and ambiguities require the researchers to develop reflexive potential and the necessary openness to discuss their doubts and considerations in making choices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2008). Therefore, we argue that the methodology of our participatory research can be understood as a practice of reflection in which some questions should be addressed concerning how our research relates to democracy and participation, as conceptualized in a capability perspective. Instead of stressing the individual researcher’s responsibility or crediting a blind belief in clear-cut participatory methods, we want to introduce the notion of “areas of choice” (Roose et al., submitted) which refer to the necessity of reflexive space in research communities to collectively embrace and discuss the complexities of participatory research. In what follows, we discuss four areas of choice, that can enhance the reflective subjectivity (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) of the researcher: 1) What is the position of the researcher?, 2) What is the definition of the problem and who has the power to define it?, 3) What are the methods to be used? and 4) How are the results interpreted, represented and disseminated?

3.1 What is the position of the researcher?

As Denzin and Lincoln (2008, pp. 29-30) argue, behind the research process is the biographically and socially situated researcher, which indicates the depth of complexity into which a researcher enters while confronting the situational and relational ethics and politics of research “that apply to all forms of the research act and its human-to-human relationships”. This recognition enables us to develop reflexive potential in uncovering our interpretative, paradigmatic framework(s), as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 31), since how we negotiate ethical and political issues are intimately conjoined with how we understand existence and knowledge (Grosz, 2005). The net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological premises may be termed a paradigmatic worldview, combining assumptions about

- ontology (What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?),
- epistemology (What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known?),
- and methodology (How do we know the world, or gain knowledge of it?) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 31).

Researchers should be aware of the fact that they are guided and bound within a set of epistemological and ontological assumptions while attempting to acquire in-depth knowledge of their research topics and subjects (Vandekinderen, Roets & Van Hove, 2014). Nevertheless, researchers should not only
explicate their theoretical and methodological frameworks, but also critically engage with their own theoretical perspective, in our case, the Capability Approach.

As Huzzard, Ahlberg & Ekman (2010) assert, in a participatory research project, the relationship between the researcher and the field is necessarily the subject of critical reflection since the fieldwork is neither a “no man’s land” nor a virgin territory. Leading a participatory research means dealing with local agendas, material constraints, possible instrumentalization of the research or the participant’s views on our role. The space between community insiders and outsiders is navigated. For example, Smith, Bratini, Chambers, Jensen and Romero (2010, p. 413) recognize that “entering a community means entering it at a particular level, or via a particular agency, and in many ways, this is a political process” that may influence the attendance of other community members, the allocation of time and space for it. Moreover, as Herr and Anderson (2005, in Smith et al., 2010) point out, it is important to understand and navigate the micropolitics of the communities, in concrete the hierarchy, resources, behind-the-scenes interests, the motivations for inviting or allowing researchers into the community etc. In the same vein, it is also important to reflect on the social position of the researcher: is the research project commissioned by policy makers, by an external, non-profit funding body; or by university; and what are the repercussions for the autonomy of the researcher to challenge dominant regimes? Another question to be addressed within this context, is about whose side we are on, since it is impossible to do research that is uncontaminated by personal and political sympathies (Becker, 1967).

The position of the researchers and co-researchers can be situated on the axis between the insider and outsider position (Van der Kamp, 1996). Van der Kamp (1996) suggests that the role of the researcher can best be described as an engaged and competent outsider. Levin (2012, p. 134) perceives the role of the researcher as a friendly outsider, identifying the role as institutionally separated from the local actors and identifies the unique combination of “deep empathic and political involvement coupled with critical and reflective research” as the essential challenge for the participatory researcher specifically. In our opinion, the idea of the researcher as boundary subject, elaborated by Huzzard, Ahlberg & Ekman (2010) is inspiring. Huzzard et al. (2010, p. 295) conducted their research in the context of interorganizational collaboration and explain that “boundaries demarcate different world views, identities and domains of practice”. As such, this interpretation recognizes the researcher as an active subject, often mediating across various professional and organizational perspectives. However, our expanded interpretation of the word boundaries, also refers to how some human subjects (disadvantaged youth in our research) are divided from others, living at the margins and living between borderlands. Participatory research often engages with the intensities of discourses and practices that
produce marginal subjects (Vandekinderen et al., 2014). By the researcher's involvement in these borderlands, he/she and the research subjects, might learn how to read webs of power and social life, produce new discourses and knowledge(s), invent possibilities to become most themselves and least sure of the boundaries (Davies, in press) and create politically informed maps for their life (Braidotti, 1994) that might help them to live a life that they have reason to value (CA). However, the researcher must decide whether or not to engage with the intensities emerging in research ventures and to cross the borders in order to work at the site of the not-yet-known (Davies, in press). As such, understanding becomes inter-standing. The shift that takes place, evolves from research that only interprets to research in which not only researcher and researched subject, but also the people who take part in our research venture, can engage with each other. It is precisely this socio-political engagement of the researcher as boundary subject and border crosser, in going beyond the already-known, that the re-invention of knowledge(s) and the promise of alternative and free ways of living (Pease, 2002) can flourish.

By focusing on the discursive role of participatory researchers as boundary subjects we can potentially reflect more critically on the roles we adopt in our intervention endeavors and their inevitably political nature (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). At its core, participatory research is about challenging and unsettling entrenched and sometimes invisible power arrangements and mechanisms that are enacted in everyday relationships, organizational and economic structures, cultural and institutional practices, large and small (Frisby, Maguire & Reid, 2009). Individuals working at boundaries and borderlands cannot claim to be politically neutral, but instead are working in a complex terrain of political praxis. As Salais (2009, p. 25) states, researchers bring out “the general knowledge contained in the practical knowledge of persons (as well as sharing it and making it public); they would (...) act as go-betweens from the singular to the general”. So this concept challenges us as researchers to pay explicit attention to the ways in which research evolves as an activity that cannot distance itself from social, political and historical processes, evolutions and contexts. As Zimmerman (2012) asserts, this implies a double commitment by the researcher, both as a scientist and as a citizen. Research is an inherently political process, as D’Cruz and Jones (2004, p. 9) argue and in that sense it is important to understand the ethical dimension of generating knowledge equally well as a political dimension, requiring “a greater degree of reflexivity (...) to think about what assumptions about the world are taken for granted” and opening up the transformative potential. As aptly expressed by Salais (2009, p. 27), participatory research is “the social process and collective action” that keeps “alive the possibilities to have the last word”.

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3.2 What is the definition of the problem and who has the power to define it?

In qualitative and participatory research literature, the power imbalance/difference is a largely debated topic (Ellis, 2007), because researchers usually initiate the research relationship, have authority over what gets said and done (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422), and earn prestige and power from their research (Lincoln, 1995, p. 285). This area of choice embodies specific and interrelated issues, including the issue that the research evolves in relations of power and the question whether researchers are aware that they intervene in existing problem definitions.

Currently, an increasing accumulation of stories and accounts of researchers that document situational and relational experiences take place and reveals how researchers deal with the power imbalance and try to become ethical researchers. We believe that situational ethics, described by Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 261) as “the kind that deal with the unpredictable, often subtle, yet ethically important moments that come up in the field” and relational ethics, recognizing and valuing “mutual respect, dignity and connectedness between researcher and researched and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007) are of crucial importance with regard to issues of power. From our point of view, however, researchers are at risk of paying too little attention to the ways in which research evolves as an activity that cannot distance itself from social, political and historical processes, evolutions and contexts that determine – what we call their socio-political research ethics.

In a sense, the role of research in the process by which knowledge is generated as socially constructed in relations of power is inevitably never neutral, since it cannot take place in a social and political vacuum (Andreola, 1993; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In that vein, an important subject of discussion (with regard to the problem and the power to define it) implies the differing roles and positions of researchers in constructing and producing the concept of “disadvantage” in research, policy and practice that are emerging in shifting and changing social, political and ideological contexts (Lister, 2004).

Perceiving our research as an essentially participative and democratic process (Snoeren et al., 2012) that enables questioning the nature of knowledge and facilitating collaborative learning, we want to address “disadvantage” as a socially constructed and sensitizing concept (Patton, 2002), and attempt to understand and interpret it as “a product of dissensus” (Biesta, 2011b), while working with people, referring to contradiction as a quality characteristic. In this vein, Bergold and Thomas (2012) argue that “it is not a question of creating a conflict-free space, but rather of ensuring that the conflicts that are revealed can be jointly discussed” by “creating a safe space in which openness, differences of opinion,
conflicts, etc. are permitted”. The knowledge that people gain through their daily life and work needs to be explicitly articulated in dialogical arenas to become the basis for knowledge creation (Bradbury & Reason, 2003). The central premise is that participatory research is research with and not just about people, and the problem at stake is what matters for the involved stakeholders (Levin, 2012). A participatory research approach implies the transformation of the researcher/researched, subject/object liaison, which presents according to Smith et al. (2010, p. 408) “a power-sharing challenge to oppressive relationships premised on submission and dependence between individuals and groups”. As such, in the context of participatory research, the established relationship is an intersubjective relationship between partners or co-researchers. Within participatory research, partnerships are formed between researchers and community members to identify issues of local importance, develop ways of studying them, collect and interpret data, and represent the resulting knowledge (Smith et al., 2010). As such, the validity of theoretical knowledge in participatory research is tested through a continuous process of validation which is called reciprocal adequacy and concerns a continuous dialogue and intersubjective negotiations between researchers and research subjects about how statements and terms must be understood, and whether statements and terms are true in concrete situations (Coenen, 1998, p. 20). In that vein, we argue for a formed consent, rather than an informed consent. These negotiations are necessary to find out “not what should be done [in the first place], but rather, in order to do something, what do we need to know and how can we find it out. In other terms, it concerns the informational basis of judgement[s] related to the situation” (Salais, 2009, p. 24).

3.3 What are the methods to be used?

Participatory research contains a whole range of methods depending largely on the research field and the research partners in question, and no one method can grasp reality and all its complexities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, we argue – in line with Bergold and Thomas (2012) – that it makes little sense to standardize methods of data collection. Mehta (2008, p. 241) rather describes twenty-first century researchers as bricoleurs who draw from a bouquet of possibilities: “like the handy-man, the bricoleur employs different methodological strategies in the unfolding of a research situation and also seeks to understand multiple perspectives and meanings.” In this area, the bricolage of methods and approaches should be discussed, in relation to their commitment to participative and democratic knowledge production and their ability to make vague (and sometimes unformed) voices clear and visible. Hereby, the question “how” to involve people might not dominate the more ethical consideration of “why” methodological choices are made (Roose et al., submitted).
At this point, the question arises whether “the voices” of people should be directly or indirectly included in the research projects, and on what grounds these choices were made. Moreover, the extent to which people are able to participate in different stages of the research process are important subjects of reflection, as visualized by Ley (2014) who made an overview of the different research stages and possible methodological translations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research process</th>
<th>Individual perspective</th>
<th>Collective perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participative data collection</td>
<td>i.e. young adults as interviewer?</td>
<td>i.e. reflexive &amp; consecutive focus groups, „walk-through” inspections of the district?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participative data analysis</td>
<td>i.e. biographical memory work?</td>
<td>i.e. research workshop, communicative validation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Participative) Representation</td>
<td>i.e. photo collages, telling daily-life stories?</td>
<td>i.e. film, politicization, young adults as co-authors?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in a practical manner)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At this point, we want to introduce (in appendix) some inspiring resources with regard to the diversity of methods in which one can browse. The mentioned resources also provide a range of options for data-analysis. As they deal in depth with issues of interpretation and representation, they will provide an anchor with regard to the next area of choice. As a complete overview of all possible approaches for analysis is impossible and beyond the scope of this guide, we will outline some basic assumptions with regard to the interpretation, representation and dissemination of the results, arising from the Capability Approach in the next section.

3.4 How are the results interpreted, represented and disseminated?

Chappell (1998) aptly argues that the ways that tales are told and translated have a major impact on influential gatekeepers to accept or reject them as “true” and “valid” accounts. In the same vein, Genat (2009, p. 105) pertinently states: “where representations of the world are highly contested, research becomes a political act”, since researchers have an inherent practice of translating realities into public issues:
“The story goes that three umpires disagreed about the task of calling balls and strikes. The first one said: ‘I calls them as they is’. The second one said: ‘I calls them as I sees them’. The third and cleverest umpire said: ‘They ain’t nothing ‘till I calls them’ (Meyer, 1997, in Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000, p. 180)

As such, researchers might experience a “crisis of representation” (Ellis et al., 2008): an uncertainty in describing and representing social realities to a wider audience while being aware that they are always engaged in interpretative accounts that cannot completely capture the lived experiences of research participants.

In this area of choice, attention should be paid to the ways in which research ventures function as sites for the production of knowledge and power (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and how the meanings given to research insights inherently grow through the processes of interaction between the researcher, the research subjects, and policy and practice. Participatory research with accounts for critical agency exposes hegemonic power arrangements and their informational basis for judgments of justice and makes transformative political action possible (Baez, 2002, p. 35). This raises the question: How can disadvantaged youth benefit from our research? Moreover, this relates to the possibilities of public and democratic debate with social actors in our societies in the creation of solidarity and social justice. In order to untangle this “crisis of representation”, Andreola (1993) asserted that issues of representation are interrelated with the encompassing theoretical and methodological approaches throughout the research process (see also areas of choice numbers 2 and 3), which requires reflexivity about how research is constructed, interpreted, reported and disseminated.

Ideally, participatory research is conducted in cooperation with a diversity of parties involved. As a consequence, participatory research not only involves a dialogue: in practice it is often a multilogue that takes place (Mölders, 2001). Boog (2002) argues that participatory research is a living social network. As such, the multi-perspectivity and multi-vocality must be preserved in the representation of the results (Bergold & Thomas, 2012).
4. Summary

We interpreted this conceptual guide as a sensitizing concept, offering a critical perspective on participatory research as a special way of knowledge production and clarifying in an abstract manner the methodological principles, characteristics, changes, challenges. It functions as a kind of common orientation to foster spaces in which a collective and deliberative social inquiry happens, while opening up space to realize our ambition to conduct participatory research adapted to the specific context (e.g. selection of the young people, methods to gather information and the analysis of these experiences…).

From our point of view, the participatory potential of our research is best captured in terms of a collective and transformative knowledge production process, initiated by dissensus through confrontation of pluralistic spheres of justice and by giving voice and light to invisible actors and practical knowledge. Our participatory research aims to deliver an empirical foundation to inform and broaden the informational basis of the judgments of justice (Sen 1990).

Putting this forward as our main goal, we argue that the metaphor of the researcher as a boundary subject catches this socio-political engagement, defining the researcher’s role as mediating across various perspectives, involving in borderlands, crossing borders and acting as a go-between from the singular to the more general. Moreover, we state that the bricolage of applied methods and analysis approaches should be discussed, in relation to their commitment to participative and democratic knowledge production. In the same vein, issues of representation are interrelated with the encompassing theoretical and methodological approaches throughout the research process.

To end, we summarize the questions for reflection which should guide our participatory research.

**What is the position of the researcher?**
- What are your ontological and epistemological assumptions and how did you explicit them?
- Did you reflect on the social position of the researcher in the community?
- How did you address and deal with your boundary position (in its variety of interpretations) as a researcher?

**What is the definition of the problem and who has the power to define it?**
- Did you use a informed/formed consent?
• How was the power issue addressed from a socio-political viewpoint during the whole research process?
• How was the problem defined? Who was involved? How did you deal with dissensus?

What are the methods to be used?
• Which methods did you use and how do these relate to the democratic and participatory objectives of the research?

How are the results interpreted, represented and disseminated?
• How were the results disseminated in a way that stimulate a democratic debate with social actors in our societies and is influential to policy and decision makers?
• How was the multi-perspectivity /multi-vocality preserved in the representation of the results?
5. Appendix

**Qualitative Inquiry (QIX)**

provides an interdisciplinary forum for qualitative methodology and related issues in the human sciences, focusing on methodological issues raised by qualitative research.

**Qualitative Research (QRJ)**

is a journal that publishes original research and review articles on the methodological diversity and multi-disciplinary focus of qualitative research.

**Forum: Qualitative Social Research (FQS)**

is an online journal for qualitative research established in 1999.


introduces the researcher to basic methods of gathering, analyzing and interpreting qualitative empirical materials.


has the purpose to provide the reader with a background for understanding the uses of qualitative research, to examine its theoretical and historical underpinnings, and to provide the “how-to’s” of doing qualitative research.


shows researchers how to design, collect, and analyze qualitative data and then present their results to the scientific community
6. References


