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NATURE CONSERVATION AND HUMAN WELFARE: THE ROLE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION OF THE URBAN AGLOMERATION OF SEVILLE

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Abstract:

This article summarizes part of the research carried out for the doctoral thesis under the title “Nature conservation and human welfare: the role of citizen participation in the socio-ecological transition of the urban agglomeration of Seville”, read on May 2017 and whose main objective was to delve into the possibilities that an effective citizen participation has on the generation of transition processes towards territorial sustainability and equity: in the current context of systemic crisis, the role played by the different socioeconomic actors is very important for generating resilient cities and territories, since they are called to meet the challenges of these days with creativity, adaptability and imagination, generating alternative, sustainability-oriented projects.

In this sense, this paper goes in depth into the theoretical and methodological frameworks supporting a research like this, oriented to reach a bigger deepening in the problems under investigation from the examination of ‘examples in action’ (Walker 1983) within the metropolitan area of Seville. In particular, it will be highlighted the importance of a qualitative approach to obtain, collect and interpret data, where a phenomenological perspective is fundamental since human behaviour is the product of a certain way of viewing and defining the world.

Palabras Clave: Citizen Participation, Socio-ecological Transition, Qualitative Methodologies

1. Introduction, objectives and methodological iter

The approach of this research finds its theoretical and methodological basis in the conceptual framework of Social Production and Management of Habitat (Capel 2003; Capel 2011; Pelli 2007; Pelli 2010; De Manuel Jerez 2010; López Medina 2012), where Social Transformation of Habitat is understood as the set of processes that tend to transform the existing habitat in which the citizen initiative plays an active role in the decision making (De Manuel Jerez 2010). They usually are spiral processes, not lineal ones, in which it is possible and necessary to find areas where popular knowledge and technical knowledge could cooperate, starting from the awareness of the necessity to face an habitat problem by a social community and progressively coming to the definition and implementation of strategies to get over it. Knowledge is built on and for the transforming action in a tight collaboration between the people and the technicians supporting them. Such theory is based on a complex conception of Social Habitat, understood as a system of physical, social, symbolical, legal, political, economical and environmental situations, “interrelated, in interaction and co-action”, that cannot be reduced to a simple addition of pieces: “any act of production, elimination or conservation of one piece or component of the habitat changes the balance, the working and the quality of the whole group and affects other components, existing or future” (Pelli 2010, p.41).

Taking into account the complex, transdisciplinary and multiscale nature of the problems under consideration, the following general objective was defined: reflect more deeply on the possibilities that an effective citizen participation could have in the generation of transition processes towards territorial equity and sustainability. In order to do so, different specific goals were established oriented to demonstrate the key role played by citizens to generate an effective socio-ecological transition in our cities and territories: the different participation models currently in use are linked to the model of society, production and consumption promoted at institutional level, and the transformation processes that lead to virtuous circles generally start from the margins before being majority and becoming institutionalised.

In addition, it was considered convenient to do a case study in the metropolitan area of Sevilla to examine current or recent processes that could become examples of different models on Social Production and Management of Habitat. The processes chosen were considered interesting for being contemporary, for their nature and for their perfect characteristics for the aim of this study. The main goal of this part was to understand the dynamics and discourses that endorse the different ways of understanding development and participation; in the same way, research has been carried out on the main keys to success and the mistakes made in each experience, in order to offer alternatives to the

current hierarchical and technocratic way of producing and managing our cities and territories, activating or reinforcing a process of socio-ecological transition based on creativity and social innovation.

2. From the stereotypical consumerism towards sustainable models of life

The hegemonic model of development has proved incapable of handling and answering to the vital problems of humanity: it is necessary to leave the unilateral growth imperative and review from its complexity the principles that regulate our production systems, characterized by a 'consumerist intoxication' that has caused this situation of global chronic lack of resources (Fernández Durán & González Reyes 2014; Hessel & Morin 2012). This same concept of welfare has been reduced to its material sens, leaving the more authentic meaning out, that one related to the quality of life or, as some authors call it, 'good living' or 'life in fullness' (Acosta 2013; Vanhulst & Beling 2013)..

In this context, the totalitarianism of the monetary and financial capitalism finds its motor and legitimation in the perpetual dissatisfaction of citizens, reduced to simple consumers or users: the dynamics of individualism and mistrust and the strategies that systematically stimulate this culture of abundance and vice hide what actually is an act of domination by an economic system that finishes off the limited capacities of our planet.

Even though from an environmental perspective (specially the most radical ecologist views) man is usually seen as an element alien to nature that harms its natural processes, this is not completely true: the territory such as we know it nowadays (not the primitive biophysical matrix) is the result of a long process of dialectical relationship between mankind and environment. The problem exists where human action destroys this equilibrium exceeding the capacity of regeneration of the ecosystems, as well as when man acts thinking that this can be done without the singularities of the territory, breaking in this way the dialectical relationship between society and territory.

It must be recognised that any social and cultural standard, from the private issues of each human being (consumption habits, ways of interaction with other people, etc), to the politic and economic organization of a society, has a direct or indirect repercussion on the environment. It is essential to work with the cultural dimension because the culture makes us act on the territory in one way or another, this is, contributing to building one model based on the worsening of resources or encouraging sustainable life patterns under an ecologically integratory perspective. An ethic system is needed in which the natural world has value not only for being useful to human welfare but also by itself, because we are part of it (Lovelock, 2006).

Movements such as the transition movement (Hopkins 2008; De Manuel Jerez et al. 2012) or citizen initiatives which have proliferated in the last years at both national and international level (such as Social Money, Time Bank programs, permaculture social projects, barter markets, ecological consumption groups, local networks of consumers and producers, etc) show that this cultural change in the citizens is already being activated, sometimes motivated by a real environmental sensitivity and sometimes by necessity. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to do to get the necessary change of direction in the future of our civilization, and above all there isn't a real coordination yet (in which the scientific and technical field could play a key role) to go from the numerous and creative partial solutions to a complex strategy to get the socio-ecological transition in our neighbourhoods, cities and territories.

3. From users/consumers to citizens of the Polis

Citizen participation has been an essential matter in the last decades because is one of the key factors to achieve the goals of sustainability. From the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 this necessity becomes evident, and since then any document that faces the matter of sustainability considers citizen participation as something indispensable, mainly respecting urban development and territory management. On the other hand, even though there are more participative experiences everyday (from both institutional and citizen initiative) that demonstrate that citizen participation is considered nowadays as a democratic demand, among the different urban actors involved there is generally a lack of culture of mature participation that affects the effective scope of participation, either because of a lack of methodological success or because of a low politic coherence in urban planning. Citizen participation has effectively followed the same path that sustainability did: even though both concepts come from critical positions respecting the model of development¹, they have ended up emptied of meaning in a lot of political and professional contexts. It is necessary to modify the top-down decision-making processes, integrating new ways of bottom-up intervention that releases the

¹ Sustainability as a critique of the unlimited growth chimera and citizen participation as the necessity of democratic deepening before the crisis of representative democracy.

citizens from their condition of simple consumers and gives them back their leading role, the role of citizen of the Polis².

However it's not about negating the role of professionals and specialists in the process of learning and analysis of the reality (Red CIMAS 2015), nor about considering a society that works without representatives and only through direct participation (Alberich et al. 2009), but about delving deeper into democracy going from a representative-like model, currently into crisis, to new complex formulas that allow the generation of areas where decisions are made together by the administration, technicians and citizens in an equitable way (Encina & Rosa 2004; De Manuel Jerez 2010) and respecting the ecological principles. In the same way it turns out that it also necessary to review the role expected to be played on this scenario by the architect, going from an architect-author to an architect-actor and moving from the design of objects to the design of processes of urban and social transformation (Cambil Medina et al. 2006).

In this way, participation is understood as the equitable redistribution of decision-making power on all the processes that tend to Production and Social Transformation of Habitat (Encina & Rosa 2004), so that the different groups and sectors to which the transformation processes are addressed don't get trapped in their traditional passive role of receivers/users. Politicians, technicians and citizens are meant to share this will to start a long process of agreement, learning and co-creation.

4. Case studies

4.1. *The reason for the case study and the processes of discovery*

To get a better understanding of the problems under consideration, an analysis of some 'examples in action' (Walker 1983) within the metropolitan area of Sevilla was carried out. It was considered that a research strategy based on case study was the most convenient since it meets the interest in understanding a wide range of problems through the deep knowledge of one or more particular cases. Such a strategy led to the identification of three case studies, three experiences each one representative of a different scale of action that allow for going in depth into the ideas and life experiences, the dynamics and discourses that endorse the different ways of understanding development and participation, and into how they determine the different forms of Social Production and Management of Habitat.

In the first case, the troubled project to dredge the river promoted by the Port Authority of Sevilla, which threatens the already reduced river's vitality (affecting the economic activities relying on it), provides the context for analyzing the platforms of socioeconomic, scientific and political agents in conflict, as well as for stressing on how in the different discourses of the two Platforms exist different ways of understanding the development.

In the second case, the analysis of the land-use plan drafting process in Sanlúcar La Mayor shows the contradictions and limitations faced by the official discourse about sustainability and participation.

The third case, about the socio-ecological transition in Alcosa neighborhood born from a collaboration between technicians and residents, points out the conflict between the culture of resistance and the culture of construction of alternatives present among the different groups of social activists, as well as the limitations of the Administration when trying to drive policies of sustainable urban rehabilitation.

Although the approach to the three cases responds to a general investigative interest, the specific characteristics of each research approach was gradually defined as the fieldwork went deeper and deeper: the hypothesis and procedures to obtain and analyse the data were not decided a priori but were emerging procedures, flexible and contextual, adapting them to data following certain specific guidelines (and not rules). Procedural qualitative research was used in the three cases, understanding the process design as a continuous decision-making through a non-linear process (during the different phases of data collection as well as the pre-analysis and analysis phases), which allowed for the modification and improvement of the research along the way (Erlandson et al. 1993; Valles 1999; Patton 2002). Therefore, each new action was a new phase of collecting and comprehending the different cases studied, usually collecting and analyzing data at the same time. During this task the research planning itself was being adjusted to new discoveries: the different phases of data collection, analysis and contextualisation are not consecutive but almost parallel with interactions and feedback loops. For this reason it would be deceptive to strictly split the planning structure into a first phase of data collection and successive phases of analysis and contextualization, since the limits between these phases got blurred throughout the research.

² The Polis concept makes reference to the categorization made by Capel (2003), which has been used as a reference within the framework of Social Production and Management of Habitat

4.2. The strategy of collecting data from a qualitative approach

On a qualitative approach, the tasks of obtaining and collecting data are not oriented to measure variables and their interferences looking for a cause-effect explanation: if people's words and actions are reduced to mathematical equations and statistics, the human factor of social life is lost (Taylor & Bogdan 1987). On the contrary, a phenomenological perspective is fundamental since human behaviour (what is said, how it is said, the ways of acting on a given context, how people's relationship is, etc) is the product of a certain way of viewing and defining the world³.

The aim of a qualitative research is to observe and listen carefully to the people in their daily life to deeply understand communities, people, contexts, relations, situations, etc: "qualitative researches perceive reality in terms of episodes or testimonies, represent events with their own direct interpretation and with their stories" and use "accounts to give the reader the best opportunity to understand the case based on experience" (Stake 1999, p. 44).

Once again, it is important to highlight the fact that a research with these objectives needs to be based on an inductive and flexible methodology, that is not filtered by models, hypothesis and theories defined a priori. In this sense it is important that the researcher thinks about people, groups and scenarios from a holistic perspective, having into account the existing relationships and the context in which actions take place, as well as the influence that experiences and contexts from the past may have: every social phenomenon happens in a context that has to be interpreted, which is why fieldwork takes precedence over laboratory work, and natural research over 'in vitro' study (Lucio-Villegas Ramos 1991).

It must not be forgotten that the researcher is actually the first tool to collect this kind of data by applying different methods and techniques, and that these data are (or may be) of different nature: written language, verbal language, body language, tone of voice or behaviour within a context or with other people. It is important for the researcher to be aware of the fact that being present causes inevitable alterations in the environment that have influence on the people and collectives that are being studied; thus, all the time during this investigation the researcher attempted to control and reduce these interferences (or at least to have them into account during the phase of data interpretation), starting by establishing a natural relationship (not intrusive) with the informants. For the purposes of this research and on the different case studies the role of 'friend'⁴ researcher was played, this is, a role where the researcher doesn't assume any specific authority and whose only aim is to establish a positive and close relationship to gain the informant's trust and to let things flow naturally.

Qualitative research is interpretative research (Creswell 1994). In this sense, the research credibility is on the researcher rather than on data, or in other words, it is on the data organization that depends on the researcher's interests, which is why it is fundamental to make these interests explicit since they have influence on the research process itself and may generate bias. (Hamilton 1989; Lucio-Villegas Ramos 1991).

The American sociologist LaPiere (1934, cited in Deutscher 1973, p. 21) said that "the study of human behaviour requires a lot of time, is intellectually exhausting and its success depends on the researcher's capacity [...]. Quantitative measurements are quantitative precise; qualitative evaluations are always subjected to the errors of human judgement. However, it would seem it is worthier an insightful conjecture about the essential than a precise measuring about what probably lacks importance".

Thus, qualitative research is subjective but "it is not considered that subjectivity is an error to get rid of, but an essential element of comprehension" (Stake 1999, p. 48). The quantitative research supporters usually criticize and discredit qualitative methodologies for being based on this subjectivity, and often consider them valid only if they are a first step prior to creating a questionnaire or other tools oriented to the obtention of quantifiable data. But "blaming the researcher's subjectivity [...]" is, among other things, denying that this subjectivity exists as well in the quantitative methods, in both the researchers (when they choose the research topic, prepare a survey and make the final report) and the individuals

³ Although there might be some discrepancy between what is said and what is done, as Irwin Deutscher (1973) says in his book "What we say/What we do. Sentiments and acts", such a discrepancy is due to the fact that discourses are liable to deceits and exaggerations (voluntarily or involuntarily), which makes difficult to reflect people's real way of acting. For this reason, when researching about social processes it is of fundamental importance to combine techniques such as the observation and the interview, because they allow for going beyond words to get to discourses and behaviours.

⁴ According to the classification made by Mertens (2010) about the main roles played by a qualitative researcher: the 'supervisor', when assuming an authoritarian role of supervision (the problem of this kind of role is the high possibilities of rejection by the community); the 'leader', adding the role of coordinator to that of supervisor (increasing the possibilities of observation); the 'friend', without any specific authority but establishing a positive relationship.

being investigated (when they decide whether to participate or not and when they answer the questions)” (Pérez Andrés 2002, p. 378).

For the results obtained through a qualitative methodology to meet the standards of validity and reliability it is necessary to be rigorous: observations and interpretations must be validated by data triangulation; all the facts perceived must be placed on record, registering them systematically and in an orderly way; also, during the research process the own interpretations must be constantly questioned, and the reader must be helped to recognize the researcher’s subjectivity on the report, avoiding in this way possible bias.

On the other hand, during the fieldwork it was important to put aside the own beliefs and points of view in order to feel close to the situation and empathize with the informants, even getting to identify with them to understand the opinions from their own perspective, without making value judgements or looking for an absolute truth. All the different perspectives were considered valuable since understanding them in detail helps to understand the complex dynamics that take place on an area between people, collectives and groups.

Regarding the methods to collect empirical data, it was considered convenient an approach based on the application of a personal set of different techniques where in-depth interview, understood as a central tool for the most part of data collection, is combined with other techniques⁵. However, the methodological iter was different on each case because “no method is equally appropriate for all purposes. Choosing a research method must be determined by the investigation interests, by the scene circumstances or by the people to be studied, and by the practical limitations faced by the researcher” (Taylor & Bogdan 1987, p.104).

In particular, the in-depth interview is not only a way to obtain information and know the informant’s opinion about specific matters or problems, but it is itself an object of study, because the language does not simply reflect ideas and opinions but also participates in building the reality (Montañés 2001). The discourse is a way of action, and different words do not reflect different ways of naming the same object or reality but build and legitimize different realities. Therefore, in qualitative research, to comprehend social processes the researcher cannot get by without understanding the discourses moving around: investigating about the meaning behind the words allows to know which are the different ways of conceiving the reality (Santander 2011).

As Tomás Ibáñez (2003) explains, the relation ideas/world must be replaced by the relation language/world because it is the logical structure of the discourses who builds realities, and the “reference dimension of language informs us about the opinions expressed on a certain crystallized reality” (Montañés 2002, p. 3). On the other hand, it can’t be forgotten that the discourses are made by social subjects that live at a specific space and time where symbolical-cultural construction processes articulate the collective representations, so it is essential to consider the meanings in relation to the context in which they had been collected.

4.3. The discovery processes

At the same time as qualitative observation, interviews and the application of other tools and techniques to collect data, emerging matters were tracked and new hypothesis were generated, confirming or rejecting the previous ones and increasing step by step the level of detailing on each case study. Informal conversations and interviews were more and more focused and the resulting annotations were progressively more complete. The analysis, although done under a general plan, got moulded by the revealed or discovered data: “it is a path with a direction but not a ‘straight-ahead’ one” (Hernández Sampieri et al 2006, p. 624). Even though it is an analysis process of non-linear type it is still possible to identify three stages: one phase of discovery in progress, another phase that generally begins when the data has already been collected and the understanding starts to become more refined, and a last phase where the researcher tries to put the discoveries in relation with the context in which they have been made.

One essential characteristic in qualitative research is the fact that the researcher collects non-structured data, that may even be of varied types⁶, to which must give a structure (Patton 2002) by organizing unities, categories, themes and patterns (Grinnell & Unrau 2005) and making sense of them within the framework of the problem. Since the qualitative analysis is of contextual type, the

⁵ Among them qualitative observation is the one with the highest value of complementarity because, as well as being a main ingredient for qualitative induction, it allows to look into the existing relations between the informer’s actions, as they happen in their natural context, and what the informer itself expresses verbally, which represents the action’s content. When considered necessary some other techniques were used, related to Narrative Biographical Study (Pujadas 2000; Creswell 2005) and to Study of Social Networks (Red CIMAS 2015; Martín Gutierrez 2001; Iconoclasistas 2013)

⁶ Verbal and non-verbal expressions, visual records of different nature, documentation, either private or public, individual or related to one group, etc, including narrations from the field journal.

researcher understands deeply the context around the data, considering each piece of it in relation with the others, describing the experiences of the studied subjects from their perspectives and with their own expressions (Creswell 1994) and rebuilding stories (Baptiste 2001); the researcher interprets and evaluates unities, categories, themes and patterns to either connect results to theoretical framework of reference or build new theories. In every process it is necessary for the researcher to reflect and constantly evaluate the approach in the light of new discoveries to adjust it according to own considerations (self-assessment during the investigation)

Regarding the way of action, qualitative analysis implies a "set of handlings, transformations, reflections and verifications based on the data to pull out relevant meanings on a investigation problem" (Rodríguez Gómez et al. 1995, p. 24). It is necessary to look for emergent issues and patterns examining the data in all the possible ways and reading it again and again, following the clues from feelings and ideas that may come up (Taylor & Bogdan 1987). On a second moment different typologies may be created to identify issues and elaborate theories, and that may come, for example, from the way in which people classify realities, objects and other people of their life as well as from classification schemes made by the researcher⁷.

Different tools were used to carry out the phase of analysis of the case studies, although not all of them were indiscriminately applied on each case: even though the issues studied were similar, it was considered convenient to resort to different techniques depending on the specific features of the approach chosen for each case.

In all the cases, the coding and analysis of the interviews played a extremely relevant role: the conversations were converted into text (by verbatim transcription)⁸ and subsequently the information from this text was coded to 'remove' everything considered as not relevant for the investigation: it is a deconstruction process with which the researcher "gets an element of information, breaks it down and isolates it, classifies it with others of the same type, depersonalizes it, decontextualizes it" (Deslauriers 2004, p. 70). Within the analysis process there are essentially two phases (Hernández Sampieri et al. 2006): an initial phase, more descriptive and classifying, where the researcher starts to examine the data finding potential meanings through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss 1967), with which data gets coded and analyzed to develop concepts (unities get coded into categories), and a second one, more interpretative, in which unities are recovered by categories and the researcher identifies relations between categories to find dimensions or metacategories (this is, the essential matters) that will help to interpret the results and understand the studied reality. The two phases together constitute an analytic task that breaks up the text as a material expression of the discourse, and then rebuilds it again, in a different order, reinterpreting it and generating a sense of comprehension of the studied problem.

Also, together with all the foregoing, different techniques and analysis tools were applied, tools of mainly graphic nature, coming from different methodologies, such as actors triangulation in Social Production and Management of Habitat (De Manuel Jerez 2010; de Manuel Jerez & López Medina 2006; López Medina 2012), Networks Cartography and Groups of Action (Zimmermann 2004; Villasante & Martín Gutierrez 2006; Red CIMAS 2015; Alberich & et al. 2009).

4.4. Short presentation of the case studies

4.4.1. First Case: collaborative networks and territorial sustainability. The case of Guadalquivir Estuary

The first 'example in action' is the River Guadalquivir Estuary, an important geographical area with a high natural and biological value internationally recognized, which has suffered over the centuries a list of deep transformations that have converted it into a complex territory; an area that cannot be understood without taking into account at the same time the economic aspects as well as the social, cultural and environmental ones. Also, in the last years this area has been the scene of strong controversies between the different socio-economic actors and socio-institutional organizations of

⁷ In social science the first described typology is related to first-order concepts and with the emic perspective, while the second is related to second-order concepts and the ethic perspective. In the emic perspective the social behaviours have to be examined according to the categories of meaning of the studied subjects: on the contrary, in the ethic approach researches must use their own concepts to understand the social behaviour. These concepts are constructs from the constructs made by actors of the social scene, which is why they are called second-order concepts.

⁸ The transcripts were done following the recommendations made by a lot of authors of specific literature in social research.

different scales, mainly related to the project to dredge the river proposed in the 'Plan Director 2020' by the Port Authority of Sevilla.

A careful critical reading of the conflict makes evident the fact that the positions and dynamics of action within this and other conflicts is just the result of the interactions between different actors that have different knowledge, apply different mental and cultural models and are influenced by diversified, and not always explicit, interests and hopes. In this sense, it was demonstrated that behind the two opposing platforms that were created around the project there are different ways of understanding development, and this implies different ways of reading the territory in which they act. The dynamics in this conflict represent a paradigmatic example of the effects caused by a model of territory management that only focuses on growth and economic development; this kind of management uses to favour only certain actors' interests, which generally have a dominant position, and does not care about the possible environmental impacts and the social and economic consequences at different scales, something that in this case goes far beyond the mere metropolitan perspective.

For that reason, this case study became a good opportunity to reflect about the importance of social sustainability as a key factor towards environmental and economic sustainability in order to get over the territorial imbalances: the transition towards a model of sustainable territorial and local development needs that the different socio-economic actors appropriate the territory metabolism.

Thus, the specific objective was to verify if among the different socio-economic actors there are grounds for participation from which it could be possible the activation or stimulation of collaboration or cooperation processes⁹ for the transition towards sustainability.

A deep study of the dynamics of conflict as well as the dynamics of management in the network (understood as a collaborative social network) reveals that it is still far from being in a mature phase, which is characterized by a joint management by the different actors involved, and at this moment it cannot be considered a cooperation network. On the other side, some groups of actors have manifested certain interest on activating specific areas for negotiation between everybody and for setting a common project up. To keep going in that direction it would be necessary to verify if the other groups of actors (economic and administrative fields) have a real willingness and availability to compromise, activating a process of collective and transdisciplinary learning with which to build gradually a common and shared view about the own territory's future, and to formulate an alternative and creative project oriented towards the integrated territorial development.

4.4.2. Second case: Sanlúcar la Mayor. Contradictions and limitations of a process started by the administration.

To proceed with the analysis of the intermediate scale it was chosen the municipal area of Sanlúcar la Mayor, where an experience of participative urban planning took place on 2006. Such an experience is a unique and emblematic case study due to its original character of participated urban planning, and it has an even bigger relevance considering that this decision was taken right in a moment when the rest of local governments of El Aljarafe tended to choose a model of huge urban growth, getting General Urban Development Plans (PGOU in its Spanish acronym) that expected very high population growth. On the contrary, Sanlúcar la Mayor chose to get a General Plan that allowed it to face the imminent flood of urbanization without being absorbed by the metropolitan area of Sevilla, avoiding to be converted into a new dormitory town losing in this way its own identity.

A critical reading of the dynamics of this participation process brings to light the main problems to face when participation is activated by the administration. In particular, it was demonstrated how the different points of view from where participation is observed have influence on the way the different groups of actors that activate the process act, and how misunderstandings or blocks can happen if those differences were not put on the table during a previous phase of negotiation about the question 'Where do we want to go?'

It is convenient to make clear that in the first phases of research, during informal conversations with some key informants, two opposite opinions about the success of the process were detected: on one hand, the technicians that worked redacting the PGOU were really satisfied with the results of the participative process (as it could be confirmed during the in-depth interviews), and on the other hand, there was a bitter sensation in those that had worked on the dinamization process, since for them the project was a half-done participative process. So, once it was confirmed this case study was chosen, the research was planned from the current research question: Why there is such a big difference in the perception of the result of the participative process between the technical team responsible for redacting the Plan and the technical team responsible for dinamizing the process?

⁹ According to Zimmermann (2004), they are two different conceptual categories: 'to collaborate' means to provide sporadic help and is based on the concept of reciprocity, while 'to cooperate' consists in sharing activities and resources regarding a common interest.

This case study highlights the limitations faced when a participative process is started by the Administration; it is necessary to be aware of the fact that the lack of a previous explicit demand coming from the residents or a specific collective makes it indispensable to do a big initial effort in order to get the citizens involved on something that, initially, they see as something distant and strange to their lives. For this reason this kind of processes need much more time than a process activated from below (going too fast can make the participants to get fed up with the experience if their attempt to activate a change gets thwarted). However, this need of an unhurried rhythm clashed with the Plan's generally hectic pace, which in this concrete case was even more frenetic due to the necessity of seeing it approved before the new elections.

This case demonstrates that a participatory urban and territorial planning, even in a context in which the politicians have a real will to activate the change, in which a good many citizens are excited with it, with a model of city committed to strong sustainability principles on the table, and with a dinamization team able to carry out an effective participatory process, will fail if it keeps to methods and elaboration and approval times of a Plan that are not the most appropriate.

4.4.3. Third case: Parque Alcosa. Culture of resistance and culture of construction of alternatives and their effects on a process activated by the technical-neighborhood axis

The third case study gets into the neighborhood scale. The research initially focused on the analysis of the R&D&I Project of Participatory Action Research "Barrios en Transición. Parque Alcosa"¹⁰, funded by the Agency of Public Works of Andalucía and born from a collaboration between the University and a neighborhood collective to obtain certain resources and meet the neighborhood demands for consultancy regarding an important problem for a lot of residents: the comprehensive refurbishment of the blocks.

In particular, the aim of the project "Barrios en Transición" was to generate methodological resources for the new urban policies, oriented on one hand to mitigate the effects of the climate change, and on the other to set out the basis for a sustainable, participative and integrated urban planning. In contrast to the attitude of 'permanent delegation' and to the 'paternalistic' policies, typical of our societies and a symptom of a representative democracy that is foundering, this project went for the convergence between new policies of urban regeneration and the activation of new citizen practices, oriented towards self-organization and cooperation with technical support.

During all the project there were ups and downs on participation, which in any case was low taking into account the total population and, above all, considering that it is a neighbourhood with a long trajectory of citizen struggles and still a strong component of 'associationism'. Also, in the middle of the project there was a block between the technical team and original motor group: it didn't become an open and direct conflict, but there were moments of tension in which the mistrust could be perceived and that eventually broke up their relationship.

Thus, the general objective of this case study was to understand the project's outcomes, highlighting the main keys of success and getting deeper on the reasons of the mistakes and blocks to deduce some considerations that might help to advance towards new models of urban regeneration oriented to a socio-ecological transition, where creativity and social innovation play a key role.

In this research there were two main discovery phases that allowed to obtain step by step a better approach to the social reality of the neighbourhood, which was useful in order to understand some dynamics that took place during the project "Barrios en Transición". Based on the results it was possible to detect that the time factor, along with the limited resources offered by fundings like the one this project had, impeded a Participatory Action Research project of this magnitude to be developed as it should be. It would be necessary a long-term process that allowed, on one hand, to go as deep as necessary to begin with an initial negotiation about the objectives and to decide where to go, and on the other, to have the breaks needed by such an ambitious project as the one undertaken by the team of "Barrios en Transición". Together with all the foregoing, a real implication by the Administration is needed for the efforts of participation not to be in vain.

5. Conclusions

In the light of what has been developed during this research, lays bare the fact that it is necessary a change of paradigm in our development model in order to move forward towards environmental sustainability and social equity. An effective socio-ecologic transition in our territories and cities cannot be obtained without the citizenship, who sets the pace of daily life affecting in one way or another the urban and territorial metabolism.

¹⁰ In which the autor of this article was involved as collaborator, giving the opportunity to use the qualitative observation as main tool to get into the study of this specific case.

If a first step to advance towards a 'coevolution' between human systems and ecological systems is the convergence between theory and practice when integrating environmental sustainability principles, in both policies and legal resources of urban planning and territorial management, the second one would be to make sure that ecological principles do not become a new dogma that replaces a community's capacity of collective decision-making (Verdaguer Viana-Cárdenas 2002), but that they are absorbed by the degree of maturity of a community understood as the set of all the involved groups of actors.

Thus, the big challenge in long term is to convert the participation into an habit more than a puntual event or a legal obligation, into a platform for constant experimentation in which to adapt languages, tools and methods from the different disciplines to generate complex and collective intervention strategies about the habitat and oriented towards sustainability.

At the same time, participation implies a deep work that requires big efforts by all the groups of actors involved, and allows to generate a pedagogical process based on a dialogue in which citizens, politicians and technicians can mature collectively.

Despite the pedagogical wealth entailed by a participatory process like this, the case studies outcomes show that the road ahead is not an easy one, mainly due to three matters: the activation strategy in a participatory process changes depending on where the initiative comes from; time factor is an essential element to reach the objectives of participation; the initial negotiation and agreement phases are fundamental to put on the table explicit and implicit objectives and to answer together the question 'Where do we want to go?'

Together with all the above it is necessary a real implication by the administration so that the efforts of participation are not in vain, as well as more inclusive policies to encourage the participation practices and to activate a change of attitude on the individual, going from user/consumer to active and co-responsible Citizen. Finally, it is also necessary to drive a revision of the regulatory framework that facilitates and increases the flexibility of the processes to prepare and approve the main instruments of territorial and urban planning, improving as well the transversal coordination at different levels.

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