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## #MakeYourYouthRing: Participatory Qualitative Research with Young People at Risk of Exclusion

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## #MakeYourYouthRing: Participatory Qualitative Research with Young People at Risk of Exclusion

### Abstract

This research forms part of a larger Research, Development and Innovation (R&D&I) project and its objective is the carrying out a number of participatory research projects aimed at fostering the social presence of socially vulnerable groups (without a voice). In this paper, we will analyse the project carried out by a group of six young people who are complying with judicial measures in an open environment, three researchers, and three social educators. These agents make up the team of co-researchers. This is a research based on the qualitative tradition and with a participatory orientation. The objective of the inquiry process undertaken by the group is to give visibility to the world of young people and to be recognised in the public sphere. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the most important achievements of the research process that make it participatory and to critically examine a number of difficulties or obstacles to participation that have arisen during the process and the learning processes that have taken place in order to overcome them.

### Keywords

qualitative approach, participatory research, democracy, young offenders, innovative social methodologies

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## #MakeYourYouthRing: Participatory Qualitative Research with Young People at Risk of Exclusion

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This research forms part of a larger Research, Development and Innovation (R&D&I) project and its objective is the carrying out a number of participatory research projects aimed at fostering the social presence of socially vulnerable groups (without a voice). In this paper, we will analyse the project carried out by a group of six young people who are complying with judicial measures in an open environment, three researchers, and three social educators. These agents make up the team of co-researchers. This is a research based on the qualitative tradition and with a participatory orientation. The objective of the inquiry process undertaken by the group is to give visibility to the world of young people and to be recognised in the public sphere. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the most important achievements of the research process that make it participatory and to critically examine a number of difficulties or obstacles to participation that have arisen during the process and the learning processes that have taken place in order to overcome them.

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### Introduction

This research forms part of two R&D&I<sup>1</sup> projects financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation that aims to study various participatory projects with the objective of promoting the social presence of socially vulnerable groups. In this paper, we present the #MakeYourYouthRing project<sup>3</sup>, which uses a participatory methodology that is carried out by a mixed research team (a team of co-researchers) made up of six young people complying with some form of judicial measure in an open environment, three social educators from the José Luis Díaz Foundation, and three researchers from the University of Cantabria.

Participation is at the core of our research and represents people's right to influence real issues and make decisions about the common good. Research permeated by inclusive principles inevitably becomes participatory to the extent that it is researched together with the subjects, who are recognised as an "active source of social knowledge" (Parrilla et al., 2016). Undertaking a participatory-inclusive project (Aldridge, 2015; Crook & Cox, 2021; Francés et al., 2015) implies starting the research without an a priori definition of the matter to be investigated. It is only after the team of co-researchers is formed that agreement is established on various meanings and concerns, and this is through a process of democratic deliberation (Leiviskä, 2020; Nishiyama, 2021; Saiz-Linares, Rodríguez-Hoyos & Susinos, 2019; Samuelsson, 2016) in which a social problem is jointly defined to draw attention to, report on,

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<sup>1</sup> R&D&I project: "Innovation Networks for Educational and Social Inclusion. Inclusive Participation Co-laboratory" (Director: Teresa Susinos. Ref. EDU2015-68617-C4-4-R. BES-2016-077770).

<sup>2</sup> R&D&I project: What are we missing in inclusive education: a participatory research in Cantabria and the Basque Country? (PID2019-108775RB-C42/ AEI / 10.13039/501100011033).

<sup>3</sup> The project can be found at: <https://inclusionlab.unican.es/hazsonartujuventud/>

or transform it. In our research, the objective was to give visibility to the world of young people (their worries and concerns, the things they like, and their interests), from their own experiences and with their own voices, and to enable them to be heard and recognised in the public sphere. This aim to achieve social projection, tied to the interest in making creative use of different languages connected with this youthful world, defined the outline of the project: to create a social dissemination campaign in a collaborative way that offered alternative imaginaries about youth to those who normally govern the adult world.

Adopting a participatory-inclusive research model means redefining the relationship between the subject and the object and between knowing and doing and choosing more just and democratic ways of building knowledge (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010; Parrilla et al., 2016). The starting point is the elimination of the privileged position of researchers in the investigation in order to propose instead that all participants form part of the process of creation and distribution of knowledge according to a relational paradigm based on horizontality and dialogue (Crook & Cox, 2021; Nind, 2017; Silva et al., 2022).

This type of research does not reject the idea of specialist researchers but proposes to rethink their roles and to consider them also as apprentices (Montenegro, 2004; Silva et al., 2022) in a process in which all those involved are trained and share their tools and knowledge. In other words, it is based on the axiom that everyone can develop the ability to *investigate* daily reality and use resources to approach the knowledge about that reality in a scientific way (Bettencourt, 2020). The fundamental contribution of the researcher lies in contributing to interlinking scientific knowledge with popular knowledge, so that the theory or knowledge that is generated is the result of popular knowledge validated and guided by scientific methods (Martin et al., 2019).

This inquiry process is not intended to have a solely cognitive objective, since participatory research is inseparable from social action and transformation (material or symbolic). To pursue this transformative goal in our research, we collaboratively developed a social dissemination campaign, #MakeYourYouthRing, which sought to examine the different views about young people that coexist in our society and offer other representations that challenge the dominant, stereotypical images of youth in the adult world.

Also important in this participatory paradigm is consideration of how the research is transmitted to the social fabric and the extent of its real capacity to satisfy the social needs that our projects address. Naidorf (2014) uses the term *social relevance* to define this requirement, for which it is essential to assume that the results of an investigation cannot be automatically transferred to its social context (Levin, 2011), but that such knowledge needs to take forms that connect with the experiences and semantic domains of the recipients (Naidorf, 2014). In order to achieve this, it is necessary to find accessible, understandable, and aesthetic formulas for communication and visibility, which implies using different semiotic systems. Some authors begin to talk about *knowledge mobilization* (Buchanan, 2013; Levin, 2011; Moss, 2013), instead of transfer, to highlight the multidimensional and interactive aspect of the process of construction and use of knowledge (Naidorf & Perrota, 2015; Pérez-Lindo, 2017; Pérez-Mora & Iguanzo, 2018). This notion is closely linked to the commitment to science with and for society associated with the participatory paradigm, and the search for formulas to build knowledge based on citizen participation, while at the same time safeguarding scientific integrity (Ariño et al., 2018).

It is essential to go beyond the current models that subordinate the work of research to the logic of the market and do not involve the affected people in the solution to their problems (Naidorf, 2014; Pérez-Mora & Iguanzo, 2018; Vilaseca et al., 2001) and understand that science should be at the service of the community to be used as a tool for emancipation from the different forms of social oppression (Borda, 1993; Rodríguez-Villasante, 1998).

The co-research team is made up of three social educators from the José Luis Díaz Foundation<sup>4</sup>, three researchers from the University of Cantabria, and six young people involved in some form of judicial measure in an open environment (three young men and three young women, all between sixteen and twenty years old). These are minor offenders who have committed crimes in the province of Cantabria. The minors who participate in the socio-educational project “Judicial Measures in an Open Environment” live in their habitual residences and are supervised by the project’s professional staff, who are responsible for carrying out the checking up, monitoring, and necessary interventions to assist with the social reintegration and education of these young offenders. This provides young people with a structured environment during a significant part of their day, in which socio-educational activities are carried out. A characteristic feature of these measures is that they take place in the physical premises of the foundation, although the young people may also spend time at other locations to make use of different leisure or cultural resources at the times specified by the workers, depending on the infraction committed. A proposal to become involved in the participatory research project is made to a group of young people from the foundation as part of the socio-educational activities carried out there, and all of them voluntarily decide to participate.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the most important milestones of the research process in the sense that they make it participatory and to identify and critically examine a number of difficulties or obstacles to participation that have arisen during the process. Consequently, the main research questions are:

- What key moments occur in a participatory research process and which activities, dynamics, and resources are employed?
- What barriers and difficulties do we find in the actions and research processes of a participatory research project with young people?
- How do we address and respond to the challenges we encounter?

### Methodology

The project carried out falls within the qualitative tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012; Flick, 2018) and takes the form of a case study (Simons, 2011) on the experience of co-construction and dissemination of a campaign about the constellation of young people’s meanings and experiences that seeks to transform the social imagery for this group.

This methodological positioning is a result of our aim to recognise the meanings constructed by our participants and understand the reflections on the experience of carrying out the campaign (Rapley, 2014). This objective can only be achieved through a qualitative methodology, where researchers generate closer relationships with their participants, recognising them as an active part of the research process. In addition, the participatory approach, within qualitative research, validates and places importance on the experiences of the participants, who become experts on their own experiences and cultural meanings, and therefore, co-researchers and collaborators in the processes of designing and carrying out the research (Nind, 2017; Pope, 2020) (something that has been a primary objective in this project).

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<sup>4</sup> The José Luis Díaz Foundation is a non-profit organisation that was originally set up in April 1989 in Santander (Cantabria, Spain). From the beginning, they have carried out work to provide “support for young people and adolescents at risk of social exclusion” aimed at young drug addicts. Over the years, and due to the changes in the needs of the neighbourhood, in 1994 the “Trenti” Youth Centre was created, an educational project whose main purpose is to use education to prevent situations of social exclusion in the young people participating in the project. Since then, they have continued to work in this field, together with the other foundation project, “Judicial Measures in an Open Environment”.

Participatory research stands out for its naturalistic and practical perspective. While continuing to prioritise a systematic approach, rigour, and reflection on the social phenomenon under study, research occurs within its natural context, with the express purpose of the modifying of reality from within by the people themselves, who are no longer considered only as an object of study, but as an active subject (Navarrete, 2004).

In this paper, we explore the ways in which the co-research team for this case study carries out a participatory project, emphasising a number of the milestones that qualify it as such, and also examining a series of obstacles to participation and the lessons learned in overcoming them.

All members of the co-research team have worked using a participatory approach (Bergold & Thomas, 2012; Bourke, 2009; Francés et al., 2015; Nind, 2014; Rodríguez-Villasante, 1998; Ruiz-López Saiz-Linares & Susinos, 2021) characterised by the symmetry of the relationships and recognition of the diverse pools of knowledge that converge in the common objective. The project has been governed at all times, from the choice of the topic to the mobilisation of knowledge, by a democratic logic (Leiviskä, 2020; Samuelsson, 2016) that has underpinned all the decisions.

In its focus on action and social change (Kincheloe et al., 2011; Kirchner, 2007), this research process combines cycles of analysis and hetero-reflection that trigger the advancement in knowledge and our own training (Francés et al., 2015). Our project took place over 18 months and has been divided into four phases, coinciding with those defined by Francés et al. (2015), which we call the inclusive participation cycle:

- Creation of the team of co-researchers and joint analysis of needs, interests, and objectives
- Democratic deliberation process, galvanised by the question “What do we want to investigate, change, communicate or report?”, which encourages dialogue and deliberative decision-making
- Improvement project: after the deliberation process, the co-research team undertakes its own project that aims to give voice to and increase the agency of the group in question
- Evaluation, dissemination and social impact: the team conducts an evaluation of the process and develops products to disseminate the experience

The ethical implications have been taken into account throughout the project (Kwan & Walsh, 2018). We ensured that the participants voluntarily joined the research after they fully understood the intentions and implications of the study (informed consent). Also, because of its particular characteristics and the fact that, for the protagonists, the preservation of their right to confidentiality and to the protection of their privacy was an especially important requirement, the confidentiality of the information and the right to privacy or anonymity were guaranteed. In addition, the project has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Cantabria. This committee complies with the Spanish Science Law and aims to create a Code of Good Research Practices equivalent to the systems of other European universities.

We used a number of traditional qualitative data production techniques, including participant observation throughout the process, semi-structured interviews with the young people, and focus groups with the educators (Kvale, 2011). Creative and participatory analysis methodologies and techniques were incorporated using different forms of language: elicitation with photographs and videos (Banks, 2010), collaborative interviews carried out by the young people, dialogical research meetings, etc., which we summarise in Table 1:

**Table 1**

*Data production tools*

Tools	Purpose or meaning	No.
<u>Initial</u> semi-structured interviews with the young participants.	Mobilise individual reflection on the issue identified for investigation, connecting the group concern with participants' own biography. Support the analysis of the decisions made in the group sessions.	6
<u>Initial</u> semi-structured interviews with diverse people, collaboratively designed and carried out by the young participants.	Explore the different views on young people that coexist in our society. Generate resources and content to form part of the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign.	26
<u>Focus group, at the halfway point in the project</u> , with the social educators.	Evaluate the carrying out of the project so far and analyse various difficulties and obstacles. Collaboratively formulate proposals to overcome the difficulties identified and to improve participation.	1
<u>Final</u> semi-structured interviews with the young participants.	Analyse the research project in its different phases and moments in time. Evaluate the use of the participatory methodology.	6
Fortnightly/monthly work meetings with all members of the co-research team.	Make collective decisions about the scheme, content and resources used in the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign. Discuss the partial products developed in small group production meetings.	Approx. 12
Small group production meetings (1 or 2 researchers, 2 young participants and, occasionally, 1 social educator).	Work on the production of resources for the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign.	Approx. 10

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Purpose or meaning</b>	<b>No.</b>
	Collect suggestions for discussion in large group work meetings.	
Campaign presentation feedback.	Collect reflections and opinions elicited after visiting the different spaces of the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign. Assess the impact of the campaign on the participating public.	10

These strategies produced a large volume of multimodal data that were categorised in a recursive process (Flick, 2018). These categories resulted from a process of organising the information fragments that shared patterns and common elements (inductive process) that were completed in accordance with the theoretical framework (deductive process). To manage the information, we have used the MAXQDA computer program. Below, we define the resulting categories and codes:

**Table 2**  
*Analysis categories*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Motivation to participate		Statements about the reasons for getting involved in the project.
Participatory methodology	Phases or points in the participation cycle	Information and statements about the phases of the participatory research process.
	Deliberative strategies employed	Assertions about the strategies, resources and decisions used in the phases of the project.
Relationships formed		Declarations about the interactions, relationships and dialogues between the participants.
Barriers to participation		Statements regarding difficulties encountered in the participatory research process.

Categories	Codes	Definition
Support for participation		Affirmations about support provided in the participatory research process.
Assessment of their participation		Declarations by the participants about the assessment of the project and the benefits of their participation.

The presentation of the results is divided into two main areas: to the process of construction of the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign, taking into account the points or phases in the projects and the strategies employed, and, secondly, the analysis resulting from the participatory research process, focusing on the difficulties encountered and the support provided or the facilitators of the process.

### 1. Construction of the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign: Phases and strategies

In this section, we present the results that allow us to define the relevant phases and points in the carrying out of the campaign, as well as the strategies employed in each of them.

#### 1.1 Collaborative definition of the research topic

The research proposal for the project was decided collaboratively after a process of democratic deliberation in which opportunities for participants to express their concerns, preferences, and needs were prioritised. This was a long process and full of uncertainty, since the researchers had not made any a priori decisions on the theme or on the form that the project was going to take. Researchers allocated several large group meetings to decide what the core issue of the investigation process would be. This also involved proposing dynamics to favour a deliberative process in which all participants had the possibility to speak, preventing one person or group from dominating the dialogue (Della Porta, 2005; Leiviskä, 2020; Nishiyama, 2021; Authors, 2019).

Researchers proposed several brainstorming sessions based on a game with Post-it Notes that ensured a space for the individual expression of all the voices, which would later be discussed in a large group, ensuring that the final choice of the theme was the product of a joint process of deliberation (Samuelsson, 2016).

Yes, the good thing about the theme was that in the end we more or less came up with, well, something like a synthesis between more or less what I was thinking and what the others were thinking (Final interview\_JU).

The intention of showing the complexities of the world of young people through the voices of the participants and breaking down a number of stereotypes emerged as the central idea that would give shape to the investigation:

So, a project to make the voice of young people heard: how we feel about the life we have right now, how we're treated, how we treat other people and that kind of thing ... (Final interview\_AD).

This chosen issue appeals and is relevant to all participants. In other words, the deliberation process safeguarded respect for the moral agency of the participants and this gives the decision legitimacy (Samuelsson, 2016; Thompson, 2008).

The thing is that we did it among ourselves and it was something that came from us, and it's not the same to express something that, well, this is what I have to show, but something you identify with, like... how can I explain? That you feel it's true – that it really happens to you yourself (Final interview\_OL).

### 1.2 Shared decision-making on the research strategies to employ

The following meetings of the working group were intended to outline what form the enquiry process about young people's reality would take. In these sessions, researchers proposed different activities (brainstorming, pyramid, diamond, etc.) in order to evoke ideas and suggestions and with a special emphasis on ensuring that everyone could continue making their contributions freely.

[How were decisions made?] Well, through conversations, mostly. I mean, I participated in the brainstorming, and making some suggestions here and there and seeing what common ground we could find and all that. In other words, in the end, we reached a kind of agreement between the participants (Final interview\_JU).

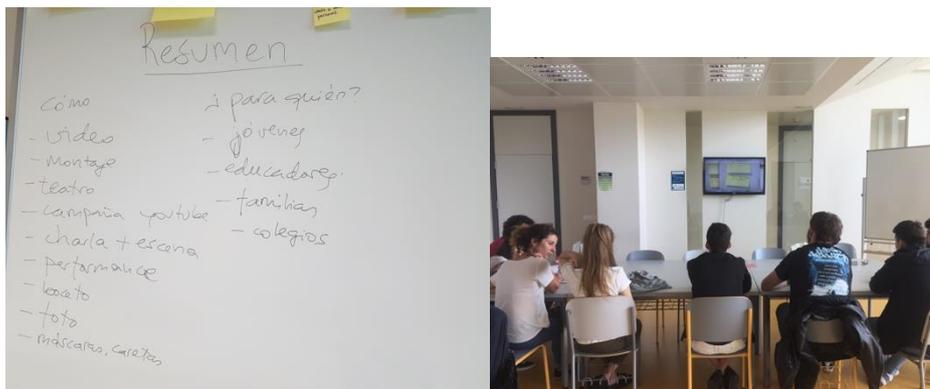


Image 1. Process of defining the project.

In these meetings, researchers also explained our intention of using creative methodologies to provoke greater resonance and connect with diverse audiences. Together, we reviewed the existing models and channels that succeed in attracting attention, mobilising people, and creating dissemination and processes of change. As a result of these dialogical processes where we addressed aspirations, concerns, and desires, the idea arose of carrying out a campaign with both physical and virtual versions, made up of different expressive spaces. Researchers also decided on the slogan that our #MakeYourYouthRing campaign would publicise and designed the logo that would visually identify it (<http://inclusionlab.unican.es/hazsonartjuventud/>).

### 1.3 Carrying out of the participatory research process and setting up of the campaign spaces

Based on this, the researchers designed a work scheme that combined regular meetings in a large group, in which collective decisions were made on the content and structure of the campaign, with other small group *production meetings* (made up of one or two researchers,

one or two young people and, occasionally, a social educator) with the aim of producing resources and building the different spaces of the campaign.

Well, at the beginning we were really deciding what we were going to do. In the end, the issue of young people came up, and little by little everyone had to do something. For example, for the project, some had to do an interview, like the one I did. Others maybe a game, like she did, or, for example, well, this guy and the videos he made going down on the skyboard ... (Final interview\_OL).

Table 2 outlines the resulting campaign spaces. As can be seen, each one uses a different communicative language (audio visual, musical, narrative, or visual) with the intention of combining the different linguistic codes through which young people interact. The different spaces converge in the objective of deconstructing some strongly rooted collective imaginaries about young people and reconstructing alternatives ones based on the youth constellation of our participants:

**Table 2**

*Products or spaces created as a result of the #HazSonarTuJuventud campaign.*

<i>Space</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Space 1: Audiovisual montage with interviews that allow us to explore the different views about young people that coexist in our society.</i>	The young participants conducted interviews with various people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Street interviews: conducted with people in the street chosen at random by the MakeYourYouthRing team.</li> <li>- Interviews with experts: carried out with different professionals in the educational or associated fields who work with young people.</li> <li>- Interviews with a young person: carried out with different young people chosen by the young men and women of MakeYourYouthRing team because of some talent they have or activity they carry out that is considered special.</li> <li>- Interviews with members of the MakeYourYouthRing research team.</li> </ul>
<i>Space 2: Musical playlist.</i>	Containing a repertoire of music, rhythms, artists, and lyrics that represent the six young participants.
<i>Space 3: Instant story game.</i>	The goal is for the audience to create a story using ten cards that will appear at random. This story will always feature a young person, as well as elements of the context of young people.
<i>Space 4: Audio visual introduction.</i>	Audio visual that presents the campaign, made with the voices of the participants and images they created themselves.
<i>Space 5: Panels about our experience.</i>	A panel in which objects, places, concerns, situations, etc. that resonate in the experiences of young people are described.
<i>Space 6: And you, what do you think?</i>	Attendees were invited to give their opinion on the question that closed the campaign: “And you, what do you think?”

2. *Carrying out of the participatory research process: assistance and barriers*

2.1. *The need to recognise diversity within a collective as an aid to research*

To undertake the project and put the deliberative principles into practice, we required time to get to know each other and to establish our own collaborative work dynamics. In these germinal moments of interaction, we approached the collective as if it constituted a unit (the young people), and our own ideas about youth inevitably mediated the choices we made about how to start working with them.

However, as we got to know each other, the diversity that existed within the group began to reveal itself and some of the assumptions that we harboured crumbled. These moments of the process were of critical importance, since they provided an opportunity to mould the relational dynamics and configure the way we functioned and worked together.

In the individual interview carried out at the beginning of the project, the young people were able to express their ideas about the characteristics that defined this group, as well as their main interests, concerns and preoccupations. We also asked them for some tasks (to send us a song, an image, and a text which represented them, with the aim of eliciting their cultural references and giving us access to their experiences (Banks, 2010).

Researcher: I'm going to propose a game. Think of three words that define what it is like to be young today. Three words and so then three sentences.

MA: One could be change.

Researcher: Change. Okay.

MA: Another could be curiosity.

Researcher: Okay.

MA: And there are young people of all kinds, but like some kind of positivity – I don't know how to say it (Initial interview\_MA).

[I wouldn't like adults] to assume that, because of my physical appearance or my actions in the past, that ... for example, for them to tell me: you're lazy, you're a bad person, you're a bad influence. Just because you've done something bad doesn't mean you're a bad person. That's the point I'd like to make to you, that we all have a good side, if you know what I mean (Initial interview\_AND).

The answers alerted us to the fact that, although there was a common thread, there was also a great deal of plurality with regard to the young people's baggage, experiences, and semantic constellations. These impressions were corroborated in the group work sessions, in which each participant had chosen a topic and committed to the campaign: everyone showed different preferences regarding the nature of the messages (more direct or more allegorical; more focused on the virtues of young people or more on their points of conflict, etc.) and the communication channels through which to spread them (visual, oral, narrative, musical, or computer-based, etc.).

Researchers understood the need to respect this way of representing the language and space of each participant (Chion, 2004) and became aware of the need to use different codes to produce meanings and information and spread the message of the campaign. The different spaces of the campaign illustrate this inherent diversity within the group and are an attempt to preserve the identity of each participant.

I think we've all shown our strongest point and I think this exhibition has been good because each of us had a way of seeing things and none of us have completely agreed on things. There was always someone who had a better idea than the others and we've made a really good team (Initial interview\_AN).

These discoveries prompted the researchers to constantly rethink not only the result, but also the research process and the work proposals, looking for alternatives that connected with everyone's interests. Thus, either individually or in pairs, participants led the construction of their preferred campaign spaces, distributing the tasks according to their inclinations. Some participants showed more extroverted tendencies and preferred direct interaction, taking charge of carrying out the *interviews with diverse people*, while others favoured interaction with acquaintances, and led the preparation of the *panels on our experience*. Another group tended to philosophise about abstract issues far removed from their daily lives and showed a predilection for technology and the gamer world, and they were the ideologues of the *instant story game* (although everyone participated in its construction). Finally, one of the participants expressed his preference for the musical world and was in charge of preparing the *musical playlist*, based on the musical tastes of the six young participants.

Researchers observed that not all of the young people got along with the three researchers in the same way and noticed how some proposals worked differently if they were handled individually as opposed to in groups. All of this was taken into account to organise the work in the small group production meetings and modulated with which researcher the contacts were made (we used WhatsApp for this purpose).

## *2.2. The importance of permanently reviewing the listening processes in order to detect barriers and try to overcome them*

This participatory process has not been without its difficulties. There were many impediments that made it difficult for the participants to attend the meetings regularly and to carry out the tasks assigned between one meeting and the next. These obstacles were disconcerting for the researchers, as we understood that this was not the involvement expected in a participatory research project. Consequently, approximately halfway through the process, researchers held a focus group with the educators to assess the situation in which both parties shared the same impressions and feelings. Although some useful conclusions were reached in this meeting, the most revealing discovery occurred at the end of the project, after conducting the final interviews with the young participants:

Researcher: How would you rate the participation of the different members, in general?

OL: Pretty positive, actually.

Researcher: Do you think there has been participation?

OL: Yes, by everyone, I think (Final interview\_OL).

All the young people have rated their commitment and involvement with the project highly, contrasting with the impressions of the researchers and educators. This dissonance between the interpretations of the adults and the young participants compelled us to employ our reflexivity as researchers (De la Cuesta, 2011) to critically examine our axioms and shed light on possible reasons for this discrepancy. Researchers contemplated what was known and understood by participating and what we consider to be the best framework for participation, contrasting this with what the young people think.

Regarding the first question, the study revealed that researchers apply an ideal of involvement that is close to what happens in our work contexts (that is to say, a university training context) where the commitments undertaken must always be fulfilled. In other words, we define involvement based on our parameters, and not on those of the collective.

First, this is a group with a history of great disaffection with their living environments, especially those that are regulated (school and family, etc.), in which they have generally been excluded or stigmatised.

Researcher: You have repeated a year twice.

JU: The second year of sixth form, because I was expelled for a bad decision. I made because of this impulsiveness I've spoken about before and now I'm aware of that. (Initial interview\_JU)

Researcher: And what circumstances in your life have been most important to you?

MA: Yes. When I was four years old I had ... I ended up in a centre for child protection because my parents couldn't take care of me, or any of my family, and at first I was taken in. And after a few years of care, you move onto adoption. And, well, the change from one place to another being so different; and having to call some people I don't know parents has been a big change for me. And, well, puberty and all that too (Initial interview\_MA).

Participants have hardly come across participation frameworks in their lives and, as far as they are concerned, persevering for more than a year in a project without giving up or abandoning it means maintaining a high degree of involvement, even if they missed a number of meetings or did not carry out the tasks.

The age gap has turned out to be a significant factor when we analyse the ways in which we have established times and rhythms.

We couldn't always all meet because of issues that each one of us had in our lives, and then there were times when none of us could meet, so we lost a bit of time there (Final Interview\_AD).

The fifteen to thirty days that separated each meeting represented a reasonable time frame for us, but for the young people it was too long a period, during which they reconnected with other issues in their lives, and so found themselves distanced from the project we were carrying out. In this way, despite affirming that they were interested and involved in the project, it was not the only activity that formed part of their lives at that time and was certainly not the most important.

Because there were days when I didn't feel like it. I would come home late, I had to eat and run to catch the bus, go there, then come back and go to train. And there were days when I said, "I can't take it anymore. I have exams, I can't go." I mean, I mean, there were days when it was like, 'No, I can't, I'm sorry, but no!' (Final interview\_AD).

Similarly, in the year and a half that the project lasted, they feel that they have evolved in other areas of their lives, so that the interests, tastes, concerns, and preoccupations that they exhibited at the beginning of the project have also changed.

For me, it's given me time to evolve psychologically between when we started and when we finished [...] It's more at the personal level, in the sense of that, well, I've had some change in mentality or whatever it was, but not with you (Final interview\_JU).

Regarding the second question, researchers have been led to examine what is understood; a participatory proposal should be framed. Our definition is linked to the following theoretical principles: the framework must be broad and without any a priori decisions made by the researchers; the decisions must be discussed and agreed upon within a framework of democratic deliberation, accepting the uncertainty of the process, etc. These vectors that have operated for other groups (Autoras, 2020), have not worked as we expected with this group. It is precisely the lack of specifics in the proposal in the first part of the project that has created a barrier causing detachment or distancing.

[What seemed the most difficult to me was] Well, at first, if I'm honest, I had no idea to begin with. I was there a little bit like a headless chicken. The truth is I was a bit lost until we started talking and began to understand what we were going to do and things like that. But at first I was lost. (Final interview\_OL).

Researchers observed that when they began to understand what we were doing and, most important, where we were heading, adherence to the project increased considerably:

The end ... the end was a piece of cake. In the end, when we had chosen the idea and we knew what we were going to do, it was like bingo! Job done! (Final interview\_AD).

Researchers found that the young people were more engaged if specific tasks were performed and if those tasks were carried out accompanied by one of the researchers (instead of having to do them on their own between meetings). This discovery led to us redefining our concept of deliberation or making it more flexible binding it to more interactive activities related to action so that it was not only a question of thinking and dialogue, understanding that, with this group, it was more productive to reflect on tangible products. Researchers understood that certain people needed to be accompanied in this process by providing a kind of "scaffolding" that allowed us to find a productive balance between management and openness.

But it's true that combining the formula of an open model and a managed model is more effective than just being either open or managed. Because when the process is very open they get lost and when it's very managed they don't have the feeling that it's theirs (Discussion group\_DA).

Finally, throughout the process we also had to review the space and format of the meetings several times, until it became a more favourable environment for participation and the exchange of information in a sincere and attentive way (Francés et al., 2015, p. 46).

Researchers met in a university seminar room (with tables and chairs, blackboard, etc.), thinking that the university environment would provide them with a stimulus because of the recognition it offered. Two hours were allocated to each session, with specific periods scheduled for each dynamic, from which tasks were also taken home (homework). Without realising it, researchers were proposing a work format that was very close to the academic format, when, precisely for these young people, school had been a framework for segregation which had cultivated feelings of frustration and rejection. Contrary to what researchers intended, there was not enough groundwork laid out to turn it into a friendly recognition context. The educators acted as intermediaries between the young people and the researchers, which made it difficult to create the bond or trust required by participatory research where the relationships are underpinned by the idea of "radical collegiality" (Fielding, 2011).

They need a long time to establish a relationship of trust and proximity ... With us mediating a bit, perhaps they have continued to have that feeling of proximity with us because it was us who they knew, and you have been more associated with the second part of, well, having to send material, the part involving the tasks, which they also have a hard time doing. [...] But, yes, perhaps the part of connecting with them more personally has been lacking (Discussion group\_EL).

As a result of all these discoveries, researchers decided to modify the environment to make it more welcoming and conducive to participation. A place to meet as a large group was secured that drew in the participants: a multipurpose university space for shared use by students that was not at all like the design of a university classroom. It was an open-plan and transformable space in which the furniture (armchairs, round tables, pouffes, etc.) could be moved around to adapt to the needs of the users, and it had large windows overlooking a nearby park. Researchers stopped insisting on tasks that had to be done at home and adapted the production process to the framework of our meetings.

Researcher: Okay, how would you have preferred it to be?

AD: Well, let's say, we're going to do this, I don't know, we're going to make a game, let's see what you think, or we're going to do this, we're going to write a lyric about something, or we're going to write a text about what you're thinking.

Researcher: Something more creative?

AD: Something more creative, not just sitting there listening, and then saying, "Okay, I'll bring you this tomorrow" (Final interview\_AD).

In many of these production meetings only some of the young people and one or two researchers attended, doing without the mediation of the educators, which helped to strengthen the bonds and trust between the young people and the researchers.

### Discussion of Results

The results presented above offer important reflections on the carrying out of research with young people, the difficulties encountered, and the assistance obtained.

A first conclusion of the work refers to the need to ensure conditions that guarantee the participatory quality of the research process, which researchers have tried to illustrate in this paper: the choice of the subject with the participants, joint decision-making on the tools of enquiry (which must be aligned with different semiotic languages), horizontal relationships between researchers and participants, the transformative nature of the research (rather than being merely cognitive), and the process of communication (understood as mobilisation of knowledge) with society. A logic of democratic deliberation (Leiviskä, 2020; Samuelsson, 2016) has also underpinned all of these processes.

Researchers have documented a number of difficulties that arose during the process that, far from discouraging us, prompted us to review our frameworks and processes and to think about *ad hoc* ways to improve participation.

Thus, for example, it was understood that the concept or idea of involvement is not the same as that expressed by the young participants. Researchers have learned about the need to reconfigure this concept based on our participants' parameters, where the contextual factors (times, spaces, participation frameworks, etc.) that articulate their lives play a fundamental role.

This project has also prompted us to re-semanticise the concept of democratic deliberation and adapt it to the specific needs of the group with which we were working, as we have verified that this group manifested a clear preference for a deliberation that occurred in conjunction with action and with tangible products.

Finally, the dialogical positioning that we adopted in the research requires relational environments that favour sincere and attentive communication, “taking into account the initial inequalities of training and knowledge of the different levels of actors” (Francés et al., 2015, p. 46). During the process we also reflected on the space used for the meetings and their format, and we modified these several times until researchers found a place that was welcoming and favoured a relational atmosphere conducive to communication and facilitating relationships.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this research study was to present an example of participatory research carried out with a group of young people who have had to comply with some form of judicial measure in an open environment. With this participatory project, revolving around the collaborative creation of the #MakeYourYouthRing campaign, intended to make visible the concerns, preoccupations, preferences, and contradictions of the world of young people based on their own voices, our aim was to add to the body of knowledge on forms of participatory research involving innovative social methodologies geared towards social transformation.

To conclude, we would like to draw attention to two key aspects: first, the processes of deliberation and, second, the relationships in participatory research processes.

The deliberative process therefore lasted a considerable but necessary length of time, since it facilitated getting to know each other and made it possible to create an *ad hoc* work dynamic adapted to the characteristics of the participants. These unveilings required long sessions of attentive and calm listening, as well as the trying out of different dynamics of interaction and work. The time spent, in addition to a number of setbacks – since many proposals did not work as we expected – allowed us to make the process more flexible and design work rituals (Francés et al., 2015) that were adapted to the characteristics of the group, which enabled the reflection, analysis and social action that characterize participatory research.

The relationships, roles, activities, environments, and expectations about the research process were changing towards becoming a deliberative model with horizontal and dynamic relationships. In the same way, this transformation was reflected in the members of the co-research team (young people, educators, and researchers) in terms of our position in relation to the investigated problem (making our vision of young people more complex), on how we conceptualise and materialise participation and in terms of the building of relationships with the other members.

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