Virtual Local Workshop: promoting a participatory convergence in a Spanish context

✓ **Aims:**

This local workshop was undertaken to generate a discussion process that would allow us to rethink our teaching and research, questioning the social, political and ethical dimension of the university. Taking into account the proposal of the Global Assembly, our contribution was to move the reflections generated in the process of meeting and discussion to a virtual format, replicating in our specific context, the cohesive profile of diverse perspectives that underline the purpose of the assembly.
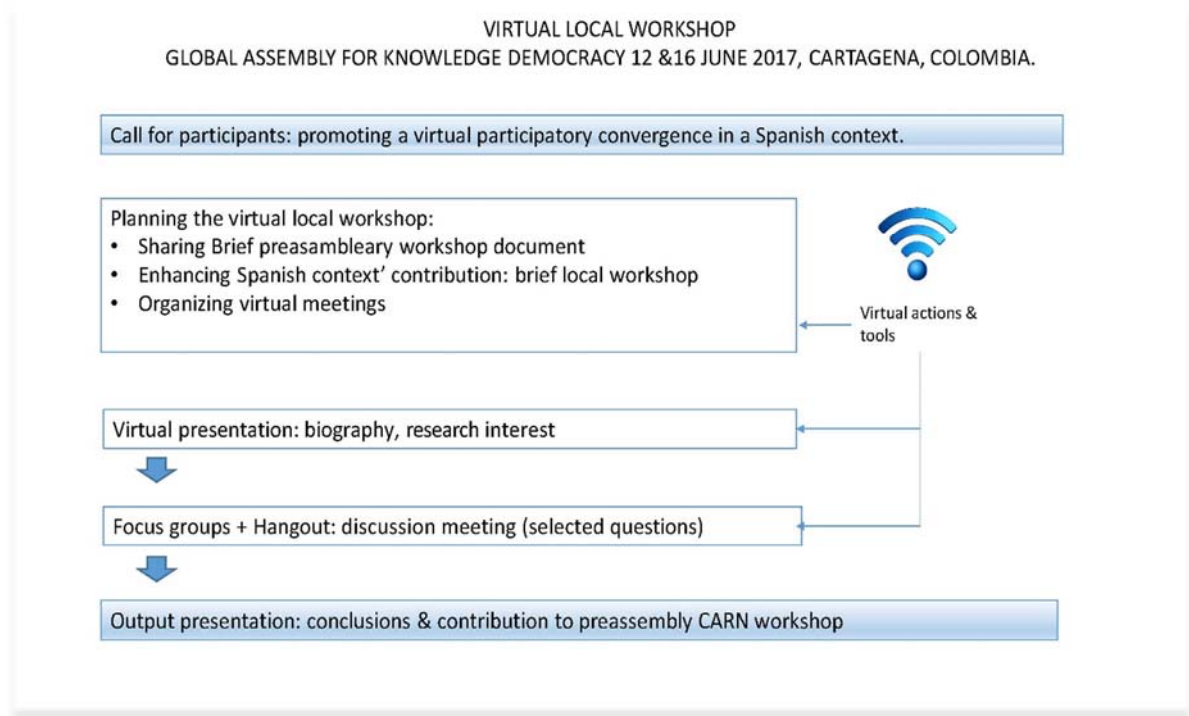
✓ **Actions:**

- Look into different methodological approaches, from a critical perspective, whose linking factor is reflection on participatory action.

- Select the topics with which we can identify in terms of the points of discussion raised in the proposal of the assembly and contextualise them according to our interests and needs.
  - Reflect on the meaning of democratization, rethinking the pedagogic relationship with our students – How do they intervene in the design of our subjects? How do we critically commit them to promote activism? ~ How can we (do we) address the democratization of knowledge within our teaching and research?
  - How do we provoke breaking vs adaptation to a homogenizing system that supports competitiveness while ignoring social commitment? How can we avoid silencing voices, exclusion? What contributions can we make to topics such as cooperation, gender or inclusion? What knowledge ecologies are appropriate/recognized for our context? And why? What are the political and pragmatic implications of knowledge democratization? What principles/philosophies might inform them? What research methodologies might advance such knowledge?

- Establish an alternative, propose an annual meeting (virtual study day) where we look for the meaning of our practices by means of a visual narrative which allows us to weave and identify our own biography and the awareness of where I am and why I act in one way or another; the search for the meaning of our actions in relation to the community we belong to.

✓ **The virtual seminar. Tools:**

- Virtual working environment, with the aim of integrating different areas, describing the content of the meeting and inserting links:
  - Name of the participants with links to websites to make their practices visible.
  - Panel on the meaning of the seminar, content, etc.

- o Virtual Presentation: to open our "boxes of life", salvaging aspects that could be linked to the motto of the global assembly or the connections, needs and concerns related to this
- o Forum for facilitating the discussion + Hangout for the virtual meeting with some representatives
- o Output- presentation with conclusions

VIRTUAL LOCAL WORKSHOP
GLOBAL ASSEMBLY FOR KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRACY 12 &16 JUNE 2017, CARTAGENA, COLOMBIA.

✓ **Reflecting on the outputs (work in process)**

How did we promote participation?

The Workshop website was created as an "event", proposing a day to enable an online meeting (Hangouts) between the participants.

However, in order to collaborate in the construction of a discussion space and facilitate asynchronous participation, we suggested creating an area for collaborative editing and reflecting on important issues using different formats, according to the various opportunities for participation available and taking into account all the concerns and interests of those involved

Following registration in the workshop, we shared this space in order to edit collaboratively. We proposed beginning reflection on the issues raised for the Global Assembly, adapting them to our work context. We tried to establish that meeting point together, editing slides, integrating different languages, incorporating concerns, reflections, making comments, suggesting external links, questioning with images, audios…Thus we negotiated a flexible way of participating in order to facilitate participatory convergence, allowing room for our concerns, interests and individual expression (shown in figures 2, 3).

Figure 1. Website: https://parconvergence.wixsite.com/workshop

A description of the workshop: the discussion conducted in the focus group

We began with the issues previously mentioned and some articles for sharing such as "Higher Education and the Politics of Disruption" (Giroux, 2016), among others:

> "For me it is increasingly difficult to work in depth on the role of the teacher as an intellectual committed to social change. The evolution of the University over the last few years has been dizzying and places us within an extremely competitive scenario within a strongly hierarchical structure, forcing us to submit to some standards of intellectual performance which are totally rigid and absurd and extreme stress provoked by an intensification of the workload and the demands of students (viewed increasingly as clients). All this provokes strong contradictions and suffering among teachers, but above all, *it radically distances us from a University committed to social change or even social criticism"*.

Figure 2. Discussion posts (images)

Secondly, we continued with some images. An intense debate was generated around the need to break down barriers and expand:

"This is a significant image because it suggests a clear difference between how to look for solutions to problems and how to make the group focus and move forward. It is exactly a group of this size which really excites us and when really interesting topics arise, this is when the roles of the teacher and student converge following the same direction. It is a space where each individual can be themselves and reflect on the role of the teacher. There have been few moments like this during this academic year. Curiously these moments are achieved *outside the conventional classroom environment*"

"The shared image invites us to reflect on what we do to improve pedagogic relationships, *what type of disruptive situations favour the search for an expanded classroom and where to prioritise links*; spaces where we converse taking into account individualities, spaces where we are heard, in order to feel this "I" which is transformed and progresses with the group."

"For me, the photo is very significant because this year I have found myself in a situation of transition. I have a group of students consisting of only 20 people and this allows me to carry out all the classes as dialogues and we sit in a circle. I believe my next step will be to leave the classroom and occupy other spaces *further away from the classroom* (as shown in the photo). Also, this year an important first step for me was visiting the Tonucci exhibition in Oviedo: All this is helping me to think about what educational practices are provided in the spaces we have."

"The image I am now showing you demonstrates the experience that we carried out with Year 6 students in a nearby primary school. My students organised workshops thinking about important work that needs to be done with students. The title of the workshop, Izan Morea, (which in Basque means "Being Purple") is an invitation *to work on gender roles*. The proposal involved making advertisements using specific objects and then reflecting on them. I have a video of this workshop approximately 7 minutes long which demonstrates the dual morality behind this topic. We all take for granted that equality and discourse is interiorized but in practice the students realised that there is still a long way to go. Personally it gives me great satisfaction to offer students the chance to spend time

with the children involved and feel responsible for them in the workshop because they begin to transform their role as a student to one of being a teacher for a few hours"

The network was woven with contributions in different languages and media. In this regard, we would like to highlight the incorporation of a video specifically edited for this by one of the participants:

"With this video, made from fragments of advertisements, my objective is to open the debate surrounding some issues which I believe we should not stop reflecting on. There is no single valid reading, the documents aims, above all, to bring to light dilemmas and raise questions:

- *What conception of citizenship* appears to be derived from the messages extracted in these fragments?
- *What role can or should the school play* in preparing students to respond to the dilemmas posed by a conception of human beings like that?
- In a model of society that uses the social organisers referred to in the video, *is it possible to talk about participatory convergence, the common good, rupture…?* In what way or ways?

Figure 3. Discussion posts (video)
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1vw1-XYF56ot9hm5C3ckWBAORqrkvB9Sjv2f_tmG-wrg/edit?usp=sharing

As a result, an in-depth debate was generated around dilemmas related to the new social reality and social justice

"I think this video raises lots of questions. I would begin by thinking about why advertising is a great mechanism for creating identities and whether we can consider that educational institutions hold the same power today. In any case, how can we improve it? *How can we achieve generating identity, creating groups or collectives to fight for the common good?* I believe that there is a strong affirmation of the subject in the video. Do educational institutions permit the recognition of the other? I think that there needs to be progress towards *the recognition of the subject as a political subject in the field of education*, as suggested by Jaume Martínez Bonafé"

"I think the video reflects the new social reality in which we live very well. It is a deeply individualistic society in which the individual is responsible for building their own identity. Failure is felt to be personal and biographical solutions to systemic contradictions are raised. The ethics of consumption permeates everything and becomes the building blocks for new identities. In a disintegrated, individualistic society, without strong social networks identity becomes the passport to inclusion/exclusion. In this context the concept of *social justice* changes radically. Faced with the previous model in which justice is based on equality, social justice is now based on recognising differences. I think it is necessary to rethink and rebuild the concept of citizenship within this new social reality but without being fooled by some ideas that are potentially very attractive and suggestive but which may bring dangers"

And the discussion led to a new line of reflections relating to the curriculum and the role of university in order to promote changes:

"In 2015 I had the opportunity to visit an exhibition in the Reina Sofía Museum called *Really useful knowledge.* It challenged us to think about the curriculum we have and the one we want to have, based on the idea of the curriculum as a space of identity (as stated by Tadeu Da Silva). What knowledge do we consider useful at university? *Can we talk about usefulness without falling into an economist and simplistic way of thinking*?

"For me it is fundamental for students *to feel uncomfortable and "unbalanced",* because this situation provokes the search for balance and reconstruction. It's not easy, but training critical people capable of analysing and creating their own identity and their own knowledge remains in our hands. It has been very interesting and I will look deeper into this in order to work on this with students next year.

"Yes I think we can talk about "useful" or functional knowledge in universities, distancing ourselves from the use of mercantilism and concern about efficiency. In my opinion, pedagogic knowledge about our disciplines is functional if it is embedded in real pedagogic practices, permitting us to analyse them, unravel them and reveal their contradictions…If it allows (more or less helps or even "obliges" or "forces") students to question themselves, *it places them before intellectual, professional, institutional, personal contradictions*…it makes them take risks, feel confusion sometimes or stupor, it provokes curiosity. In this case, knowledge is useful and functional for me"

Finally, we need to reflect on the contributions and proposals generated in CARN and rise to the challenge of analysing the development of the process using visual narrative as well as continuing to carry out action to reinvigorate the Spanish CARN group proposing virtual spaces capable of promoting participatory convergence.

Elia Fernández-Díaz, Adelina Calvo Salvador, Carlos Rodríguez-Hoyos (University of Cantabria)
Gloria Braga Blanco (University of Oviedo)
Lorea Fernández Olaskoaga (University of the Bask Country)
Prudencia Gutiérrez Esteban (University of Extremadura)