

# PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: PATHWAYS THROUGH DIVERSITY

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## Abstract

Human diversity is recreated through the representation of new forms of existence that occur in the face of encounters, relationships and mutual respect. Belonging to a political community implies defining clear relationship guidelines that make available the visions, forms and colors that characterize contemporary societies. COODIL, is a reflection of such noble purposes, through an exercise of Participatory Action Research, it is possible to transform a scenario of exclusion based mainly on the hegemonies of normality. It is the implementation of a cooperative of labor inclusion that thinks of a different place for income generation, rethinks the purposes of the dominant economies, through disruptive practices that question the logics of production, distribution and consumption known.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Cooperation, Social Transformation, Participatory Action Research, Productivity

## Introduction

This research is based on the reflection-action that had as a starting point the contribution of materials that contribute to the enforceability of rights for people with "disabilities" (Páez et al., 2017; Parra et al., 2017, 2018). Through empirical research on the linkage, permanence and withdrawal from the work field, the following assumptions were made:

1. Inclusion processes depend on a change in the way disability is understood. Currently, there is a prevailing idea, both among the disabled population and among the country's employment generators, that "disability" is a burden for the productive scaffolding.
2. The country's production models are not thought in and for diversity, therefore, accessibility barriers are accentuated.
3. There is a lack of knowledge on the part of the generators of employment and the "disabled" populations of the regulations that protect and regulate the processes of hiring and retirement in the work field.

4. The problem of employment, permanence and retirement in the labor field is generalized in the country, therefore, it is necessary to weigh an income generation strategy that contributes to improve the conditions for these populations.

Taking into account the aforementioned characteristics, a project was initiated to articulate two fields of action to generate a transformation in populations with "disabilities" and caregivers. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is taken as a reference, given that, in spite of having a wide knowledge about the main problem related to the linkage, permanence and withdrawal from the labor field, the processes designed by the communities with disabilities and caregivers to face this reality are not known.

In 2018, a Participatory Action Research (PAR) group was formed with various actors that under the philosophy of the concept of functional diversity articulated their purposes to undertake a transformative action aimed at recognizing their practices in income generation and enhance the articulation of this knowledge through an

associative model. The group was initially made up of mothers who were heads of households, people with "disabilities", caregivers and elderly people. Through the accompaniment and management of the group, a series of eight workshops were designed to promote leadership, participation and community development. Within the framework of the process, the idea of articulating the collective was built through a solidarity economy model based on the principles of the international cooperative movement.

Parallel to these reflections, discussion scenarios related to bets that provide alternatives to capitalist development through practices that recognize the Latin American landscapes under the concept of good living were promoted. This figure takes name and meaning through the following apostrophe, COODIL: Cooperativa De Inclusión Laboral (Cooperative of Labor Inclusion), a name widely discussed by the collective as it sought to maintain through this denomination the purposes and philosophies that articulate the nascent organization process.

COODIL defines itself as an organization that works under the following premises:

1. Recognizes the human and functional diversities that characterize human conglomerates.
2. Promotes the recognition of the diverse human capacities in the different fields of action and life that the subjects develop in the processes of relationship and existence.
3. It takes as a reference a model of economic solidarity that is sustained through the thesis of the international cooperativist movement.
4. Promotes independent life as an aspiration that establishes the principles of a society based on solidarity and overcomes the logic of competition.
5. Pursues through its postulates the good living in the communities, recognizing the socio-cultural landscape that is formed in the territories and sows the bases to design alternatives to the development model of capital.

Through these premises, COODIL promotes social and community entrepreneurship. It differs from the perspective of individual entrepreneurship, promoting logics that articulate the knowledge produced in the communities and that define mechanisms to dignify life in the different contexts in which it develops.

## METHODOLOGY

COODIL is a strategy that was born framed by an exercise of Participatory Action Research, beginning in 2018 with the formation of a group that jointly defined the strategies that facilitated the understanding of income generation strategies for the populations subject to the project: mothers head of household, elderly, caregiver, people with disabilities, children and youth.

For PRA, the generation of scientific knowledge, unlike what the positivist school maintains, is not the result of the disinterested and unprejudiced observation of the researcher. Its objectivity lies in social verification, and to achieve it, it is necessary to establish a consensus on the method of verification, because its purpose is to bring about transformations in the relations of material production and in the relations of knowledge generation. This, in turn, presupposes that in the research process a subject-subject relationship is established between the external researcher and the participating social actors. The external researcher, consciously refraining from imposing his own ideas, should encourage the social actors to act as true subjects of the process, capable of autonomously producing knowledge (Guardiola, 2017, p. 207)

COODIL can be defined through three moments that are necessary to expose as methodological aspects, since they are relevant and emerge in the fabric that shapes its own ways of being through the encounter (see Table 1):

Table 1. Moments of Participatory Action Research

Opening Phase	Organizational phase	Consolidation phase
It began with the formation of a group that defined the first relevant aspects to mobilize a cooperative-based social and community organization, implicitly defining the agreements that allow sustaining the collective work to date.	Organizational structures and statutes were defined, committees were organized, productive scenarios were defined, agreements with public and private institutions were promoted, and a clearer economic criterion was organized to enable COODIL's social capital to be collected.	It took hold with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted known organizational models and defined new patterns of relationships through virtuality.

Source: own elaboration

These phases of the collective's development are marked by creativity and the formation of new scenarios that make it possible to respond to current demands and overcome the logic of exclusion that was accentuated during the Pandemic.

In terms of methodology, it is necessary to highlight the social and community action that articulates in a particular way the principles mobilized in its political action. Beyond a discourse related to "inclusion", it defines a way of being in accordance with functional diversities, the recognition of human capabilities, the formation of solidarity economies based on cooperativism that seek independent living and good living in the people who make up the collective.

It is a methodological challenge in that it conceptually redefines some aspects that socially have not been overcome by living the hegemonies of normality, competition and individualism. It is a methodological route because, through the idea made practice, the spaces of mobilization and social change that can be transferred to other spaces that require affirmative actions to overcome the realities of exclusion experienced by the various groups that are subject to special protection by the state and the international community are conjugated.

The follow-up processes to the organizational process were marked by a permanent logic of recovering the memory of the process through

meeting minutes, observation diaries and documents that were born in the framework of the project implementation. Since its foundation, a systematic organizational model was maintained across the board, which made it possible to capture the different moments experienced and to exalt the collective memory through the recovery of knowledge. The information was triangulated through the categories defined by the group, relating COODIL's social and community life, reconstructed through the experiences recorded in the documents mentioned above.

## RESULTS

COODIL's internal and external transformations, its positioning in district scenarios and the management of articulations with the private sector, show a scenario of change through the processes mentioned above, which are linking new forms of articulation through a deep respect for diversities. COODIL defines its work routes based on five guiding principles:

The first of them, refers to the recognition of the concept that in Spain has allowed dignifying people with disabilities under the recognition of a context that overcomes the notion of normality-abnormality and allows finding human groups under the protection of functional diversity.

The consideration of functional diversity as an expression of an inherent characteristic of the

human condition, by the diversity model, is due to the lack of positioning of the social model in the intersectionality of oppression, since such consideration is directed towards the promotion and acceptance of functional diversity as one more of the human diversities: diversity of culture, nationality, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., which in many occasions also become an additional reason for discrimination against people with disabilities (Toboso-Martín, 2018, p. 791).

COODIL promotes an exercise where differentiation is understood as a possibility that materializes through the recognition of human diversities. Thus, being part of COODIL goes beyond the social labels people built to refer to the human person. However, the social process understands that the normative transformations to recognize this landscape of diversity are under construction and therefore recognizes that there are some boundaries that must be overcome through political action of citizens. In this sense, it takes up the category of subjects of special protection by the state to make visible some populations that have historically been marginalized. This reflection is accompanied by the postulates established in the Political Constitution of Colombia of 1991, which in its article 13 defines:

All persons are born free and equal under the law, shall receive equal protection and treatment from the authorities and shall enjoy the same rights, freedoms and opportunities without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, national or family origin, language, religion, political or philosophical opinion (Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991, Art. 13)

In this regard, COODIL is engaged in a reflection that allows it to internally sustain the discourse of diversity and, in external political action, recognizes difference as a mechanism that allows it to dignify historically excluded populations. It is a permanent debate within the collective, a fundamental aspect of reflection that mobilizes the other articulation scenarios that COODIL mobilizes.

Secondly, it is thought through the recognition of human capacities. Any member of the collective can develop productive actions according to his or her needs and capabilities, thus, under this motto, it defines three modes of integration into the collective: the producer, the

apprentice and the distributor. The producer is the person or collective of people who have a defined concept of product to be commercialized in the market. The apprentice is the person or group of people who join the producer to replicate, improve or transform the productive initiative according to their needs or capabilities. The distributor is responsible for marketing the products through various strategies that are defined collectively for the mutual benefit of COODIL.

Thirdly, there is the concept of solidarity economy, understood as the capacity to articulate different human groups to establish forms of production, distribution and consumption, in solidarity and respectful of the diverse skills that are socially elaborated. This concept is materialized through the cooperative model that highlights the articulation of different people and collectives to ensure the satisfaction of human needs through values such as respect, solidarity, fraternity, equity, among others.

Fourthly, COODIL defines challenges that the independent living movement has faced since its birth in the United States, with the slogan "nothing about us, without us". And it considers that in order to achieve independent living it is necessary to establish scenarios of articulation of the three concepts mentioned above: functional diversity, recognition of human capacity and solidarity economy based on cooperativism. In other words, independent living is possible through the encounter and recognition of others in their diverse ways of representing themselves, of creating skills and cooperating, of working reciprocally in pursuit of socially defined objectives.

In the fifth place, people aspire to live well, to live pleasantly, guaranteeing harmony, happiness, love for others, as an alternative to the capitalist development model that promotes selfish, individualistic, obsessive consumers and the primacy of the law of the strongest as a survival mechanism. Good living will be sought, because it is intended to transform production relations through fair systems in conditions of equity according to the human realities.

These principles are mobilized from a structure that defines COODIL as a participatory action group in several meetings and that materializes in the definition of statutes and organizational schemes. COODIL takes up the principles by

which the criteria are established to constitute solidarity economy organizations (Law 79, 1988; Law 454, 1998).

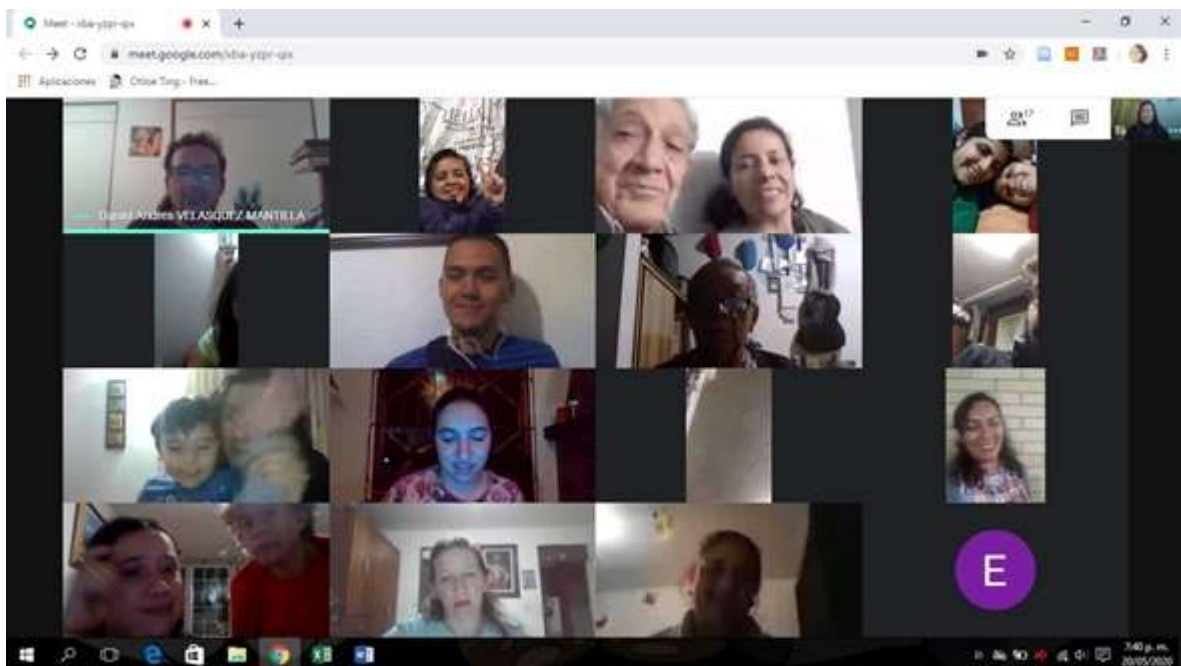
To this end, structurally, a promoter board is defined, made up of a coordinator, a secretary, a treasurer and a member for each committee that articulates the needs and purposes pursued by the collective, an ethics committee, which fulfills the function of ensuring ethical agreements and commitments that each member subscribes to join COODIL; a fiscal audit, a scenario that is under construction and that allows through its exercise to internally regulate the actions exercised by the promoter board, this figure will be transformed at the time of formally constituting the cooperative, before the entities that regulate the activities of solidarity economy in Colombia.

These structures are subordinated to the assembly: the highest body that regulates and

formulates plans and policies, and ensures internal cohesion through the active participation of all members of the collective. This structure was defined through long discussions and dialogue of different alternatives that would allow to organize through a model that respects the needs and capabilities that COODIL is particularly able to enhance by the diversities in the broad sense of the word that defines them.

The assembly is the main body, because through experience it has been possible to identify that the challenges undertaken needed to be energized through a political and social space that brings together all COODIL members without distinction. Participation in these assembly activities has always been successful and the commitments acquired in these spaces have been respected by all members.

Figure 8. Virtual Meeting, May 20, 2020



Source: IAP Seedbed Archive

It is a sui generis organization, given that its organizational definitions, in spite of agreeing with a classic structure, the dynamism that is undertaken within it responds to the particular interests that COODIL has shaped through its meeting spaces. The main premise is that all

actors have the right to express their opinions, decide and abstain in relation to the issues that mobilize COODIL's articulation processes.

All opinions are valued and mechanisms are created so that those who require support for

their decision-making are taken into account. Methodologically, the group has considered it fundamental to develop training spaces that promote the discussions that articulate COODIL. In practice, training is based on respect, recognition of differences, the difficulties encountered as human beings, and the capacities that can contribute to the collective construction of the group.

### A narrative across time...

In June 2018, it was possible to establish some initial work agreements that allowed to agree on the expectations of the process and that in an articulated way managed to establish a dialogue that allowed to recognize the human capacities and that each participant of the participatory action research collective had. Through the dialogue of knowledge, the study explored the

different forms of entrepreneurship that characterize the group and the alternative that can be promoted through integration and collective dialogue.

The aim was to recognize aspects related to diversity, to overcome cultural determinisms that arise from standardization processes and to promote cooperativism. This exercise strengthened the main theses that propitiated the consolidation of the process in order to guarantee their rights through the collective synergies that undertake alternatives of sustainability under the proposed ideas. These reflections were energized in commercial fairs where their products and the forms of work that they were configuring through the meeting were exhibited.

Figure 2. Trade show, November 24, 2018



Source: IAP Seedbed Archive

In a quilt woven with scraps of fabric, the first dreams and aspirations that they collectively defined were exhibited. It is preserved as a symbol of the social and community fabric that is being untied through the opportunity offered by this meeting. This is how it was portrayed then: "(...) "amazing quilt" where we are going

to join everything written that they are doing at this moment, but it will not be just to see it there, it will be to remember our first commitment with itself (...)" (Observation Diary No.1, P. Cepeda, June 6, 2018, p.3).



Figure 3. Photo patchwork quilt, June 6, 2018.



Source: IAP Seedbed Archive

In 2019, the collective process defined the roles and support strategies to be developed by the people participating in COODIL. Through this process, a line of popular banking was defined that would allow, through individual savings by the different people and productive initiatives, to guarantee low-interest loans and establish common funds to achieve the proposed goals.

(...) when meeting with them I noticed that they were talking about the organization and responsibility of the fund that was established in previous meetings, with different nonconformities, saying phrases such as that if a person does not commit to the payment of the loan in different installments there is no guarantee of anything, that there must be a letter

to commit the person, that it does not pay to lend everything and leave the fund illiquid; and me, I tried to mediate everything through the principle of trust and make them see things through the agreements that had been stipulated (...) (Field Diary, February 20, 2019, p. 2)

In this period, a line of affiliation was defined at three levels, producer: person or group of persons who have a defined production line; distributor: persons or group of persons who play the role of commercialization and marketing of COODIL's production lines, and Apprentice: as subjects without defined production lines that are articulated to a producer to enhance productive initiatives.

Figure 4. Meeting Pablo Forigua and Ricardo Cubillo Q.E.P.D., September 19, 2018



Source: IAP Seedbed Archive

A strategy for advertising and positioning in social networks is defined, and the foundations that guarantee solidarity economies through trust are formed. A work plan was also defined and a process of participation of the partners was organized in different scenarios in Engativá and the city in order to position COODIL's thesis in the public institutions. Similarly, the process of statutory organization began and defined five lines of action that articulate COODIL: Functional diversity, human capabilities, solidarity economy linked to cooperativism and independent living.

(...) Among so many ideas about the work plan, it is concluded that it should be strengthened first from the local to the National, meanwhile all very participatory say that one way is starting with billboards, perifoneo, flyers, that is how they visualize and publicize the fact of how they want to make themselves known and

disseminate that they are present and to publicize their work not only for labor inclusion but also contributing to the environment, that their strength is not only to market but also to raise awareness (...) (Field Diary, February 27, 2019, p. 1 - 2).

Through the exercise of defining the bylaws, the organization chart was clarified, which allowed the different actions that COODIL promoted to be woven together, the promotion board, the surveillance board, the good living, marketing and marketing training and productivity committees were created. The bylaws of the people's banking fund were established and a line of fundraising through raffles, fairs, old libraries, among others, was established.

Figure 5. Participation in fair, August 31, 2019



Source: IAP Seedbed Archive



Similarly, agreements are established with technical and technological institutions that support COODIL's training and administrative specialization processes. This work generated tensions inherent to human relationships and the traditional ways of assuming collective life. These tensions were overcome through the primacy of the collective and the aspirations that have been commonly defined.

(...) The session was going on, I have had a more reflective look, I recognize a little more the alliances and rivalries, it hurts me to see how it is difficult to think in community when we have to unlearn to live from assistentialism, from wanting to take advantage without the need for the gain to be communal, and how these attitudes destroy the illusions of the other (...) (Field Diary, May 15, 2019, p. 1).

It is possible to move from a discursive level to a practical field, the recognition of functional diversity and human capabilities and to promote respect for the different ways of understanding the organizational process, enabling dialogues that recreated other ways of being and existing in COODIL, this allowed having an organizational model that favored support networks among its members, innovating productive units and projecting COODIL in the public scenario, as a strategy that guarantees the encounter in human diversity.

The year 2020, begins with a particular enthusiasm product of the leaderships that manage to channel the collective ideas in COODIL, and that through the challenge that implied to sustain collectively in time of pandemic, managed to face its thesis to these new realities and that, under the support of the university corporation *minuto de dios*, managed to redirect its capacities to new environments and distribution in the context of the virtuality.

## DISCUSSION

Throughout its constitutional history, Colombia has defined a series of laws and decrees aimed at guaranteeing the effective enjoyment of labor rights for persons with "disabilities" (Ley 361, 1997; Ley 1346, 2009; Ley Estatutaria 1618, 2013; Decreto 2011, 2017; Decreto 2177, 2017; Decreto 392, 2018). In practice, barriers for people with "disabilities" persist and are accentuated mainly in the physical,

socioeconomic and cultural aspects, despite the existence of benefits for companies that hire people with "disabilities", the labels that define people with "disabilities" make access to the labor market a chimera.

The concept of productivity must be transformed and operate from a logic that overcomes market rationalities, and thus, be able to integrate a practice coherent with functional diversities and the capacities that each subject can develop through their situational elements. This dimension implies overcoming the models of normality that operate socially, establishing productive scaffolds that manage to understand the diversities and promote the recognition of the capacities that the subjects can develop. In other words, it is necessary to guarantee a process of linkage, permanence and retirement in the labor field through:

- Training to transform the labels that define the human person under the hegemonies of normality.
- Conditions to develop work according to the needs and capacities of the various population groups.
- Tax incentives

In various academic analyses and empirical works carried out on the subject, it is possible to reveal that the traditional forms of production stimulate a worker through competition, and in the particular case of populations with disabilities, they must assume a role that exceeds the expectations of average workers, to reaffirm that they are useful within the productive sectors, a tragedy that these populations must face and that accentuates the discrimination processes they suffer for living in a society that is governed by the parameters of normality (Alves & da Silva, 2020; Hidegh & Csillag, 2013; Soffer et al. , 2011; Ta & Leng, 2013)

COODIL's project recognizes that working represents the most accurate way for individuals to achieve their aspirations of personal autonomy and to satisfy their different needs, transforming the ways that determine a person as "disabled". In this way, COODIL proposes itself as an organizational structure that contributes to transform these traditional work

and productivity relations, through a model that promotes solidarity, independent living and good living as an alternative to development and market competition.

In the cooperative, people are full of attributes that go beyond the logic that undervalues or undervalues the capabilities that a subject has to face life. And it promotes a system of relationships that guarantees, according to their needs, the liberation of their working time to dedicate themselves to matters related to enjoyment and pleasure. Ultimately, it pursues a model that allows the enjoyment of collective life, routed through solidarity, encounter and the guarantees that can be born in the interaction.

## CONCLUSIONS

In COODIL, the category of time and space are transformed into a key to diversity, hours, minutes and seconds run differently, time is subjective, the forms of space are designed for subjectivities. The times and spaces of normalities impose an unequal relationship, they define what can be achieved and in what time, they elaborate an evaluation criterion on the efficiency in the relationship between means and ends. It is a process that waters a seed to lay the foundations that define techniques inspired by the will, that is to say, it is more important the creative act, the motivational charges, the inspiration... it is a life technique that sustains the existence through the recognition of the being in its diverse scenarios that define it.

COODIL overcomes the relation more products in less time by other efficiencies: the cooperative relation in key of the product, the human capacities in key of the product, the human diversities in key of the product. In other words, the important results for COODIL in terms of productivity are cooperation, solidarity, recognition of human capabilities and diversities behind the product. The products are designed to ensure the good living of its partners, the products are made for people to live well, that is to say, they are born without sacrifices, they are produced for people without costing the person in the production.

The commercialization and marketing strategy before the pandemic was mainly the sale at fairs, one to one and by referrals. The pandemic made it possible to design a strategy that took

virtuality as a reference. This path began before the pandemic, the difficulties of locomotion for some of the associates in COODIL, made that always in the center of reflection was the possibility of creating a virtual marketing and commercialization channel that would facilitate the distribution of the products produced. In this sense, the use of social networks has been a tool that COODIL has defined to be used to position the cooperative and achieve sales of its products.

COODIL is a space that thinks cooperative strategies that allow to reach the aspirations of the good living of its members. To meet implies to relate with the other, the possibility of meeting is limited in times of confinement due to the sanitary measures taken in the framework of the social and economic emergency that Colombia and the world are living due to the pandemic of Covid-19.

This challenge implied transforming the usual relationships that COODIL defined before the pandemic. They usually met every Wednesday in a central space that was often affected by the contingencies that COODIL members were facing in their daily lives: limited mobility, medical contingencies, moods, among others. Virtuality was an obligatory space that strengthened the bonds and trust within the collective. Participating in COODIL in times of pandemic was a daily action for all its members, given that the technological devices used allowed them to have and bring their associates together on a constant basis, in addition to this, the committee of good living thought of meeting strategies in virtuality that allowed the celebration, dialogue and reflection.

The good life is a constant search that allows harmonizing needs with the environment in which it unfolds, it implies giving up the schizophrenic race that seeks, as stated by Deleuze & Guattari (1985), to satisfy the desiring bodies that dissociate about reality through images that divert attention from the real through the constant search for desire. The encounter is real in the virtual, the concerns for the other are real, the empathies are real, virtuality is a channel that allows to be connected and to overcome the limitations of the natural world, of time and space, which for the target populations within the cooperative are more frequent and excluding due to the hegemonies of normality.

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