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Whose knowledge counts? The academic, academic knowledge and epistemic justice

In this chapter, I consider how the person with the title 'academic' might be represented in relation to understandings of what might count as academic knowledge. I argue that notions of what is widely accepted as 'the academic' are linked to a specific form of knowledge: this is a form of knowledge that is considered 'legitimate' by universities, based upon Western knowledge frameworks, and privileged at the expense of the legitimacy of 'other' knowledges. In the chapter I draw upon my experiences as an academic working in a higher education institution.

In higher education settings, legitimate knowledge creation tends to be seen as the prerogative of those academics who prefer to view knowledge creation as a specialised activity and use theoretical frameworks developed in the Western world. This can lead to the injustice of the exclusion of many other knowers who use other types of knowledge and ways of coming to know (epistemologies). These others include people such as academics working in universities in the so-called 'global South,' practitioners using practical forms of knowledge developed in their fields and those who draw upon traditional or indigenous ways of knowing. This all amounts to a type of injustice which Fricker (2007) terms 'epistemic injustice'. I argue that this form of (in)justice is highly relevant to academics in their role as generators and disseminators of knowledge. I also argue that an important role of the university, and the academic within it, is to engage with a diversity of knowledges in a world of plurality. I argue that academics can lead, and model for society, forms of engagement between people in which all people can be considered equally different. This is important, I believe, because it can offer the possibility of hopeful, shared human futures.

To exemplify my arguments, I use a case study of an international research project about the 'social and solidarity economy' (a term to be explained later). Throughout the project, I worked collaboratively with academics and practitioners from the global North and South to make more visible those multiple expressions of values and knowledges within the social and solidarity economy which tend to be marginalised in academia and mainstream discourses. The project was premised on the idea that forms of knowledge currently dominant in academia are too narrow and have failed to address pressing social, environmental and economic concerns.

I make the argument that, if international partnerships take place only within unquestioned, Western-based knowledge frameworks, they can reinforce the neo-colonial practices of epistemic injustice. As an alternative to this, I explore practices in which participation is based on the assumption that all participants are equals in their capacity to create knowledge. Moving beyond critique and into other ways of conceptualising the practice of academics, the chapter explains how, through the project, spaces were created for collaboration between international partners that valued local paradigms whilst generating new understandings together.

The chapter has the following structure:

1. I set out the conceptual framework to explain the dominance of Western-based knowledge and of the frequently unequal relationships of power between academics in the so-called global North and global South. I say why this can be construed as problematic and advocate the need for academics to acknowledge the importance of plurality in forms of legitimate knowledge.
2. Next, I describe an international collaborative project about the social and solidarity economy, which included academics and practitioners from the global North and South; I explain the rationale behind the project in relation to the role of the academic. This serves as a case study from which my data is drawn.
3. I then explain some thinking between me and my fellow project coordinator about how project participants might collaborate in a peer-to-peer approach to knowledge creation. I explain how this worked out in practice and highlight some of the outcomes.
4. Finally, I argue that a key responsibility of academics is to create spaces of knowledge creation in which epistemic justice can be enacted.

1. ACADEMICS AND THE DOMINANCE OF WESTERN-BASED KNOWLEDGE FRAMEWORKS

In this section I consider the main characteristics of the form of knowledge which tends to be favoured by academics. I then discuss the relationships of power that result in such forms of knowledge being used and applied in contexts where they are not always appropriate. I argue for the importance of acknowledging and working with diverse knowledges and knowers that exist in the world. Finally, I discuss the responsibility of the academic to recognise and work with diverse knowledges. I explain the concept of dialogism, which offers an approach that enables new knowledge and understandings to emerge from within a context of plurality in which participants are understood as equally different.

According to Toulmin (1990), a belief underpinning what many term 'Western' forms of knowledge is that human nature and society can be fitted into exact rational categories. Further, Berlin argues that these forms are based upon a belief that certainty in knowing is possible (2003). Such an epistemology, perhaps suited to scientific forms of knowledge, prioritises the theoretical or abstract over practical and personal knowledge, according to McNiff (2017: 49). It is also premised on the idea that objects are best understood if separated from their context. The assumption is that knowledge of the individual parts enables an understanding of the whole, in the same way that one might understand the workings of a machine. Such knowledge, sometimes called 'techno-rationalist', also claims to be objective, universal and values-free.

A premise of this chapter is that this form of techno-rationalist knowledge can be inadequate and inappropriate in helping us understand the social world, which is complex and dependent upon multiple influences and contexts, as well as the values and purposes of its

actors. Western epistemologies, based on such techno-rationalism, are one type of knowledge amongst many in what Santos (2016) refers to as the 'ecologies of knowledges' which exist in the world.

Like Code (2006), I believe that this

> dominant model of knowledge and epistemology in Anglo-American philosophy produces an epistemological monoculture both in the academy and in everyday life, whose consequences are to suppress and choke out ways of knowing that depart from the stringent dictates of an exaggerated ideal of scientific knowledge making (Code, 2006: 8-9).

The logic of this epistemology is that the act of 'knowing' is always best left to 'experts' who develop a narrow technical focus in their field (Easterly, 2013). This makes it less likely that members of the public will feel able to contribute to research with the aim of transforming situations of concern to them. Yet it is a form of knowledge often treated as containing universally applicable truths and it is favoured, generated, disseminated and applied by many higher education-based academics.

Michael Apple calls such knowledge 'official knowledge', a term which aims to make explicit the link between power and certain types of knowledge (Apple, 2000). Discourses and power relationships, which inform the legitimacy or otherwise of different knowledges, have practical consequences for the acceptance and circulation of knowledge. They lay the foundations for the kind of knowledge that counts, that is considered important and relevant to our lives, and establish a type of 'monopoly of truth', according to Connell (2007). This epistemology of the powerful is supported with power in hard forms – financial, institutional and military, for example, and is also imposed in its soft forms within culture, norms, values and epistemology, according to writers such as Mignolo (2002) and Connell (2007).

Western universities, as powerful institutions, are part of a system that can reinforce such dominant forms of knowledge. Academics therefore run the risk of reinforcing unjust and exclusionary practices and norms at an epistemic level. For example, discourses within higher education and elsewhere are often based on assumptions of the need by the global North to address supposed deficits in the global South: ideas such as 'capacity building' in universities (EACEA, 2019) and 'empowerment' of people are conceptualised as being a one-way flow, such that lack of capacity and the powerlessness of academics in the global South are unquestioned in the way in which issues are framed and are acted out in practices (Djerasimovic, 2014: 207).

This dominant epistemology can be internalised by many in the global South, who often merely set out to test existing theories from the global North with what Sun (2019: no page) characterises as 'little or no consideration for cultural or situational influences'. This adoption of an inappropriate form of theory, generated elsewhere, can be damaging to the idea that academics may generate knowledges and understandings of local significance and benefit, with local people, but who in turn may feel alienated from 'official' research processes.

The diversity of knowledges and the role of academics

This leads me to argue that an important role of the university, and the academic within it, is to engage with a diversity of knowledges and values in a world of plurality. Issues such as environmental degradation, and social and economic inequality and marginalisation are some of the pressing issues for our age. The knowledge required to address such issues needs to be 'adaptable and epistemologically pluralistic' according to Gaventa and Bivens (2014: 72) and needs to draw upon the fullness of experiences and diversity of the world. I believe that if academics maintain only a narrow view of what counts as legitimate knowledge, we will become increasingly irrelevant in addressing some of the most serious challenges faced by communities and humanity.

The acknowledgement of such plurality means that a variety of perspectives can enhance our understandings and the bases from which knowledge can be generated and applied. This is at a time when the generation of knowledges and understandings to address critical issues facing humanity should be a priority; and I believe that there is a pressing need for academics to find ways of envisaging and enacting a vision of how we can 'make the present into a richer future' (Rorty, 1999: 30).

This raises issues about how spaces could be created by academics in which participants from a variety of backgrounds participate as peers in the co-creation of knowledge around a matter of concern. It poses questions about how all participants in such collaborations can have the opportunity to frame issues based on their own epistemologies and not have their mental frameworks and ways of seeing the world underplayed or delegitimised. When working in contexts of plurality, one challenge for the academic is to create spaces in which difference can be expressed whilst maintaining a whole which is meaningful to participants. Dialogic approaches offer an opportunity for this, and I now briefly explain what I mean by this.

Dialogic approaches

Academia is sometimes associated with finding *the* right answer – 'the truth' – or at least one good answer and asserting the rightness of one's position to win an argument. A dialogic approach, on the other hand, views truth as pluralistic. It is based on the idea of the possibility of multiple truths. It is, I believe, an approach which is highly appropriate for participative research in the social sphere, where practices are usually driven by the values people and communities have and their meaning making within complex situations.

The process of dialogic engagement with the other can enable the creation of new thinking and new understandings because

> what is realized …. is the process of coming to know one's own language as it is perceived in someone else's language, coming to know one's own belief system in someone else's system (Bakhtin 1981: 365).

A dialogical approach does not seek to overcome difference and suppress it in order to reach an answer and a consensus; rather, it finds meaning within the difference. In dialogism 'differences remain yet the dialogue continues' according to Stern (2016: 19). It therefore seems to be an approach consistent with working towards addressing issues of common concern in participative ways in which difference is seen as an asset rather than a problem.

2. AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT ABOUT THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

In the introduction to this chapter, I stated that the practical context for this chapter was an international research project about the 'social and solidarity economy'. In the project academics and practitioners in the global North and South collaborated to make more visible the multiple expressions of values and knowledges in the economic life of communities - knowledges which tend to be marginalised in academia and mainstream discourses. This current section starts with a brief explanation of what is meant by the term 'social and solidarity economy'. I will then explain how partners in the project collaborated in ways that showed how they valued plurality and local paradigms, whilst generating new understandings together.

The social and solidarity economy – a brief explanation

The term 'social and solidarity economy' combines two complementary aspects. First, the 'social economy' is characterised by its aim to balance three factors—the economic, the social, and the environmental, according to Amin (2009). Organisations within the social economy have diverse identities depending on geographical context and the local factors from which they emerged. Such identities are reflected in the UK and Europe in terms such as 'social enterprise', the 'third sector' and the 'not-for-profit sector' (Ridley-Duff and Bull, 2015). Second, the descriptor 'solidarity' is mainly used in Latin America and emphasises both systems and processes of democratisation as well as the idea of equality in relation to the recognition of people as more than merely economic subjects (Quiroz-Niño and Murga-Menoyo, 2017: 3). The project I am describing here included significant contributions from people in both Europe and Latin America, so the term 'social and solidarity economy' acknowledged both traditions.

The social and solidarity economy project

To explore the issue of collaboration in practice in which people can participate as equals in knowledge creation around an issue of concern, I will next describe the project which was designed and coordinated by myself, together with Catalina Quiroz-Niño, social psychologist and research partner.

Representing a UK university, we brought a consortium together that involved academics from universities in Bolivia, Peru, Portugal (representing a centre for African Studies) and Spain. These academics were termed 'partners' in the application for funding and subsequent

contract. Academics from other institutions and practitioners in the social and solidarity economy field also became involved. I will refer to this wider group of all who participated as 'collaborators'. Our purpose was to carry out a research project called 'Enhancing Studies and Practice of the Social Economy in Higher Education', funded by the European Union's Erasmus Mundus programme. The project ran from 2012-2015.

The project was envisaged as a practical critique of the extent to which academia was complicit in the events that led up to the financial crash of 2008, in, for example, the reliance on mathematical models and the quest for 'simple ways of thinking about highly complex phenomena that cannot really be taken apart and studied in a systematic way', according to economist Robert Shiller (2010: 407), and the potential consequences of this. Academia seemed to have no practical response to the crisis and there seemed to be little critique or discussion of the role and purposes of academics and the kinds of techno-rationalist knowledge frameworks used in traditionalist academia and which seemed to underpin the financial crisis

The aim of the project was to make visible the many ways of expressing value and values in our economic activities, encapsulated by the notion of the social and solidarity economy. The intention was to take a broad and international view that would enable an understanding of the kinds of knowledges and practices created at a local level which prioritised community and well-being, and how these were explained and theorised by people working in their local context. The project went beyond a straightforward critique of the events leading up to the financial crash and demonstrated also that practical examples were available that showed communities and organisations working with different epistemologies, values and practices. These topics would be reflected in a handbook, co-created by the project partners and other collaborating academics and practitioners in the field, from the three regions of the project – Africa, Europe and Latin America – and in the three main languages of the regions encompassed by the project: English, Portuguese and Spanish. This would enable anyone to access the knowledge and practices from many regions in languages spoken in those regions.

In another sense, too, the project went beyond critique. As project partners and collaborators, we found ways of working which showed that it is possible to draw upon 'multiple and global sources of knowledge' (Leask and de Wit, 2016: no page). We worked in ways that assumed that Western knowledge paradigms are just one part of the 'ecologies of knowledges' referred to above. The project focused on creating spaces of participation for knowledge creation by a wide range of people, from a wide range of backgrounds in academia and in practice in the field and with a wide range of experiences.

The academics from Peru had first-hand experience of European projects in their university. Project partner and co-author of the project handbook, Ana María Villafuerte, explained the usual approach taken by the Western partners in her university in the Peruvian Andes:

> What generally happens is that when projects come from Europe to my university, we are merely the collectors of data. The research questions, the theoretical framework and the analysis of the data - those happen in Europe. (Personal correspondence, 14.2.18. Translated from Spanish).

This phenomenon, echoing the kind of power relationship outlined above meant that there was little conceptual or values-based input from those regions in which people may have entirely different traditions and understandings from European ones. The Peruvian partners were not positioned as epistemic equals in those previous projects and were not recognised in their capacity as knowers and generators of knowledge. This meant that they experienced epistemic injustice.

Further, this lack of the wider dissemination and acceptance of knowledges, values and practices could be seen as a loss to humanity, as alluded to by Leask and de Wit above. Ways of knowing which are directly linked to well-being and which value harmony and reciprocity between human beings and their natural environment (termed *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua – one of the languages of the Andes, meaning 'good living') form part of the epistemology of this region (UNESCO, 2015: 31), but this important way of understanding life was not afforded space in the previous European-initiated projects.

So with these matters in mind, in the next section I will address how, within the project, partners aimed to work in ways that enabled all to value their local knowledges and understandings whilst generating new meanings together.

3. CREATING KNOWLEDGE DIALOGICALLY, AS PEERS

At the start of the project, the academics from the partner institutions came to the lead university in the UK for five days to participate in the strategic planning meetings to plan for its three-year duration. The encounter would be a space in which diverse perspectives would be represented: we were ten partners in total, representing four different universities, in the UK, Peru, Spain and from a centre for African studies in Portugal.

Considerations to inform setting the agenda

As project coordinators, Catalina and I were aware that we needed to have an agreed, coherent action plan with which to proceed by the end of the five days. On a conceptual level, we could see the importance of all partners gaining a common understanding of the knowledge and experiences of the social and solidarity economy of each group, given the diversity of our backgrounds. From there, it would be important to find ways to move forward as a single group. We were also aware of the need to foster a sense of ownership around the structure and content of the main output of the project, the handbook, in order to promote full participation in which there would be space to accommodate our different knowledge traditions and experiences. Having done this, the plan was to work on how each

of us, as partners, would develop our respective roles in the project. The less tangible aim was that we would develop trusting collaborative relationships based on open communication, which would be necessary to ensure progress.

So, we saw that the challenge was to create spaces in which all could participate in ways that enabled each one to have the opportunity for conceptual input around the issue. The conceptual framework Catalina and I could provide would be derived only from our own socio-cultural experiences, and therefore would be limited to our own, inevitably limited, frames of reference. We gave a great deal of thought about how we would design processes which opened the space for partners to contribute knowledge and understandings from their own experiences and in so doing, broaden the field of possible understandings and interpretations of what the social and solidarity economy actually was in theory and practice.

If a rigid conceptualisation of the focus of the project had been set before these strategic planning meetings, it would have been from the limited perspectives Catalina and I could have provided. It would have put the participation of others at the end of a set of pre-established givens: given definitions, given questions and a closed vision of the content of the handbook. In this sense the opportunity to inform the conceptual framework, and to therefore set the parameters of understanding of the issue would have rested only with Catalina and myself, rather than with all partners. This would run the risk of repeating the pattern identified by Ana Maria Villafuerte above, in which the Peruvian partners could only contribute once the important conceptual parameters had been set.

It may, of course, have been more straightforward to have held the planning meetings as a *who, what, when* type of logistics exercise: design the specific tasks towards the pre-engineered objectives, make sure they were assigned to different people, ensure that we agreed on how to go about them, and check that we all understood what was expected of us. This could have been participative in the sense of having discussions about how the tasks should be set up, by getting people to put their name against the tasks or areas they felt best able to work on and giving flexibility in the work plan itself according to personal working preferences. We could then have invited others to participate in the work of carrying out the vision and conceptual framework Catalina and I had established. However, this would have involved participation and dialogue only around the edges, taking perhaps a form of 'technical dialogue', or 'monologue disguised as dialogue' (Buber, 2002: 22-23), but it would have missed an opportunity for a deeper and more just form of participation and would not have given space for different conceptualisations, based upon different forms of knowledge. It could have been superficially participatory, but would actually have been asymmetrical, disempowering and hierarchical. It would have denied justice to other project partners at an epistemic level by finalising the way the issue was seen, and which aspects were relevant for investigation, before inviting the participation of others. Such practices would have reinforced a kind of neo-colonialism at the level of knowledge.

So, we realised we needed to develop a different strategy, which would involve dedicating considerable time to the articulation of the different understandings of relevant concepts. Having done this, we would then have the challenge of weaving these different conceptual understandings into something we could all proceed with within the project. The alternative would be to work as parallel but separate (and potentially unequal) entities. This would possibly reinforce difference and fragmentation, where each asserts the truth of their individual understanding: an approach that would be along the lines of 'Here's a perspective from the UK' and 'Here's one from Spain, Peru, etc.' in a kind of parallel monologue. This disjointed information would barely add up to a bigger picture or involve dialogical learning and finding ways forward together. The challenge was to do this in ways which would highlight each partner's contribution and ensure it was reflected in the whole.

The strategic planning meetings in practice

The outline agenda for the five-day strategic planning meetings was shared with partners for their comments and agreed in advance of the event. Feedback from partners suggested they felt that arriving at a consensus of different understandings of the social and solidarity economy was highly important. Our agreed aims for the planning meetings included: to create a common ground for working; to set initial criteria for the field of study; and to get a clear picture of how to proceed within the first year. In what follows, I will explain how the collaborative work varied between different formations of small groups and the larger group that comprised all participants. During the activities, participants were free to contribute or not, and able to observe the work of other groups if they wished to do so. The aim was to ensure an environment in which participation was negotiated and fostered but not coerced. For Catalina and me, as coordinators, the overriding focus was on creating spaces and processes to enable the expression of difference whilst moving forward in ways everyone could accommodate and agree to.

In what follows I will explain the processes we followed in four main steps. These were informed by partners and agreed at each stage. A more detailed explanation can be found in Meredith (2020).

i. Articulating concepts and understandings

On the first day of the meetings the team from each country gave a pre-prepared presentation about the social and solidarity economy in their region, answered questions and led whole group discussion about issues arising from their presentation. This enabled each national group to 'set out their stall' and explain concepts and practices from their own contexts.

There was extensive debate and not insignificant disagreement about, for example, differing understandings of the responsibility of the state, the role of non-governmental organisations and the expediency of 'the market'. These discussions involved differing theoretical approaches and experiences of practices. They also involved a political level, which owed much to personal outlook and could not necessarily be aligned to a perspective based on

nationality or wider culture. An important outcome of this debate was to highlight the diverse and complex nature of the field.

ii. Developing criteria to identify organisations that partners would approach to work with

Given the differences in the conceptualisations of the social and solidarity economy, both in the literature and in the experiences of partners, it would have been highly problematic to attempt to create a definition of it that would inform which organisations we would approach to work with as part of the project.

Following the articulation of concepts around the social and solidarity economy, we divided ourselves into two geographical region-based groups (representatives from Africa and Latin America in one group and from Europe in the other, making the numbers of people equal in each). During this activity, we discussed and wrote on flip charts the aspects we considered to be important characteristics of organisations in the social and solidarity economy in the contexts we were familiar with. These were the criteria that partners felt they could use to identify organisations they would approach to work with within the project. The activity involved some discussion and clarification of ideas and concepts between members of each group and required each to think pragmatically about the types of organisations we might approach to work with and towards the preparation of the handbook. In this way, a list of criteria was generated by each group.

In order to integrate the two lists of different criteria from the groups, we came back together as one larger group and questioned each other about the understandings and experiences leading to the identification of their criteria. As part of this dialogue, areas of commonality and those of difference were apparent. An aim of the discussion was to work collaboratively to interweave criteria from both groups. The resulting criteria for organisations we would approach to work with can be seen on the project website (https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/socialeconomy/what-is-the-social-economy/) and encompass each one of the ideas expressed by the groups.

The criteria we generated enabled us as a group of partners to move forward together. I would argue that generating criteria together was preferable to coming up with a set definition, which could have been exclusive and a denial of the diversity of the field. A definition would have left no room to redraw the parameters or accept a different framing of the issue and therefore reduce the possibilities inherent in any social context. By developing criteria dialogically for the types of organisations partners would approach I believe we succeeded in creating a situation in which the partners could work with an element of fuzziness. This would potentially keep the dialogue open, and enable partners and collaborators to see their own contexts reflected in the project. The approach would also offer a spectrum of different criteria rather than a hard and fast definition, which, in its rigidity might risk excluding some highly effective community-oriented organisations. For this reason, in my view, the approach was conducive to promoting justice in its epistemic form

because it kept the space open for the inclusion of a variety of types of knowledge, approaches and forms of practice.

iii. Creating the framework for the handbook

In line with the participative intentions behind the project, Catalina and I aimed to use our coordination role to ensure that the structure of the handbook was open enough for all to have significant input into the theoretical underpinnings of how the social and solidarity economy might be envisaged and manifested in practices. Along with the project partners, we aimed to promote an approach in which new knowledge and understandings could emerge through the dialogical interaction between different people and perspectives.

With this in mind the next challenge was to use the criteria we had generated as a group in a way that informed the handbook as one of the main outputs of the project. Following previous work based on literature and her experiences of the field, Catalina had developed draft chapter titles for the handbook. These had been identified and presented as a starting point in the project funding bid. Partners had been able to give feedback on these at the bid preparation stage.

During the meetings on the day following the presentations and the generation of criteria, we placed the draft chapter titles onto a 'sticky wall': this was a display board covered with ripstop nylon with spray glue on which papers would stick and could be placed, peeled off and replaced, which meant that papers could be organised and reorganised. As a group we discussed the criteria we had generated on the previous day and negotiated placing each one under the provisional chapter headings which best encapsulated the idea contained by the criterion. Following extensive debate, papers were arranged, rearranged and reordered by the group of partners into different chapters as a better thematic fit was negotiated and agreed upon. At the initiative of the group and with much discussion, some chapters were combined because they were considered by the partners to be dealing with a similar, bigger theme, and some chapters were renamed to better reflect the themes emerging from the criteria generated by the partners. Reflection and debate around this led to the existing ten chapters becoming eight. As the last paper was placed to the satisfaction of the group, there was a sense of elation and some applause in the group. We were now beginning to flesh out the concepts in a series of chapters which could be seen to include everyone's contribution. Each partner could claim some ownership and input into the whole and see their contribution towards setting the conceptual framework. By the end of this activity, we had chapter titles which reflected the conceptualisations and priorities of all partners, and we also had outline areas of focus for the handbook chapters based on the criteria we had generated together.

iv. Raising questions to inform the handbook chapters

Finally, Catalina and I invited partners to place their names next to chapters they felt best able to contribute to, and to take the lead on one or more specific chapters which were of particular interest to them. In the emerging chapter-focused groups we worked

collaboratively on raising questions that we considered relevant for development as part of the research for the focus of each chapter. The only stipulation Catalina and I made as project co-ordinators was that the work on each chapter should be coordinated by a representative from both global North and South. In this way we aimed to foster a diversity of approaches in each chapter as far as possible, to promote dialogue between partners and make more likely the need to check assumptions in the process of leading and creating the chapters. The process of each of us raising questions we considered relevant to investigate was another way of framing the issues and expressing what was important to us. The content of each chapter was based on key questions that were expressed, explained and framed by each small group. Question raising around an issue of concern is, I believe, an important aspect of the practice of epistemic justice.

Following these processes, we proceeded as a group to discuss our action plan and the logistics that would be involved in carrying out the project.

Partners' evaluations of the strategic planning meetings

In the processes described and explained above, the conceptual bases of our study were built up together. During these processes there was a high level of engagement from partners. Their written evaluations at the end of the week alluded to the satisfaction of the processes and with the results of them. One stated, 'It's a matter of building from diversity (which is not easy but foundation stones were laid).' Comments from other partners included '… the main objectives were achieved with in-depth debates which were necessary'; another that 'The [outcomes] that we achieved were very positive and more than seemed possible'; and 'I think it has been a fruitful week … to start to set concepts to … start to move the project'. Partners also expressed their sense of ownership of the outputs; for example, one stated, 'I am very happy to have known and participated in the process and contributed to the results' and another, 'It gave me clarity about the project and I committed myself to it'.

What did we learn and what were some of the outcomes?

I have aimed so far to explain how Catalina and I, along with project partners worked on and within a participative approach, and how this was fostered as near to the outset of the project as possible. This seemed to be a way of working towards epistemic justice in which all participants are recognised in their capacity as knowers. Such an approach, however, can be more complex and less certain than one in which concepts and approaches are pre-engineered and participants work within already established frameworks. I now aim to set out some of the learning from adopting such an approach, a main one of which was the value of a dialogical approach.

The dialogical approach taken in the project processes generated new understandings on three levels. The first was that in articulating our understandings we learned about one another's contexts and realities and found commonalities and differences. The second, a slower and more profound process, involved deconstructing our own assumptions as part of the dialogue. The third level was that in our dialogical space of new understandings of

ourselves and others, new knowledge and frameworks for knowing emerged. For example, Ana María Villafuerte reflected:

> I learnt that a better world is possible, that our differences are not irreconcilable, that it is only necessary to learn and listen. I learnt that a dialogue of knowledges between different latitudes is possible, I learnt that no knowledge is better than another, they are simply different and therefore it is necessary to seek complementarities (email communication, 2.10.2016. Translated from Spanish).

So, on one level it involved learning about one another's contexts and worlds; on another level it created a situation in which we could partially step out of our own context and view it as outsiders in a way that enabled a greater meta-understanding of our own frameworks of knowing. In this way we learnt from and with one another.

The handbook that was developed is publicly available (Meredith and Quiroz-Niño et al., 2015) and contains: literature reviews from the three geographical regions of the project: Africa, Europe and Latin America; examples from many contexts in each region in which practice was explicated by those working in the social and solidarity economy, together with academics from universities; and dialogical sections in which we articulated the new understandings we had gained together from our work in our local contexts. Working in this way gave the opportunity for collaborators to articulate those knowledges and practices that were unique to their context. Published in three languages (English, Spanish and Portuguese), the handbook was the result of the collaborative efforts of many people committed to epistemologies and practices that viewed social and environmental considerations alongside, and as important, as economic ones, rather than placing economic priorities above all else.

Over the three years of the project, many collaborators from universities and from organisations in the social and solidarity economy around the world, collaborated in the work of the project and formed their own local 'communities of inquiry' (Eikeland, 2006) between academics, students and those in practices in the field. They contributed to the work of creating and articulating knowledges and practices and the values and ways of thinking that underpin them. For example, Melba Quijano, an academic specialising in social communication from Colombia, created her own community of inquiry of academics, students and practitioners around the issue. She said:

> What most challenged me was the idea of the collective construction of knowledge. The project permitted me to approach these practices and get to know, for example, the knowledge that an organisation like Woman and Future has in the area of gender, and the work of organisations like the Cacao Cooperative with all its knowledge, the technical knowledge of the peasant, the more 'popular' knowledge of organisations like CoCuza [Comité Cultural del Barrio Zapamanga]. (Transcript of audio recording 2.5.2016. Translated from Spanish).

Melba also stated that some of the organisations contacted through the project were prompted to engage in self-reflection about their own practices. She has subsequently

worked with them, creating a community of inquiry. She commented about the response of some of the grassroots organisations:

> It opened a panorama of reflection from within – hey we're important – how can we organise things better? … I don't know if this applied to their actions in general, but certainly in the field of communication, they did reflect on what they were doing (Transcript of audio recording 2.5.2016. Translated from Spanish).

Different styles and approaches are apparent in the literature reviews, case studies, teaching activities and documentary evidence that make up each chapter of the handbook. In the introduction to the handbook partners from two continents wrote collaboratively:

> The reader will come across these differences [in approach], illustrating lives running in parallel towards the same goal: to imagine and build a human and solidarity economy, with and for everyone. We should point out that our aim was never to generalise our interpretations of the information gathered from different geographical areas. We hope instead to create knowledge that is dynamic and dialogical on the theory and practice of the social and solidarity economy. (Meredith and Quiroz-Niño et al., 2015).

4. ACADEMICS AND EPISTEMIC JUSTICE

As academics, we represent what is widely considered to be 'proper', legitimate knowledge. This places a great responsibility upon us to consider the types of knowledge we value, who is considered to be a knower, and the processes we see as legitimate in creating knowledge. I have explained how within the project theme, and in our relationships with those involved, Catalina and I aimed to foster a participative and dialogical approach to knowledge creation which involved academics and those working in the field of the social and solidarity economy where each one has the capacity to contribute to domains of knowledge.

I have explained a process of project partners engaging with different 'others' as peers in framing the issues for investigation and in working together to take action on matters of common concern. We worked together on conceptualisations of issues for investigation and collaboratively raised and investigated questions that were meaningful to us. In this way, I believe we developed democratic forms of knowledge creation and 'create[d] new pathways for human development' (Leask and de Wit, 2016: no page).

I have argued that in our role we have a responsibility to work towards epistemic justice, where all have a stake and a claim to participate in domains of the kind of knowledge that counts. After all, and as Nixon argues 'any serious debate about higher education must also be a debate about how we are to live together' (2011: 117). In this way, as academics, we can position ourselves towards public service in knowledge domains. Part of this knowledge is that which enables us to collaborate within our differences. The university environment in which many of us work is a privileged one and uniquely suited to facilitating and leading in

the development of knowledges in pluralistic contexts, given its commitment to knowledge, to research, its social capital, and its human and physical resources.

As well as being places of dialogical learning and learning to think for oneself, higher education institutions could also be seen as deliberative spaces which are about

> helping ourselves to live together in a world of incommensurable difference and uncompromising contingency [because] the world is not going to stop being like this. On the contrary, it will become increasingly super-complex in its inter-connectivity and will make ever increasing demands on our human capacity to understand (Nixon, 2015: 174).

The current global context is one of seemingly increasing polarisation and retrenchment into fixed positions based on political binaries and manifestations of inequalities. As an academic I believe it is my responsibility to create spaces for participation in knowledge creation which challenge exclusionary practices and reductive ways of addressing pressing issues of the day. My responsibility as an academic is, I believe, to work in practical ways in efforts to enact and influence the broader social and political questions about the kind of society it is worth working towards. In this chapter I have tried to illustrate this kind of society in practice by showing how participants, in our differences, were able to address a common concern in a way in which each person's contribution was included and influenced the direction of the whole endeavour.

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