

Chapter 1

Participatory Evaluation as an Expression of Democracy in Action

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Abstract

Drawing on the general framework emerging from the theory and practice of participatory evaluation in Latin America, the chapter highlights the significant growth that the field of evaluation has experienced globally, noting how its political dimension underpins its ability to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes. The importance that the leading role of civil society has acquired is highlighted as an expression of a new sensibility in both the management and evaluation of public policies and social programmes. Participatory evaluation in the Latin American context and the principles that characterise it are briefly presented before outlining the key aspects emerging from the chapters of this book regarding the potential of evaluation involving social participation to strengthen democratic processes. Finally, the scope and potential, as well as the limitations and weaknesses typically associated with the participatory evaluation approach, are analysed, reflecting on them in light of the experiences examined in this publication.

Keywords:

Latin America, Participatory Evaluation, Democracy, Experiences

Citation

Rodríguez Bilella, P. & Tapella, E. (2026). Participatory evaluation as a manifestation of democracy in action. In P. Rodríguez Bilella & E. Tapella (Eds.), *Evaluation, democracy and transformation. Experiences of participatory evaluation in Latin America*. Vientosur.

This opening chapter aims to provide a general framework drawn from the theory and practice of participatory evaluation in Latin America.

To this end, the first section highlights the remarkable growth the field of evaluation has experienced globally, and its practice in approaches that emphasise its technocratic nature (method and technique), including its political dimension, which enables its capacity to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes.

The second section highlights the growing importance of evaluation approaches that give civil society a more prominent role, reflecting a new sensibility in the field of evaluation linked to a democratising perspective within which different evaluation methodologies coexist.

The third section of the chapter provides a brief introduction to participatory evaluation in the Latin American context, as well as the principles that characterise it, which have been systematised within the framework of the EvalParticipativa initiative.

The fourth and final section summarises the key points emerging from the chapters of this book regarding the potential of evaluation involving social participation to strengthen democratic processes. In addition, it addresses some of the criticisms and weaknesses of the participatory evaluation approach, as well as the

insights that can be drawn from the experiences analysed.

Participatory evaluation is characterised by being a flexible approach that can be adapted to different contexts, offering varying degrees of participation by different social actors. The possibility of replicating the approach in different situations is facilitated through the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned. Within this framework, a key idea underlying the book in general and this chapter in particular is that participatory evaluation is an approach to democracy in action. Among the various dimensions that give concrete form to this idea, a basic and fundamental one relates to the democratic principle that people must have a voice (and a vote) in matters that concern and affect them, such as when they are the target population of projects, programmes or policies whether public or otherwise that affect them. This book is a collective endeavour based on this understanding and conviction.

The growth of the evaluation field: technocratic approach versus political dimension

Public policy analysis is defined by Dunn (1994, p. 416) as a social science discipline that employs multiple research methods in contexts of argumentation and debate to create, critically evaluate and communicate relevant knowledge. An integral part of the public policy analysis process is the field of evaluative research (Dery, 1984, p. 104), which aims to generate information about the value or merit of past and/or future courses of action, emphasising not only the outcomes achieved but also accounting for the processes involved (Weiss, 1998, p. 4). Evaluative research thus emerges as an appropriate arena for the development of social research, based on the understanding that public interventions are framed—generally in an unstated manner—by hypotheses regarding macrosocial trends, the role of the social actors involved, the context of implementation, and so on.

For over four decades, the evaluation of social interventions has been approached conceptually and epistemologically both as a fruitful field of scientific inquiry and as a practical, applied domain of knowledge (Scriven, 2011; Stockmann & Meyer, 2016). Thus, consolidating advances in the field of evaluation and analysing them critically presents a challenge both for academic debate and inquiry, as well as for the implementation of public policies (Yañes Rizo, 2021).

Against this backdrop, interest in and concern about evaluation in general, and public policy evaluation in particular, have grown globally in the early decades of the 21st century. This is reflected both in a dynamic body of theoretical production and the resulting methodological reflection within the field of evaluation, as well as in the increase in evaluative practices and national evaluation policies across countries on all continents. This trend is also evident in the growing institutionalisation of evaluation and the emergence of various initiatives aimed at professionalising this practice (Peroni & Rodríguez Bilella, 2021; Rodríguez Bilella, 2017).

As a global reflection of these trends, 2015 was declared the International Year of Evaluation by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (Evalpartners, 2016). This made explicit a consensus on the relevance of the issue, given the convergence of interests and actions among various sectors of nation states, the main international development agencies, nongovernmental organisations, academia and Voluntary Organisations for Professional Evaluation (VOPE), comprising networks, associations and communities of evaluation practice) (Segone & Rugh, 2013). The common factor uniting these institutional actors in this field is their interest in promoting the development of evaluation as a tool for improving social interventions, whether these be policies, programmes, or projects, public or otherwise (Rodríguez Bilella & Lucero Manzano, 2017).

In the Latin American context, the evaluation of public management has undergone significant development, manifested in a variety of

organisational forms, practices and approaches, largely characterised by the commitment of public administrations and international development agencies to a technocratic managerial approach (Cullen *et al.*, 2011; Pérez Yarahuán & Maldonado Trujillo, 2015). This approach, an expression of the neoliberal trend and its **New Public Management** movement, have had a profound impact on evaluation practices, placing a strong emphasis on accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and impact measurement. Consequently, evaluation systems in the region tend to adopt largely conservative stances, as well as a narrow and positivist understanding of methodological rigour, which focus exclusively on quantitative methods and the construction of large indicator systems.

This emphasis on the evaluative functions of technical, economic or organisational improvement reinforces the image and conception of evaluation as a rational, pragmatic and technical activity, guided by procedures and criteria that would lead to ‘scientifically’ verifiable results. This view seeks to confer neutrality, pragmatism and detachment from the policymaking process, presenting evaluation as a value-free exercise and obscuring its political function.

In contrast, viewing evaluation as a social practice allows us to understand it from a sociohistorical perspective, in which its definitions, methods, uses and legitimate participants are seen as the result of social constructions specific to each context and, therefore, subject to different social forces and potential for change over time (Dahler-Larsen, 2012). The social and intersubjective nature of evaluation becomes apparent

when one considers the plurality of criteria, procedures and potential uses of evaluation by different actors with unequal interests and power. In this regard, evaluation has a significant strategic potential for social transformation, although developing evaluations with a comprehensive approach remains a challenge (Amaya, 2008, 2010).

While the logic of conventional evaluations does not appear to lead significantly to more effective public interventions, it should nonetheless be guided by the public values that have been restored in the context of democratisation and the institutionalisation of rights over the last 30 years in the region (Jannuzzi, 2020). Only by building on this commitment can evaluation contribute to the construction of a more prosperous and just society that serves to promote the rights of vulnerable and marginalised individuals. In this regard, recognising the political dimension of evaluation makes it possible to reflect on its capacity to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes (Cardozo Brum & Rosas Huerta, 2021; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2018; Hay & KumarRange, 2014; Rodríguez-Campos, 2018; Zukoski & Bosserman, 2018) as it can facilitate the exercise of the rights to participation, advocacy and control over public affairs by various social actors, particularly those traditionally excluded.

Traditional evaluation approaches, which focus primarily on quantitative methods and are largely detached from the day-to-day reality of the intervention, have often led to disinterest and even resistance among local stakeholders. Meanwhile, an understanding of the specific circumstances of community stakeholders has

gained ground in the theory and practice of evaluation in the region, with a particular attention to indigenous peoples (Kushner & Rotondo, 2012), rural farmers (Romero Sarduy et al., 2017), older adults (Huenchuan & Paredes, 2007), atrisk communities (Letichevsky & Penna Firme, 2012) and organisations and social groups involved in the management and evaluation of social policies (Cardozo Brum, 2008).

It is within this context that participatory, democratic and dialogue-oriented approaches have seen significant development at both global and regional levels. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and aimed at promoting social development, economic growth, environmental sustainability, as well as peace and access to justice, reflect this trend by incorporating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that they are systematically reviewed, with a central role for civil society (Bamberger et al., 2017; van den Berg et al., 2017). This has given rise to a new set of priorities for evaluation, in which the participatory dimension has become a central feature, helping to ensure that evaluations effectively respond to the needs and interests of intended users.

A new approach in the field of evaluation

The ultimate aim of evaluation should be social improvement, that is, transforming the quality of life of the population targeted by the interventions being evaluated (Rodríguez Bilella & Tapella, 2017). This is achieved by contributing to the development of initiatives (projects, programmes and policies) aimed at promoting social justice, as well as by stimulating public debate regarding the benefits and costs of social interventions and how these are distributed by and for society. Within this framework, the importance of evaluative approaches that give civil society a greater role becomes apparent; this reflects a new sensibility in the field of evaluation that recognises its importance when assessing or attributing effects and outcomes to a specific intervention. In this regard, there is a growing proliferation of both proposals and examples of situated evaluation, which highlight the lessons learned and outcomes of interventions from multiple community perspectives, with methodological rigour and an understanding of the complexity they represent (Amaya, 2016).

The relationship between evaluation and participation can be traced back to the 1960s, when social science researchers began to question positivist approaches (Plottu & Plottu, 2009). It gained significant momentum in the mid-1990s within the context of an international framework aimed at promoting human development (Daigneault, 2011; King *et al.*, 2007; Ryan

et al., 1998). Since then, various forms of stakeholder participation in evaluation have emerged, including empowerment evaluation (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2018), transformative evaluation (Mertens, 2009), democratic deliberative evaluation (House & Howe, 2000) and collaborative evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). These diverse approaches highlight how the participatory dimension has become a central aspect of evaluation practice, shaping a tangible, current and inescapable reality.

A significant strand in the field of evaluation is the *democratising perspective* (Dahler-Larsen, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; Greene, 2006; House & Howe, 2000; Podems, 2017), which takes shape in various methodologies and where the evaluative practice itself constitutes a form of intervention in the public sphere, attributing value to public actions. From the democratic tradition of evaluation, Greene (2015) identifies three key analytical dimensions to consider in evaluative practices:

- who takes part in them, turning them into spaces of inclusion or exclusion in the political process,
- what their substance and content are, that is, the central and core issues they address, and
- what social relationships are generated within the evaluation context, shaping specific forms of interaction between evaluators and stakeholders.

These dimensions are relevant for distinguishing between two competing approaches to participation in the field of evaluation, both of which focus on promoting greater participation and involvement

of local stakeholders in evaluation processes (Espinosa Fajardo *et al.*, 2022). The first of these, *practical evaluation*, has been developed mainly in the developed Anglophone world and emphasises the involvement of stakeholders through a pragmatic, problem-solving approach aimed at improving the use and outcomes of evaluation (Cousins *et al.*, 2013). The second perspective, *transformative evaluation*, which has had a significant presence in Latin America, India and Africa, emphasises the components of emancipation, empowerment and social change (Rodríguez Bilella *et al.*, 2021). This transformative evaluation is aligned with the democratic tradition in evaluation and aims to transcend the instrumentalist view of stakeholder participation as mere informants, recognising that its democratising or transformative potential is realised by placing stakeholders at the centre of the evaluation. With the support of a facilitation team, these groups are involved in setting the evaluation objectives, co-designing the methodology, carrying out fieldwork, analysing the data, presenting the results and ensuring that the implementation of recommendations leads to effective improvements in the programmes and their outcomes.

In the Latin American context, the transformative approach to stakeholder participation in evaluation has been driven and promoted by a rich tradition in the field of social action, which placed a clear and significant emphasis on the participatory dimension within a liberating perspective on reality. Specifically, stakeholder participation in evaluation has drawn on

three traditions of inquiry-action widely developed in the region: popular education (Freire, 1972), participatory research/action (Fals Borda, 2009) and the systematisation of experiences (Tapella & Rodríguez Bilella, 2014). Alongside this, recent years have seen a growing interest in addressing issues of interculturalism, gender and human rights within evaluation processes in the region (Faúndez Meléndez & Weinstein, 2013). Beyond their specific nuances, these different traditions focus on social change and empowerment, recognising the importance of dialogue and participation in addressing structural inequalities and injustices that often go unnoticed in more traditional evaluation processes, while assigning a clear facilitating role to those who promote inquiry/action processes.

Traditionally, policymakers and funders have adopted a view of evaluation centred on accountability, institutional transparency and control (Cullen *et al.*, 2011; Scriven, 2013), thereby reinforcing the stereotypical image of the evaluator as an expert who, by following the scientific method, is able both to account for what does and does not work in a given intervention and to provide detailed recommendations to the relevant decision-makers in order to remedy the problems identified. In this way,

The evaluator assumes a position of professional authority. The entire evaluation system pushes them—and those who hire them—to conform to this stereotype, in which it is presented as self-evident and appropriate that, at some point, the evaluator should assume the authority to modify, validate

and provide the appropriate recommendations and solutions to improve the situation. (Ferretti, 2024)

In contrast, there are numerous examples (as each chapter of this book demonstrates) that assign a significant role to ‘formative’ evaluation as a tool for continuous learning and capacity building. While at the global level much of the debate in the field of social evaluation tends to focus on theoretical approaches and evaluation methods, the Latin American agenda has played a marginal role in these debates, even though there is some recognition of the innovative practices in the region, including the linking of social evaluation with the political dimension of social inclusion (Neirotti *et al.*, 2019; Pérez Yarahuan & Maldonado Trujillo, 2015).

Participatory evaluation in Latin America

In Latin America, the most common term for this type of evaluation practice has been ‘*participatory evaluation*’, understood as one in which non-evaluating participants—that is, stakeholders of the evaluation and those affected by it, particularly local managers and the target population of a programme—are meaningfully involved in the evaluation process. This type of evaluation reveals its political dimension by often taking place within

the context of social interventions that have not been participatory in their design and implementation. This reality addresses and goes beyond the question of the possibility of a participatory evaluation in such scenarios, highlighting the importance of ensuring that the very formulation and development of projects, programmes and policies incorporate social participation. Alongside this, it becomes important to deepen and transform the evaluation process into an endogenous practice, rather than one that is external to (and often imposed upon) the institution responsible for the intervention.

Participatory evaluation also helps to introduce a new dimension to accountability, an aspect that has been emphasised in a one-dimensional manner in technocratic evaluation approaches to the detriment of the learning dimension. The collective generation of data facilitates transparency and public debate with and within the context of civil society, with public participation constituting an exercise in citizenship — that is, both a right and a democratic responsibility aimed at facilitating the construction of a new political culture—. Thus, the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation promotes negotiation between the various actors – including funding bodies and political authorities – for each specific evaluation exercise. This commitment also involves the task of resolving conflicts of interest; balancing power dynamics in decision-making; and creating social spaces for encounter, dialogue and the joint creation of knowledge.

In line with global trends, research and analysis in Latin America on the theory and practice of evaluation

have seen a marked increase over the last decade (Cardozo Brum & Rosas Huerta, 2021; Ghiano, 2021; Neirotti, 2019), although the focus on participatory evaluation has been largely implicit and has not drawn directly on the analysis of situated practices. The lack of academic and associative spaces focused on the field of participatory evaluation theory and practice made it difficult to respond with concrete experience to the key question of how to achieve greater participation and agency of diverse social actors in the evaluation of policies, programmes or projects that affect and involve them. Consequently, international initiatives and publications seeking to further explore theoretical and methodological approaches to evaluation involving multiple actors (Cousins *et al.*, 2013; Eggens & Chavez-Tafur, 2019; Shulha *et al.*, 2015) lacked contributions from Latin America. While the development of the Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean (Ghiano *et al.*, 2021; Rodríguez Bilella *et al.*, 2016) entailed an initial process of regional coordination as well as a global presence for discussions on the specific realities of evaluation and social participation, a significant gap remained between these normative contributions and the analysis and reflection on concrete experiences of participatory evaluation.

Against this backdrop the First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean took place in 2019. One of its aims was to build a framework through reflection and practice that would enable this approach to be conceptualised from and for the region. Within this forum emerged

the following principles that characterise this type of evaluation in Latin America (Tapella et al., 2022):

1. The key stakeholders in the intervention or situation under evaluation are actively and consciously involved in the evaluation process as rights-holders.
2. Local knowledge is recognised as valid and essential to the evaluation.
3. Institutional representatives work in partnership with local stakeholders on the design, implementation and interpretation of the evaluation findings.
4. The use of teaching techniques and materials facilitates dialogue by creating spaces and procedures for the collection, analysis and use of information.
5. Participants or stakeholders take ownership of both the processes and the results of the evaluation.
6. The evaluation process strengthens local capacities for planning and participatory decision-making.
7. External evaluators act as facilitators of the evaluation process.

These principles were formulated by the collective reflection of stakeholders who had taken part in participatory evaluations in the region, thus becoming fundamental elements for conceptualising through practice the reality of this evaluation in the region. These principles have been present in the training and knowledge sharing sessions on participatory

evaluation undertaken by EvalParticipativa, clearly serving as an introductory foundation and facilitating an initial understanding of this evaluative approach.

Participatory evaluation experiences and their key points

Taken as a whole, this book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the lessons learned and challenges faced in the region through the practice of participatory evaluation and offers different perspectives on the following key points:

- **Community empowerment.** By focusing not only on measuring the outcomes of interventions, participatory evaluation enables local stakeholders and citizens in general to become active participants in the assessment of the projects, programmes and policies that affect them. By encouraging the active participation of stakeholders, incorporating their voices and perspectives, and creating spaces for dialogue where they can express their needs and concerns, it strengthens their capacity to influence decision-making. This makes it a source of valuable lessons for similar initiatives that are not necessarily evaluations, such as community assessments, participatory planning and transparent accountability processes. The case studies presented in this book demonstrate

how the development of participatory evaluation processes improves the quality of the evaluation and fosters a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards the projects in which they are involved. This in turn leads to greater trust in institutions and the strengthening of social cohesion.

- **Improving public policy.** Given that civil society organisations focus on social justice and therefore commonly promote active participation in evaluations, they provided fertile ground for the development of participatory evaluations. Various chapters of the book illustrate how governments (in this case at a subnational level) can move beyond more traditional approaches and instrumental participation. The contribution of participatory evaluation to improving the quality of public policies is evident in its ability to incorporate diverse perspectives and local knowledge into the evaluation process by paying particular attention to understanding the context and the realities of the affected communities, thus making it easier to adjust interventions by tailoring them to the specific needs of the population. The experiences examined in this book show that active participation of people and organisations enables participatory evaluation to address its subject matter more closely than in cases where no attention is paid to the diversity of perspectives, thereby fostering a better understanding of the local context. In this way, the quality of public policies is improved because citizens can influence their

formulation and implementation, contributing their knowledge and experience as valuable inputs for decision-making.

- **Promoting transparency and accountability.** The various chapters of the book illustrate how participatory evaluation promotes transparency and accountability in both public administration and non-governmental organisation projects. The active involvement of citizens and project participants in the evaluation process creates opportunities for dialogue about the outcomes of interventions, which requires a commitment from decision-makers and those responsible for the intervention to consider the perspectives of local stakeholders. This also explains the resistance to participatory evaluation processes in contexts where authorities lack transparency and accountability to their citizens which makes this approach a key tool in the consolidation of democratic processes.
- **Strengthening social cohesion.** At the heart of participatory evaluation lies the possibility of making the realities of inequality and injustice visible and thus addressable—realities that tend to go unnoticed by more technocratic and top-down evaluation approaches—. Participatory evaluation is particularly relevant in contexts where communities have historically been marginalised and excluded from decision-making processes. Such processes promote dialogue and collaboration while helping to overcome social divisions and build bridges

between different and often unconnected groups, such as indigenous communities, young people, people with disabilities, rural communities, etc. In this way, working towards a common goal, such as that proposed by participatory evaluation initiatives, contributes directly to strengthening social cohesion in various spheres.

● **Capacity building.** Capacity building among those involved in a participatory evaluation process—particularly the members of the evaluation team—is one of the most highly valued aspects of this evaluative approach as evidenced by the experiences presented in this book. These new capacities are developed when opportunities for participation are provided and local residents and other stakeholders are encouraged to engage actively in the evaluation process. Among the most highly valued aspects, particularly by local residents, programme and project users, as well as community leaders who had never before been involved in an evaluation, were the following skills: (a) improving the ability to reflect, analyse and propose solutions; (b) learning about new participatory tools useful for building consensus and participatory processes in their communities; (c) strengthening local organisations so that they have greater control over their own development; and (d) recognising their right and capacity to influence the design of policies and programmes relevant to their circumstances.

● **Focus on the sustainability of interventions.** Community involvement in evaluation processes helps ensure that the interventions in which

they participate are relevant to their needs, moving beyond a focus on immediate results and facilitating consideration of their long-term sustainability. Participatory evaluations provide a space to assess the incorporation of practices and approaches that are culturally appropriate to each context, as well as the continuous adaptation of interventions to the changing needs of the community. This enables local participation in the (re)design and implementation of interventions, thereby greatly enhancing their long-term sustainability. Stakeholder participation promotes methodological designs that are flexible and adaptable to varied contexts and evaluation objectives, fostering a greater understanding of the processes and of the results, both expected and unexpected. In addition, the sense of ownership of the initiative fostered by participatory evaluation is another key factor in ensuring that its benefits are sustained over time.

Advancing stakeholder participation requires a transformation not only of evaluation culture and policies but also of its frameworks and objectives. Such participation involves working collaboratively and on an equal footing among stakeholders, which is achieved through facilitation by evaluation teams and the use of educational tools, materials and techniques that ensure a sense of ownership and commitment among those involved. These elements have been explored in depth in *Sowing and Harvesting – Participatory Evaluation Handbook* (Tapella et al., 2022).

This book's focus of reflecting on specific examples of participatory evaluation makes it particularly relevant for those responsible for commissioning, carrying out and designing evaluations, so that they may give greater consideration to the possibility and feasibility of evaluation involving public participation (and keep both on their radar and in their agenda). In the academic field, the case studies in this book will be of interest to lecturers and participants in diploma courses, specialisations and master's programmes focusing on evaluation and social planning, an area that has seen significant growth in the region (Ghiano, 2021). For their part, trained evaluators will find further resources to enrich their professional practice by engaging in reflection on critical learning processes that enrich the field of evaluation. In this way, the democratic dimension of evaluation will be strengthened through the evaluators' reflexivity, as they analyse the factors shaping their position and remain mindful of their potential to facilitate processes of dialogue and generate arguments and evidence alongside a diverse range of social actors, thereby enriching public debate.

On the other hand, the limitations and difficulties present in participatory evaluation processes must be taken seriously to avoid romanticising the approach, which could lead to a loss of legitimacy and credibility among various individual and/or institutional stakeholders. The critical elements can be summarised as follows:

- the real possibility of effective and equal participation by stakeholders;

- issues relating to the methodological rigour of evaluation approaches involving public participation, specifically regarding sampling, data collection and analysis, as well as the formulation of recommendations;
- the greater demand for financial and time resources that it entails.

It is clear that, on many occasions, the practice of evaluation has failed to reflect the intended participatory 'vocation', overlooking the fact that any exercise involving such a process can become a symbolic charade if it fails to recognise that any truly participatory process entails a redistribution of power (Chambers, 2003). The role of the facilitator of participatory evaluation processes is key to addressing the risk that the most vocal or powerful stakeholders might dominate the process, silencing the voices of the most vulnerable. Training for both facilitators and community participants together with the use of participatory and inclusive tools and techniques is essential to promote equitable and representative processes that ensure the quality of the evaluation (Tapella & Sanz, 2019).

The issue of rigour in participatory evaluations must be addressed within the context of quality that is essential to any evaluation effort. In this regard, and like any evaluation, it follows a logical sequence, involving stakeholders at the different stages; this dynamic enriches the results achieved, fostering a process of reflective dialogue. Every stage of an evaluation process is critical to its successful implementation, a

reality that is no less true of participatory evaluation. The use of relevant evaluation tools and instruments to rigorously carry out these processes is illustrated in the case studies presented in this book.

Criticism of participatory evaluation as a slow and costly process highlights two distinct realities. The fact that it requires more time than traditional evaluations is readily apparent, but this should not prevent us from paying attention to —and, above all, valuing— it given the various benefits (detailed in the key points outlined above) that arise from the participation of stakeholders in the evaluation process. With this context in mind, a pending task for evaluation research is to demonstrate whether additional financial resources are indeed necessary for a participatory evaluation, taking into account the potential benefits and their capacity to offset costs.

The key challenge is to move towards the institutionalisation of participatory evaluation within different organisations, legitimising its role and securing the resources needed for its implementation. In this process, the establishment of legal and regulatory frameworks plays an important role, alongside the promotion of a culture of evaluation and the support of civil society. In the face of institutional resistance to the participatory evaluation approach, which often occurs within the public sector, the demonstration effect plays a fundamental role. As illustrated by various cases in this book, this implies that prestigious organisations from both the public and non-governmental sectors

can share their experiences and demonstrate both the feasibility and potential of the approach to generate added value. At the same time, training and raising awareness among policy-makers regarding the benefits of participatory evaluation can also help foster greater openness to adopting the approach. Collaboration with civil society organisations and universities can provide significant support, strengthening the structure and sustainability of these processes as well as methodological rigour in order to ensure the scientific quality of the evaluations.

Participation and engagement in evaluation in Latin America are in their infancy, progressing step by step and becoming increasingly aware of the challenges involved in moving towards an inclusive social evaluation that brings about transformative change in institutions, organisations and the general public (Stockmann *et al.*, 2022). In line with the democratic tradition in evaluation, participatory evaluation transforms stakeholders into subjects of evaluation and agents of change, placing them at the centre of the evaluation process. With the support of facilitators, communities are recognised as legitimate participants in setting objectives, co-designing methodologies, carrying out data collection and analysis, as well as in presenting and disseminating outcomes and monitoring the implementation of recommendations. Underpinning the entire evaluation process, this approach allows us to recognise how the experiences and needs of stakeholders vary significantly according to their cultural and gender contexts, while also facilitating

greater control over the resources and decisions that affect their lives. Participatory evaluation helps to redistribute power and build a more equitable, just and democratic society.

This is why the existence of initiatives and organisations that seek to ensure their evaluation efforts go beyond the mere measurement of outcomes to create opportunities for genuine and active stakeholder participation deserve to be studied, recognised and explored in greater depth in order to enhance their capacity to influence the culture and overall policy of evaluation. By consciously

taking part in evaluation processes, citizens acquire various skills and knowledge that go beyond the one-off assessment of an intervention, enabling them to question and demand accountability from their governments, thereby developing a political culture in which participation and transparency are fundamental social values. Participatory evaluation promotes clear collective learning as well as critical reflection on the public policies that affect them, contributing to the construction of a democracy capable of creating spaces for social inclusion, giving a voice to those who do not have one, narrowing the gaps of inequality and contributing to social equity: a democracy in action.

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