

# Examining the Process of Participation in Evaluation

## The Case of the Transition to Independent Living Programme for Persons with Disabilities in Chile

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### Abstract

*Participatory evaluation has gained considerable prominence in recent years owing to the benefits it can offer to the parties involved and its potential contribution to democratisation and social transformation. Nevertheless, a lack of clarity persists within the evaluator community regarding which elements distinguish it, thereby hampering its operationalisation. This article seeks to address this problem by critically examining a case through the application of the participatory evaluation measurement instrument, which comprises three dimensions of participation: control over the evaluation process, diversity of stakeholders, and extent of involvement. The results demonstrate that the instrument is useful for systematically examining an evaluation and obtaining a deeper understanding of the participation process in it, the need to reincorporate the dimension of power relations between stakeholders, the role the evaluator may play in conflicts embedded in asymmetrical relationships, and the relevance of participation for oppressed groups. The importance of continuing to research participatory evaluation is affirmed, as is the use of findings to train colleagues, implementers, decision-makers, and citizens in the theory and practice of participatory evaluation.*

### Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Dimensions of Participation, Power Relations, Conflict, Democracy.

### Citation

Quiroz Saavedra, R. (2026). Examining the process of participation in evaluation: The case of the Transition to Independent Living programme for persons with disabilities in Chile. In P. Rodríguez Bilella & E. Tapella (Eds.), *Evaluation, democracy and transformation: Experiences of participatory evaluation in Latin America*. Vientosur.

## Introduction

It is currently well established that evaluation bears an intimate relation with democracy (Chelimsky, 2006). That said, the purpose of evaluation is not to eliminate the errors of authority or to strengthen its credibility, but rather to facilitate a democratic and pluralist process that enlightens all participants (Cronbach *et al.*, 1980, p. 1).

In pursuit of these aims, numerous evaluation approaches grounded in democratic values have been developed over recent decades: *democratic evaluation* (Podems, 2017), *deliberative evaluation* (House & Howe, 2000), *empowerment evaluation* (Fetterman *et al.*, 1996), *inclusive evaluation* (Mertens, 2008), *community evaluation* (Kilmer & Cook, 2020), and *collaborative evaluation* (Cousins *et al.*, 2016), among others. Despite their theoretical, methodological, or axiological differences, one aspect common to these approaches is the importance they attribute to participation during evaluation processes, and to the effects of such participation (Espinosa-Fajardo *et al.*, 2022; Smits & Champagne, 2008).

Traditionally, participation has been described in general terms as the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making during the various stages of the evaluation process, including planning, implementation, and utilisation of the evaluation (Whitmore & Cousins, 1998). In recent years, the field of participatory evaluation has seen significant advances in terms of *conceptual frameworks* (Weaver & Cousins,

2004), *operational models* (Fawcett *et al.*, 2014/2003), and *principles* (Tapella *et al.*, 2022) that specify with greater clarity what a participatory evaluation process consists in. However, some authors have noted that the conceptual development and empirical knowledge regarding these participation processes in evaluation continue to present limitations (Connors & Magilvy, 2011; Odera, 2021). Likewise, the difficulty of applying participatory evaluation in a manner consistent with the democratic values that infuse our practice has been highlighted (Ridde, 2006). As a consequence, our capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate participatory evaluations is diminished, as are the use and effects of such evaluations on participants. This chapter seeks to provide elements of a response to this problem by critically examining the case of a participatory evaluation of a programme designed to facilitate the transition to independent living for young people with disabilities, funded through public resources from the National Disability Service (Senadis) in Chile.

For the analysis of the experience, a conceptual framework is applied that distinguishes three dimensions of participation: extent of involvement in evaluative tasks, diversity of non-evaluator stakeholders, and control of the evaluation process (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009; Weaver & Cousins, 2004). It is anticipated that the results of this analysis will provide insights for designing and implementing participatory processes that reinforce the involvement of actors in decision-making, thereby fostering the promotion of rights, inclusion, and equity in social programmes and projects in Latin America (Tapella *et al.*, 2022).

## National context

Chile has a National Monitoring and Evaluation System for Public Policies, Programmes, and Projects with over 25 years of history (Irarrázaval & Pérez, 2017). The monitoring and evaluation instruments have been under the responsibility of the Budget Directorate (Dirección de Presupuesto, DIPRES), under the Ministry of Finance, and have therefore been linked primarily to the national budgetary cycle; that is, they seek to generate information for budgetary decision-making (Guzmán, Irarrázaval, & De los Ríos, 2014). In the view of experts, programme evaluation in Chile is highly institutionalised, characterised by being strongly centralised, disciplined, and routine (World Bank, 2005).

Despite its level of institutionalisation and relevance for the country, this evaluation system faces major challenges. In general terms, there is a demand for greater transparency (Consejo para la Transparencia, 2016), deficient programme design and a lack of evaluations of them (González, 2020), low coverage of evaluated programmes (Guzmán, Irarrázaval, & de los Ríos, 2014), and limited use of the information produced for budgetary decision-making and the public policy cycle (Olavarría, 2012).

With regard to the focus of this chapter, challenges are observed that relate specifically to the role of stakeholders in the programmes evaluated and, consequently, in the evaluations themselves. These include the predominance of economic criteria at the

expense of public values such as social justice, equity, dignity, and human freedoms and rights (Centro de Sistemas Públicos, 2019), as well as an excessive centralisation of evaluation processes that leads to limited ownership of these processes by programme implementers and a low degree of influence of public service users and civil society organisations in programme evaluation (Irarrázaval *et al.*, 2020). Although programme evaluation in Chile rests upon a solid institutional framework, the participation of citizens and, in broader terms, its democratic function, remains in deficit (Paredes, 2011).

## Description of the implementing organisation

The programme that was the object of evaluation is implemented by the Eres Foundation, which was established in July 2014 on the basis of recognising and valuing people as unique individuals, in light of their differences, with distinct needs and potentialities, as well as the dedication of their families and guardians throughout the process of growth and development. Its mission is

to guarantee the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families in spaces for citizen participation such as education, employment, health, recreation, culture, tourism, sport, and the environment, among others, promoting a cultural, social, and normative

change that ensures the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, together with their families, communities, and surroundings.

The work of the Foundation is carried out in close partnership with the Special School for Development in La Reina and other schools in the Metropolitan Region that serve students with disabilities, as well as with organisations of and for persons with disabilities from different regions. The areas of intervention of the Eres Foundation are as follows: participation, communication, tourism, family, health, sport, recreation, culture, education, and employment.

## Description of the case study

The programme under examination is entitled Transition to Independent Living, You Are What You Decide (TILP), the purpose of which is to promote the participation of *Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID)* in various spheres of civic life, mainly the world of employment, through an intervention that seeks to develop and strengthen social skills in both persons with disabilities and their carers, as well as in support professionals.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To introduce participants to the philosophy of Independent Living so that they may assimilate and incorporate it into their life projects.

- To develop and establish self-care as a fundamental element for optimising the quality of life of participants.
- To develop and establish personal self-management tools that help participants navigate the process of Transition to Adult Life.
- To enable participants to know and exercise their rights so as to access, on equal terms, a role within society and fulfil the responsibilities that this entails.

The TILP is implemented on the basis of collaboration with a network of public bodies (e.g., Senadis), civil society organisations (foundations), and international bodies (e.g., the International Labour Organisation, ILO) related to disability, as well as special schools that receive the intervention for their students.

The TILP intervention strategy consists of an active, participatory, and experiential training model comprising four modules that cover topics related to independent living for persons with disabilities (see Table 1). A follow-up strategy is added to these four modules, offering support to participants by providing them with tools to facilitate the completion of tasks undertaken during the modules.

Each module is delivered through a workshop facilitated by two monitors who are specialists in disability. Participants are young people with disabilities, their family members or carers, and support professionals from the schools. They are aged between 15 and 30 years, belong to the first and second lowest-income quintiles, and are enrolled in a special school. The recruitment of participants is carried out

in collaboration with school management, and on the basis of the motivation to participate expressed by the parents and by the young people themselves.

The number of participants in the workshops varies depending on the context, reaching an average of approximately 10 young people with disabilities per implementation cycle.

| Module                                                   | Contents                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Methodology                                                                                                                                                                | Strategy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Philosophy of Independent Living</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Foundations and principles of the philosophy of independent living</li> <li>- Beliefs and expectations regarding disability</li> <li>- New approaches to disability</li> <li>- A new perspective on personal assistance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of concepts</li> <li>- Practical activity</li> <li>- Questions for reflection</li> <li>- Personal logbook</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage people with disabilities and their families to participate in the programme in advance.</li> <li>- Create a more horizontal environment so that PwID can express their needs and wishes for themselves.</li> <li>- Empower PwID to recognise their own abilities.</li> <li>- Encourage participation so that PwID, family members and professionals can communicate with one another.</li> <li>- Use a learning-by-doing methodology both within and outside the programme setting so that PwID take the lead.</li> </ul> |
| <b>2. Quality of Life and Self-Care</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-care</li> <li>- Quality of life (dimensions)</li> <li>- Well-being</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of concepts</li> <li>- Practical activity</li> <li>- Questions for reflection</li> <li>- Personal logbook</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>3. Self-management and Development of Soft Skills</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-determination</li> <li>- Self-management competencies</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of concepts</li> <li>- Practical activity</li> <li>- Questions for reflection</li> <li>- Transfer project</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>4. Right to Autonomy and Self-determination</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is a right</li> <li>- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</li> <li>- My rights at work</li> <li>- My health rights</li> <li>- Persons with disabilities as agents of change</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentation of concepts</li> <li>- Practical activity</li> <li>- Questions for reflection</li> <li>- Transfer project</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Personalised follow-up</b>                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual and group meetings via Zoom or WhatsApp video calls</li> <li>- Text messages</li> </ul>                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Table 1.** *Components of the Transition to Independent Living programme*

From 2019 to the present, four cycles of programme implementation have been completed in various regions of Chile. Some of these cycles have been conducted in person, while others have been delivered

remotely. The remote versions of the programme emerged as an adaptation to address the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the programme has served 85 young people with disabilities, 80 families, and 58 support professionals throughout the country.

| Year             | Municipalities                                                                                          | Region              |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 2019             | Iquique                                                                                                 | Tarapacá            |
| 2019             | Rengo, Quinta de Tilcoco, Rancagua, Requinoa.                                                           | O'Higgins           |
| 2019             | Linares, Talca, Constitución, Longaví                                                                   | Maule Region        |
| 2019             | Concepción                                                                                              | Biobío Region       |
| 2019, 2020, 2021 | La Reina, Ñuñoa, Buin, Puente Alto, San Miguel, Quilicura, Independencia, La Granja, San José de Maipo. | Metropolitan Region |
| 2023             | Peñalolén                                                                                               | Metropolitan Region |

**Table 2.** Implementation cycles of the TIL programme

## General description of the evaluation

The evaluation project for the TILP arose in 2021, following an initial contact with the Director of the Eres Foundation during a webinar I conducted on the subject of participatory evaluation<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>This webinar was held in the context of the launch of the postgraduate diploma in Participatory Evaluation of Social Programmes, directed by the author of this chapter from the Faculty of Psychology at the Universidad del Desarrollo. For further information, see the following link: [https://psicologia.udd.cl/files/2023/08/evaluacion-psicologia-participa-programas-sociales-udd\\_070823.pdf](https://psicologia.udd.cl/files/2023/08/evaluacion-psicologia-participa-programas-sociales-udd_070823.pdf)

Subsequently, we met on several occasions in order to discuss the possibility of establishing a collaborative relationship to evaluate the **TIL** programme. For the Eres Foundation, this evaluation project was viewed as a strategy for producing evidence that would help to improve the programme being implemented and to validate the work carried out in the field of disability, while for me this project represented an opportunity to apply a participatory evaluation approach to a programme working with a group that faces multiple barriers in society, and thereby to contribute to improving the programme so that it might better support young people and their families.

The broader context for this evaluation is that the formulation and implementation of the TILP by the Eres Foundation takes place against the backdrop of the difficulties that special schools face in adopting an approach of autonomy and independence with their students, and as a response to the demand from the National Disability Service (Senadis) to implement the Independent Living programme for persons with disabilities. It is also important to note that, prior to the conduct of this evaluation, the Eres Foundation team was already evaluating relevant aspects of its practice internally (e.g., number of participants, changes in participants) through a reflective exercise and instruments constructed by themselves (e.g., surveys administered before the intervention began and after it had concluded). On the basis of the results of these evaluations, the Eres Foundation produced and submitted reports to its Board of Directors and to funders. In this sense, participatory evaluation represents an innovation for this Foundation in its approach to evaluating the TILP, both through the incorporation of stakeholder participation in the evaluation process and through the construction of an evaluation instrument as the principal output of that process.

In keeping with the foregoing, the purpose of the evaluation was to create an instrument to measure the outcomes of the programme in terms of increased self-determination among the young people with intellectual disabilities who participate in it. At the same time, the evaluation sought to address objectives related to understanding the experience of the participants in the programme activities and the effects they perceived in relation to their participation.

The evaluation consisted in a sequential mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) design with a participatory approach, comprising three stages: formalisation of the intervention model, a qualitative implementation study, and a quantitative study involving the construction of an outcome measurement instrument.

The evaluation lasted one year, from September 2022 to September 2023. It involved a team of professionals from the Foundation, young people with intellectual disabilities, their family members, and support professionals, all of whom were beneficiaries of the programme.

As a key component of the participatory design, an *Evaluation Committee* was constituted, comprising representatives of the main stakeholder groups of the programme, such as *public policy formulators* (e.g., Senadis), *implementers* (e.g., the Foundation team), *direct beneficiaries* (e.g., young people with intellectual disabilities), *indirect beneficiaries* (e.g., family members of young people with intellectual disabilities, hereon YwID), and *civil society* (e.g., members of a disability advisory committee), with the remit of ensuring the sound progress of the evaluation, validating and informing evaluation activities, and taking part in key decisions throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation team comprised five professionals: the lead researcher, who is the author of this chapter; a specialist in quantitative methodology; two research assistants; and a professional support member from the Eres Foundation.

It should be noted that this evaluation was funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the Chilean State.

## Conceptual framework

The roots of participatory evaluation extend into Latin American traditions (Tapella *et al.*, 2022) such as *Participatory Action-Research* (Fals-Borda, 1985), *Popular Education* (Freire, 1970), and the *Systematisation of Experiences* (Zuñiga, 1992), as well as the citizen participation programmes created in the United States during the 1960s and the international development programmes of the same era (Plottu & Plottu, 2009).

According to Jackson and Kassam (1998), participatory evaluation is

a process of self-assessment, collective knowledge production, and cooperative action in which the stakeholders in a development intervention participate substantively in the identification of the evaluation issues, the design of the evaluation, the collection and analysis of data, and the action taken as a result of the evaluation findings.

This type of evaluation seeks to give preferential treatment to the voices and decisions of the least powerful and most affected.

Different conceptual models have been proposed for analysing and understanding a participatory evaluation process. In a pioneering study, Cousins *et al.* (1996) proposed three dimensions extending along a continuum for analysing what they defined as collaborative evaluation. The first dimension corresponded to stakeholder selection, extending the range of representation from direct users to any other individual or group with a stake in the programme (e.g., designers, implementers, funders). The second dimension referred to who holds control over technical decisions, that is, whether this rests with the evaluator, the stakeholders, or both. The third dimension was the level of participation of stakeholders in the activities of the various evaluation phases, which may range from moderate to high. The results showed that the evaluator continued to maintain a dominant role and that professionals and direct users had limited participation, as was the case in traditional evaluations. Drawing on the preceding research, Weaver and Cousins (2004) reformulated one of the dimensions of their model —stakeholder selection— thereby proposing a five-dimension model:

- control over technical decisions,
- diversity among stakeholders selected to participate,
- power relations between stakeholders,
- management of the evaluation implementation, and
- depth of participation.

Having applied these dimensions to two case studies — one in a hospital in Canada and another in an educational leaders training programme in India — the authors conclude that these dimensions change over time (e.g., the nature of conflicts), that the manner in which these dimensions are expressed during the evaluation process has both intended and unintended consequences, and that these dimensions enable a critical examination of participatory processes so as to prevent them from reproducing the status quo.

In a subsequent study, Ridde (2006) sought to verify the validity of the model proposed by Weaver and Cousins (2004). To achieve this objective, the author applied the model to three case studies corresponding to the three types of participatory evaluation derived from it, pertaining to health and social service programmes implemented by NGOs in Haiti, Afghanistan, and Québec (Canada) respectively. The conclusions of this exercise indicate that the model is well grounded empirically and constitutes a useful heuristic for examining the dimensions of the participatory evaluation process, that there is a need to describe the elements of the values attributed to each dimension, and that it is pertinent to apply this model again to other cases.

In the same vein, Daigneault and Jacob (2009) set out to develop an instrument for measuring participation in evaluation. To this end, they reconceptualise the model proposed by Cousins and Whitmore (1998), defining and operationalising three dimensions considered essential in participatory evaluation: extent of involvement, diversity of participants, and

control of the evaluation process. On the basis of these three dimensions, the authors elaborate and offer a coding system that may be applied to evaluations to establish the degree to which they are participatory, recognising that this instrument still requires validation through further research. More recently, Daigneault *et al.* (2012) conducted a study to empirically validate the participatory evaluation measurement instrument using 40 cases drawn from the specialist literature on the subject. The results suggest that, notwithstanding certain limitations such as the difficulty of scoring the dimension of control of the evaluation process, the instrument is reliable and valid for measuring the three dimensions of participation.

In summary, the studies analysed demonstrate that it is possible and useful to examine the participatory evaluation process in greater depth for several reasons. In the first place, the conceptual models display good validity, focusing on substantive and distinctive aspects of participatory evaluation in contrast to non-participatory approaches. In the second place, such examination enables evaluators to plan, implement, and appraise participatory evaluations according to a clear and well-structured framework of reference. In the third place, the examination of participatory evaluations contributes to raising their quality and to clarifying their relationship with other outcomes of participatory evaluations (e.g., the empowerment of participants). That said, despite all the merits of the available models, the results obtained in these studies suggest that the participatory evaluation measurement instrument presents certain advantages related to

the use of a smaller number of dimensions (N=3) that facilitates the identification of relevant aspects of the process, the availability of a coding system that simplifies the scoring of the dimensions, and the validation it has undergone, which has corroborated its reliability and validity for these purposes.

For this reason, we shall employ the participatory evaluation measurement instrument developed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009) to examine a participatory evaluation conducted by the author of this article.

Participatory evaluation measurement instrument

The instrument comprises three dimensions considered necessary and sufficient for classifying an evaluation as participatory. The first dimension is the *extent of involvement*, which refers to the number of tasks in which stakeholders are involved, above and beyond the quality and intensity of the involvement or the control they may exercise over decision-making. This dimension is coded as follows:

|                                                                          | Level of Membership            |              |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Number of tasks in which non-evaluating stakeholders are involved</i> | <i>Intuitive label</i>         | <i>Score</i> |
| 0                                                                        | No involvement                 | .00          |
| 1                                                                        | Limited/weak involvement       | .25          |
| 2                                                                        | Moderate involvement           | .50          |
| 3                                                                        | Strong/substantial involvement | .75          |
| 4                                                                        | Complete involvement           | 1.00         |

The second dimension is the *diversity of participants*, which concerns the selection of non-evaluator stakeholders who participate in the evaluation (e.g., policymakers, implementers, practitioners, beneficiaries, civil society). This dimension is coded as follows:

|                                                                         | Level of Membership          |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| <i>Number of tasks in which non-evaluator stakeholders are involved</i> | <i>Intuitive label</i>       | <i>Score</i> |
| 0                                                                       | No diversity                 | .00          |
| 1                                                                       | Limited/weak diversity       | .25          |
| 2                                                                       | Moderate diversity           | .50          |
| 3                                                                       | Substantive/strong diversity | .75          |
| 4                                                                       | Complete diversity           | 1.00         |

The third dimension is the *control of the evaluation process*, measured in terms of how shared this is between non-evaluator stakeholders and the evaluator. This dimension is coded as follows:

| Level of Membership                                                                |       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Intuitive label                                                                    | Score |
| Exclusive control by the evaluator and/or non-participating sponsor                | .00   |
| Limited/weak control by participants                                               | .25   |
| Shared control between participants and evaluator and/or non-participating sponsor | .50   |
| Substantive/strong control by participants                                         | .75   |
| Exclusive control by participants                                                  | 1.00  |

In order to be classified as participatory through the application of this instrument, an evaluation must obtain a score equal to or greater than .25 in each of the three dimensions and therefore at the *basic level*. The calculation of the score at this basic level is straightforward: the minimum score of the secondary-level dimension determines the overall score of the participatory evaluation. For example, if an evaluation includes all categories of non-evaluator stakeholders (score of 1.00 on the diversity dimension), it will obtain an aggregate score of 1.00 only if stakeholders are

involved in all evaluation tasks (extent of involvement = 1.00), and if these stakeholders have total control over decisions in the evaluation process (control = 1.00). However, if the score for the control dimension is .50, the evaluation will obtain a score of .50 at the basic level, and if the score for the control dimension is .00, the evaluation will obtain a score of .00 at the basic level. Were this last case to apply, the evaluation could not be classified as participatory, even if it were to obtain a perfect score (1.00) on the other two dimensions.

By applying this instrument to the evaluation of the TILP that I conducted, we seek to contribute evidence towards its validation, and in particular to look retrospectively at the participation process in order to contrast the evaluator’s subjective perception with the objective measurement provided by the participation index, and thereby to establish the degree to which this evaluation has been participatory, identifying the challenges involved in deepening participation in future evaluations. We consider that these lessons are fundamental for improving the competencies of the evaluator community, and for optimising the results of participatory evaluations for the various stakeholders involved. Likewise, the findings of this exercise may contribute to advancing research in participatory evaluation.

## Description and analysis of the participatory process

In this section, we shall examine the three stages of the participatory evaluation process implemented (*modelling, qualitative study, and quantitative study*) through the lens of the three dimensions of participation proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009). At the end of this section, we shall present a summary of the results and score the participatory evaluation process according to the rubric constructed by the same authors in order to determine whether this evaluation may be classified as participatory in accordance with this instrument.

### Diversity of participants

Diversity was expressed from the outset through the inclusion of the team responsible for the programme (educator, psychologist, occupational therapist) as participants in all three stages of the evaluation process. Once public funding had been secured to carry out the evaluation, the evaluator and the Foundation's team set about the task of constituting the Evaluation Committee (EC), which had formed part of the methodological design of the project. To this end, the evaluator provided general guidance to the Foundation's team regarding

aspects such as the types of stakeholders that should form part of this body (e.g., users, policymakers, frontline professionals), whereupon the Foundation proceeded to identify and convene them. The diversity of participants increased considerably with the constitution and launch of the EC, given that it comprised representatives of all stakeholder categories in the field of disability: policymakers (e.g., ILO); central-level implementers of the state administration (e.g., Senadis); service-providing organisations (e.g., foundations, schools) and frontline professionals (e.g., specialist teachers); users (e.g., young people with disabilities) and indirect beneficiaries (e.g., family members of users); civil society (e.g., university researchers; community of solidarity organisations); and citizens (e.g., members of a disability advisory committee). This EC convened on five occasions throughout the evaluation process, which lasted one year, achieving an average attendance of 15 persons per session. Additionally, contact was made with foreign researchers specialising in self-determination in persons with disabilities in order to request feedback on specific aspects of the work in progress.

By way of summary, the analysis of the diversity dimension allows us to state that representatives of all four categories of non-evaluator stakeholders (decision-makers; implementers and practitioners; direct and indirect beneficiaries; and civil society and citizens) were involved throughout the evaluation process. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of 1.00.

## Extent of involvement

This dimension of participation was expressed from the outset in the fact that the team responsible for the programme actively participated in defining the evaluation questions (e.g., What are the main changes expected in YwID as a result of their participation in the TIL programme?), defining the type of evaluation (e.g., design, processes, and immediate results), specifying the methodological design (e.g., mixed methods), and identifying sources of data (e.g., YwID, family members, support professionals). From then on, the programme team and the EC actively participated in the following tasks across the phases of programme modelling, qualitative study, and quantitative study: selection and construction of data collection instruments; determination of when data collection would take place; interpretation of results (e.g., conditions for successful programme implementation); and formulation of recommendations (e.g., providing support to the mothers of YwID). For example, in the qualitative study, the interview guides and focus group protocols were constructed jointly with the programme team, with an emphasis on the use of language that was comprehensible and consistent with the social model of disability.

Thus, the evaluator and the Foundation's team constructed adapted guides for persons with disabilities using pictograms. Later on, the evaluator was responsible for the greater part of data collection, while one of the focus groups was co-facilitated by a

professional from the Foundation's team. Likewise, the analysis of qualitative data was carried out by the evaluation team, while its interpretation involved the evaluation team—in one meeting—and the EC at its third meeting. During these meetings, participants sought clarification regarding certain results (e.g., what are the medium-term changes?), made observations about conditions for successful programme implementation (e.g., support from schools, parental motivation, continuity of changes in YwID at home), and reflected on the implications of these results for the future of the programme (e.g., actions for improving the TIL programme).

In the quantitative study, the evaluation team was responsible for constructing an instrument to measure self-determination in the young people with disabilities participating in the programme. A first version of the self-reported questionnaire on self-determination in YwID was presented to the members of the EC at its fourth meeting, at which point they made observations regarding the questions on autonomy, participation, and self-determination, and recommended reviewing the language and either selecting or adequately preparing the person who would administer the instrument in order to facilitate participants' comprehension. In the final stage, reporting was the responsibility of the evaluation team, with review and comments provided by the programme team. Various dissemination activities were carried out. The principal one was a seminar to which members of the EC were invited, along with a broad group of individuals involved in the field of disability at the

national level. With approximately 60 attendees, a Senadis professional led a workshop introducing the concept of Independent Living, and the evaluator presented the main findings of the evaluation.

By way of summary, the analysis of the *extent of involvement* dimension allows us to state that non-evaluator stakeholders were involved to varying degrees in the four key tasks of the evaluation process: evaluation questions and methodological design; data collection and analysis; judgement and recommendations; and reporting and dissemination of results. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of 1.00.

## Control of the evaluation process

Control of the evaluation process was shared between the evaluator, the Foundation's team, and the EC throughout the evaluation process in various ways. Prior to conducting the evaluation, the programme team and the evaluator decided to work collaboratively on this evaluation, on the basis of mutual recognition and respect. Accordingly, the focus of the evaluation was established jointly by the team responsible for the programme and the evaluator. The evaluator and the Foundation's team thus worked for approximately one month through online meetings and cloud-hosted documents to prepare the application for the fund that financed the evaluation. The evaluator's principal function was to listen to the Foundation's needs and to translate these technically into evaluation questions, a

methodological design, a phased activity plan, and a budget.

The purpose of the evaluation was to improve the work carried out by the Foundation and to validate the results obtained by the programme with its various audiences, while the focus of the evaluation was programme design, implementation, and outcomes. The methodological design adopted was a qualitative/quantitative mixed-methods approach, as this allowed to first define the intervention model and to explore the key aspects of programme implementation from the perspective of stakeholders, before proceeding to a quantitative study aimed at constructing an outcome measurement instrument. In the modelling phase, the evaluation team prepared the Theory of Change for the project based on various sources of information. The resulting model was then submitted for review and validation by the programme team and the EC.

Following the second meeting with the EC, the evaluation team prepared and circulated to the EC a revised version of the Theory of Change that incorporated the corrections requested by its members. This new version of the Theory of Change was validated by the EC at its third meeting. During the qualitative study, and prior to beginning fieldwork, a presentation was made to the EC on the instruments, sample, and type of analysis of the qualitative study, at which point its members provided recommendations to ensure that data collection was appropriate for persons with disabilities (e.g., conducting interviews with YwID with the support of a parent). At the close

of this meeting, the EC validated the methodological design of the qualitative study.

As the qualitative study drew to a close, the EC held a meeting at which contradictory viewpoints were expressed regarding the role assigned by the programme to the family members of YwID who participate in the intervention. While the team in charge of the programme and a professional from an international organisation maintained that family members serve as supports for the process of independence undertaken by YwID, former programme users and persons with disabilities argued that it is typically the mothers of YwID who must support their sons and daughters but without having the support they themselves need in order to fulfil that role. This was one of the controversies that ran throughout the entire evaluation process, manifesting not only in discussions within EC meetings but also in the study results, their interpretation, and the recommendations made to the programme.

During the quantitative study, the evaluation team worked with the Foundation's team and with some members of the EC to make adjustments of varying degrees to the battery of instruments that had been constructed to measure the outcomes of the TILP (questionnaire for YwID, questionnaire for family members, and questionnaire on implementation performance), until a new version was obtained. This instrument was reviewed, given feedback on, and validated by the EC prior to being piloted in a special school in a municipality in the south-eastern area of

Santiago. Subsequently, the evaluation team and the programme team met on multiple occasions to adjust the instrument and produce a definitive version, which was adapted to a universal accessibility format by a professional volunteer of the Foundation, before being subsequently validated by the EC.

By way of summary, the analysis of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* allows us to state that non-evaluator stakeholders shared control with the evaluator over the essential tasks of the evaluation process, but that the former did not have total control over the evaluation process. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of .50.

In conclusion, the evaluation examined receives a score of 1.00 for the dimension of *diversity of participants*, 1.00 for the dimension of *extent of involvement*, and 0.50 for the dimension of *control of the evaluation process*, giving an overall score of 0.50, and may therefore be classified as a participatory evaluation in accordance with the instrument of Daigneault and Jacob (2009). Table 3 presents these results:

| Dimension/indicator                      | No. of tasks | Non-evaluator stakeholders involved | Regarding the tasks of the evaluation process |
|------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <i>Extent of involvement</i>             | 4 = 1.00     | -                                   | -                                             |
| <i>Diversity of stakeholders</i>         | -            | 4 = 1.00                            | -                                             |
| <i>Control of the evaluation process</i> | -            | -                                   | 2 = 0.50                                      |
| <b>Total score</b>                       | <b>.50</b>   |                                     |                                               |

**Table 3.** Scores for the three dimensions of the participatory evaluation examined

### Discussion

The objective of this text was to apply Daigneault and Jacob’s model (2009) to the case of a participatory evaluation in the field of disability, in order to extract lessons that may be useful for the community of evaluators wishing to adopt a participatory approach in their professional practice, and to contribute to the study of participatory evaluation.

It is important to begin by noting that we succeeded in applying the model successfully to the case under examination. Indeed, all three dimensions were employed to analyse the evaluation process through the lens of the participation of non-evaluator stakeholders. In this regard, we should note that we perceived significant differences in the application of the three dimensions. The dimension of *extent of involvement* allowed the most straightforward application, as the indicators (e.g., tasks) are clear and can be readily

identified in the evaluation process. Something similar applies to the dimension of *diversity of non-evaluator stakeholders*, which is applied through a categorisation of stakeholders (e.g., decision-makers, practitioners, users) that fits adequately with the Chilean context.

However, the application of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* was less straightforward, as the indicator for this dimension and the indicator for the dimension of *extent of involvement* partially overlap in that both focus on essential tasks. To overcome this difficulty, we shifted the focus from the tasks to the authority over decision-making (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009), and, following the approach proposed by Daigneault *et al.* (2012), we mapped certain key terms used to describe the manner in which the evaluation process under study was conducted (e.g., shared, jointly, collaboratively) in order to use these as indicators of how decisions were made regarding essential tasks. In this way, we succeeded in applying the dimension of *control of the evaluation process*,

obtaining an analysis that was both coherent and more extensive than that resulting from the application of the other two dimensions.

Another problematic aspect in the application of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* relates, in our view, to a conceptual confusion between outcomes and processes. According to the reconceptualisation proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009), control of the evaluation process will rest with those who hold formal (e.g., legal, institutional) or informal (e.g., resource mobilisation to exert influence) authority to make decisions on essential tasks. This definition of control over the evaluation process facilitates the task of constructing indicators for observing who holds control in the decision-making pertaining to various tasks throughout the evaluation process, but does not explain how those stakeholders come to gain or lose such control over decision-making. In other words, we observe the outcomes of the distribution of control over the evaluation process but do not understand the process of distributing that control in and of itself.

Our experience conducting multiple participatory evaluation processes suggests that the distribution of control during the evaluation process can be better explained by drawing on the concept of power relations between stakeholders, as done by Weaver and Cousins (2004). These authors propose a five-dimension model that conceptually distinguishes between the dimension of control over technical decisions and the dimension of power relations between stakeholders, the latter being related to indicators such as conflict

among stakeholders (Quiroz *et al.*, 2022), the capacity of these parties to generate change, and the degree of alignment of their interests.

In the case under study, one of the moments of greatest conflict arose when interpreting the results of the qualitative study regarding the relevance of the support provided by families to the young people with disabilities participating in the programme. The Foundation's management and a professional from an international body defended the position that on occasion families do not support the process of change desired by their sons or daughters with disabilities owing to a lack of commitment, while family members and persons with disabilities argued that it is typically the mothers who have to assume this role without themselves having the necessary support to do so. What is important here: the participation of stakeholders in the interpretation of results, or which interpretation of results ultimately prevails? Unlike the dimension of control over the evaluation process, which is confined to identifying who participates in the task of interpreting results, the dimension of power relations understands that what is fundamental in a participatory evaluation is which interpretation of results prevails, by virtue of the positive or negative consequences this may have for the interests, needs, and perspectives of stakeholders. For instance, maintaining that families are not committed to the process of change in their sons or daughters with disabilities, while disregarding the lack of support experienced by mother-carers, may lead to an overloading of the latter and may affect their physical and emotional wellbeing.

The preceding point also draws our attention to the role of the evaluator in participatory evaluation in the face of conflicts emerging between stakeholders in asymmetrical relationships. My experience in such situations has been, first, to recognise and make visible the existence of a conflict of interpretations; then, to facilitate the adequate expression of the perspective of both parties with regard to the conflict; and, if necessary, to defend the position of the less powerful stakeholder by means of the resources at my disposal as an evaluator. In this way, it is possible to sufficiently balance the asymmetries and generate the conditions necessary for the interpretation of the less powerful stakeholder to be able to claim, in the public sphere, a portion of reality that is observable by all parties.

This position derives from the assumption that participatory evaluation is grounded in social relations between the evaluator and stakeholders, and that the manner in which these relations unfold will have repercussions simultaneously on the process of knowledge construction (the epistemological dimension) and on that of decision-making (the political dimension) (Chouinard & Cousins, 2013). That said, the evaluator may also on occasion commit the error of exercising epistemic violence against stakeholders, by interpreting or privileging an interpretation of data that portrays the other (e.g., the beneficiary) as inferior on the basis of a power asymmetry (Teo, 2010); that is, the programme evaluator could contribute to perpetuating inequalities in the process of knowledge production and decision-making within the evaluation, by placing the interests of the study above the quality of the intervention or the wellbeing of users (Daher *et al.*, 2023).

Another interesting aspect of this exercise is that it has allowed for a contrast between the subjective perception of the participatory process and more objective data arising from the application of the instrument proposed by Daigneault *et al.* (2012). In this regard, it may be noted that the evaluator held a view of the evaluation as having been less participatory than what was revealed by the analysis of the evaluation process from the perspective of the three dimensions. Indeed, it was surprising to note the broad diversity of stakeholders who participated in this evaluation, the fact that all of these stakeholders were involved in every essential task of the evaluation process, and additionally that they achieved significant control over several of these tasks, which had not been planned for. For example, an occupational therapist from the programme team progressively acquired a more significant role, taking part in multiple activities throughout the process (e.g., information management, instrument adaptation, data collection) and becoming an authoritative voice within the evaluation.

Something similar was recorded within the Evaluation Committee, where one mother/carer and two young people with intellectual disabilities assumed a prominent role at each of the meetings, taking the floor to express their opinions, suggestions, and disagreements.

These participation practices on the part of certain stakeholders within the evaluation are consistent with a definition of participatory evaluation as one that seeks to give preferential treatment to the voices and decisions of the least powerful and most affected (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). At the same time, these

practices may be considered as forms of transformative participatory evaluation insofar as they succeed in empowering stakeholders through the recognition and respect of their knowledge in the process of knowledge construction (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). In the words of Latin American Participatory Action Research (PAR), it is possible for research to contribute to the democratisation of our societies and to the self-determination of popular groups if we cease to attribute superiority to formal knowledge and instead value popular knowledge in the analysis of the processes and structures that perpetuate oppression and inequalities (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991).

To conclude, we should like to highlight the value of the original participatory evaluation model (Weaver & Cousins, 2004), and in particular the instrument proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009) on the basis of that model. The application of this instrument to a participatory evaluation case conducted by the author of this article has shown it to be parsimonious, offering three well-operationalised dimensions of participation with a clear and coherent scoring system. In this way, any evaluator could use this instrument to examine their own practice, identify its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and plan the participation of stakeholders in future evaluation processes in a more detailed and effective manner.

## Lessons learned

Having conducted this analytical exercise on the participatory evaluation process that I had the opportunity to lead, I am in a position to share the following lessons learned.

In the first place, the instrument used to carry out this exercise has been of great value, as it has enabled me to examine the evaluation process exhaustively through the lens of three dimensions of participation, and thus to better understand the essential characteristics that distinguish a participatory evaluation from one that is not. I hope that this exercise may serve as an illustration for other evaluators so that they too may develop a more nuanced understanding of what a participatory evaluation entails, thereby increasing their capacity to plan, implement, and critically appraise the participatory evaluations for which they are responsible.

In the second place, it is possible to conclude, at least in the light of this case, that an adequate understanding of a participatory evaluation requires taking the dimension of power relations into account, and with it, the oppressive patterns that may be reproduced among the stakeholders of an evaluation process. While the dimensions of control over the evaluation process, diversity of stakeholders, and extent of involvement can capture what is essential and observable in a participatory evaluation process, the oppression experienced by the 'users' of the programmes we

evaluate remains present even when we do not ‘see’ it. In the case of the TILP, the multiple forms of violence, discrimination, injustice, and inequality experienced on a daily basis by persons with disabilities and their carers can easily be reproduced in participation processes if the evaluator is not aware of the presence of a view of disability understood as impairment and of the ideology of normality that underlies it. Thus, recognising and understanding these power asymmetries and oppressive patterns gives us the possibility of planning participation processes that can be liberating for the oppressed, and for ourselves as oppressors.

In the third place, this exercise has made me aware that a fundamental aspect of the evaluator’s role in a participatory evaluation is that of facilitating the resolution of conflicts as a driver of learning and transformation in relations between stakeholders. In this way, evaluation may contribute not only to opening spaces for participation that are meaningful for stakeholders, but also to wellbeing and the reduction of the inequalities that particularly affect oppressed groups striving for greater democratisation of our societies. That said, facilitating the resolution of conflicts is a major challenge that demands preparation on our part.

In the fourth place, I should like to note that participatory evaluation can have positive effects from the perspective of stakeholders. For instance, when the Director of the Foundation was consulted regarding the perceived benefits of her participation in this evaluation, she noted that it had served to validate what they do internally within the organisation and externally with other organisations in the field of disability; to increase institutional recognition not only as ‘implementers’ of a public programme but also as an organisation that designs and evaluates its implementation; to have a clearer, more objective, and more concrete vision of the needs of the programme and of what is required with and for persons with disabilities; and to establish focal points for continuous improvement.

In sum, it seems important to close this article by reaffirming the fundamental significance of the evaluation community continuing to learn and conduct research on the participatory evaluations taking place in the region, and of the knowledge produced being used to train colleagues, implementers, decision-makers, and citizens in the theory and practice of participatory evaluation.

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