

**Including minorities in education: from access to the perspective of
participation in decision-making processes.
Reflections and challenges**

**L'inclusione delle minoranze nell'educazione: dall'accesso alla
prospettiva della partecipazione nei processi decisionali.
Riflessioni e sfide**

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Abstract

The inclusion of minorities in educational contexts requires further reflection on how to manage the processes that determine policies, investments, and best practices. The participation of minorities at all levels of the decision-making processes is crucial to achieving effective inclusion, in order to emancipate them from the reductive view of integration or mere access. In the present-day scenario, it is important and necessary to focus on who holds a key power role in transforming and changing the outcomes of participation in decision-making processes: policy-makers and decision-makers. They are the ones who have the power to decide at various levels. The aim of this paper is to reflect on some key aspects that can pave the way to the participation of minorities in decision-making processes. In the first part of the paper, the concept of participation and its applications in decision-making processes will be discussed to outline rigorous theoretical frameworks. In the second part, the focus will shift onto how scientific research can support policy-makers and decision-makers in meeting the challenge of building participatory decision-making processes.

Keywords: minorities inclusion, minorities participation, participatory decision-making process, educational systems, community based participatory research.

Sommario

L'inclusione delle minoranze nei contesti educativi richiede delle riflessioni su come gestire i processi che determinano le policies, gli investimenti e le best practices. La partecipazione delle minoranze a tutti i livelli dei processi decisionali è cruciale per raggiungere un'effettiva inclusione finalizzata a emancipare le minoranze dalla visione riduttiva dell'integrazione e dell'accesso. Nel presente scenario storico è importante e necessario focalizzarsi su chi ha un ruolo chiave in termini di potere per trasformare e cambiare gli esiti della partecipazione nei processi decisionali: i *policy-maker* e i *decision-maker*. Tali attori, infatti, detengono il potere di decidere a vari livelli. L'obiettivo di questo articolo è riflettere su alcuni aspetti chiave che determinano la partecipazione delle minoranze nei processi decisionali. Nella prima parte dell'articolo verrà analizzato il concetto di partecipazione e le sue implicazioni nei processi decisionali per definire un rigoroso framework teorico. Nella seconda parte si focalizzerà l'analisi su come la ricerca scientifica può supportare i *decision-* e *policy-makers* nell'accogliere la sfida di costruire processi decisionali di tipo partecipativo.

Parole chiave: inclusione delle minoranze, partecipazione delle minoranze, processi decisionali partecipativi, sistemi educativi, community based participatory research.

Introduction

The inclusion of minorities in educational systems – both formal and nonformal – is an issue that plays a central role in our societies. The most important international Institutions believe that inclusion should be at the centre of society's attention and that laws and recommendations should be established in order to support and, in some cases, positively enforce the implementation of the inclusion of minorities at all levels of society. Nevertheless, it is evident that the inclusion of minorities is a global goal that is

far from being achieved. In this regard, the UN 2030 Agenda focuses on this, especially in Goals 4 and 10. European Union countries are not exempt from the urgency to maintain a constant focus on minorities, their inclusion and protection from discrimination, and racism in education. Although the European Union can boast one of the most advanced legal systems in the world, important and critical issues remain, and many challenges are still to be met. Among the most significant challenges there is the need to interpret the inclusion of minorities in education within a perspective of real participation by abandoning a mere logic of access. In its *Education 2030 Framework for Action* (2015), UNESCO emphasises this important shift in perspective:

to achieve inclusive education, policies should aim to transform educational systems so they can better respond to learners' diversity and needs. This is key in fulfilling the right to education with equality, and it is related not only to access, but also to participation and achievement of all students, with special attention to those who are excluded, vulnerable or at risk of being marginalized (p. 44).

Access recognises the right of opportunity, while participation grants the right to inclusion and equality. The participation of minorities at all levels of the decision-making processes is a key factor to achieve effective inclusion, in order to emancipate them from the reductive view of integration or mere access. This means that minorities should not be regarded as an *exclusive bubble* to be treated in a special manner in educational contexts but should be recognised from an intercultural perspective of inclusion in which dialogue, exchange, and interaction become the focal points for all stakeholders and not just minorities (Santerini, 2017; Portera, 2022).

In order to achieve real participation, children and youth need contexts that are structured on a perspective of inclusion and allow teachers, educators, social workers, etc. to constantly adopt best practices. Responsibility cannot be delegated only to education professionals, but it should be shared with all the stakeholders in the education community. The subject of minorities' participation is extremely complex, and can be investigated through a variety of aspects, none of which is ever exhaustive by itself. Among all these aspects, it is important and necessary to focus on who holds a key power role in transforming and changing the outcomes of participation and participatory processes: policy-makers and decision-makers. They are the ones who have the power to decide at various levels. International Institutions actually provide policy-makers with a key role in ensuring, improving and implementing the participation of minorities in educational decision-making processes. Their ability to build participatory decision-making processes can substantially affect the educational contexts of children's and young people's lives. The importance of this issue, which often remains on the sidelines of pedagogical reflection, encourages further reflection in order to identify educational priorities and consequently support decision- and policy-makers in decision-making systems. That is why this paper aims to reflect on some key aspects that can affect the building of minority participatory processes in decision-making processes, and whose impacts can spill over into formal and nonformal educational contexts. This paper opens with the definition of minorities and how it can be expanded through the intersectional perspective, in order to include the complexity approach that is needed to interpret this phenomenon in educational systems. It will then reflect on the concept of participation and its applications in decision-making processes. This paper will subsequently close with some reflections and practical methods deriving from scientific research, whose contribution can support policy-makers and decision-makers in meeting the challenge of building participatory decision-making processes.

1. Defining minorities and expanding the view on complexity through the intersectional perspective

There is no unanimous definition of minority (UN, 2010). The United Nations Minorities Declaration of 1992 «in its article 1 refers to minorities as based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and provides that States should protect their existence» (UN, 2010, p. 2). In this declaration, minorities are defined according to nationality, language, or religion. With the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of The European Union* (2000), but especially with the *European Parliament resolution on the protection of minorities and anti-discrimination policies in an enlarged Europe* of 2005, the European Union broadened the interpretation of the concept of minorities to also include, for example, age, sexual orientation, gender, or specific ethnic groups such as Roma. However, each element in every category is at risk of being reductive unless it is included in a broader paradigm relating the individual to the rest of society. According to Capotorti (1979), minorities can be defined as

a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language (p. 568).

A minority group can also be defined as such in relation to several categories and elements that, as a whole, can result in conditions of exclusion and discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). That is why reductive interpretations may not include the aspects of complexity that often cause discrimination, a lack of rights, and racism for minorities. In educational systems, especially formal ones such as schools, minorities have different experiences that mainly depend on the interaction within the educational contexts and what they offer in terms of opportunities or risks. Discrimination, racism, marginalization are in fact the outcome of different elements present in the educational social context of life. The phenomenon of the inclusion of minorities in educational systems requires adopting a perspective of complexity to interpret it in all its nuances, in order to implement the most appropriate socio-educational strategies. Among the most significant perspectives in the literature supporting complexity in the interpretation of this phenomenon, there is certainly the intersectionality paradigm.

The intersectionality paradigm

The term *intersectionality* was first coined in 1989 by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, an African-American scholar of Women's Studies, and Critical Race Theory. She began to analyse the phenomenon of discrimination against black women starting by investigating social discrimination phenomena of those years. The term was coined by Crenshaw (1989) by studying a court ruling in which a clear situation of unequal interpretation emerged: the status of discrimination in relation not only to gender, but also, and more importantly, to skin colour was not considered. According to the intersectionality paradigm, if we analyse a phenomenon of inequality and discrimination based only on one specific category (e.g., gender), we cannot determine the true characteristics of this phenomenon. To fully understand them, we have to combine the main category (e.g., skin colour, religion, etc.) with other categories, and focus on the outcomes of these

intersections (Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005). Crenshaw started observing that the discrimination against white women is different from the one experienced by black women and is also different from discrimination against black men (Crenshaw, 1989; Marchetti, 2013). The path traced by intersectionality studies concerns the analysis of what occurs, in terms of disparity and inequality, at the intersection of two or more different social categories and

describes the position of an individual within society at the intersection of several categories – which do not cumulate, but interact with each other –, thus characterising his/her personal daily experience in ways that are qualitatively different from the experience of those identifying with or being defined by only one category (Bello, 2020, p. 64).

However, categories should not be limited to gender and skin colour, but, as defined by Leslie McCall (2005), interpreted from a complexity perspective to include the multiple dimensions of social life (McCall, 2005). The intersectional analysis is determined by the intersection of gender, skin colour, citizenship, age, area of residence, profession, etc., and by the evaluation of possible interactions created at these intersections (McCall, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989). Furthermore, there is another key aspect to consider when adopting the intersectionality perspective, which is particularly relevant in the inclusion of minorities: the relationship between individual(s) and Institutions. Ange-Marie Hancock (2007) explains how this relationship is indispensable because Institutions, politics and policy-makers play a fundamental role in the power dynamics of processes of inequality, disparity and discrimination, and also of their potential deconstruction (Hancock, 2007). This is the *intercategorical approach* as defined by McCall:

the intercategorical approach (also referred to as the categorical approach) begins with the observation that there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the centre of analysis. The main task of the categorical approach is to explicate those relationships, and doing so requires the provisional use of categories. [...] The categorical approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on complexities within single social groups, single categories, or both (McCall, 2005, pp. 1785-1786).

Therefore, it is crucial to interpret social categories according to a multifaceted interaction that is not limited to a narrow and strongly predetermined set of categories. We have to constantly analyse the individual-society-Institution circles to identify the characteristics of the power relations that are generated (Zoletto, 2020).

The intersectionality paradigm is particularly useful in evaluating and better understanding what elements allow to influence the promotion of minority participation in decision-making processes that concern them. First of all, the intersectionality perspective reminds us that often the minority status is not determined by a single identity element, or even by the sum of a few categories. Rather, as authoritatively introduced by Crenshaw's studies, it is the outcome of intersections that defines the consequences of minorities' life in society. Moreover, as argued by McCall (2005) and Hancock (2007), interactions among minority groups in different social contexts can determine the outcome of real participation, especially in the relationship with policy-makers, who, as explained below, have a key role in recognising the right to participation.

Minorities' participation: the interpretation from the theoretical perspective

In order to define the characteristics of participation, it might be useful to start with the concept of inclusion. The *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue* (COE, 2008) defines it

as a two-sided process and as the capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. It encompasses all aspects of social development and all policies. It requires the protection of the weak, as well as the right to differ, to create and to innovate [...]. Strategies for integration must necessarily cover all areas of society, and include social, political and cultural aspects (p. 14).

Inclusion therefore encompasses and requires participation. In the White Paper's definition, participation in social life can be interpreted as society's ability to offer organized areas of citizenship, where a minority can integrate without suffering from brutal exploitation of its members (Belvisi, 2012). To maintain their identity and fight social exclusion, people from minority groups must actively participate in public affairs and all dimensions of the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the nation in which they live (UN, 2010). However, participation assumes a decisive role when it acknowledges the possibility of decision-making power. As a matter of fact, international Institutions in regulatory frameworks and recommendations consistently advocate the minorities participation in decision-making processes, especially when these processes directly affect them. The United Nations Minorities Declaration (1992) recognises this as a right in Article 2: «The right to participate effectively in decisions which affect them on the national and regional levels». The *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life & Explanatory Note* issued by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in 1999 are essential in understanding how to interpret representation.

«States should ensure that opportunities exist for minorities to have an effective voice at the level of the central government, including through special arrangements as necessary» (OSCE, 1999, p. 8). These may include, depending upon the circumstances:

- special representation for national minorities, such as a designated number of seats in one or both chambers of parliament or in parliamentary committees, as well as other guaranteed participation rights;
- formal or informal agreements that provide seats on the supreme or constitutional court, lower courts, nominated advisory groups, and other high-level organs to members of national minorities;
- methods to ensure minority interests are taken into account within relevant ministries, such as staff members who address minority concerns or the issuance of standing directives (OSCE, 1999).

However, it should be pointed out that the word *participation* conveys a lack of clarity and lends itself to a lot of misunderstandings (Lansdown, 2005; Arnstein, 1969; Hart, 2004). The process of participation can be interpreted as manipulative or contradictory through the instrumentalization of a process that should be *bottom up*, but the process is actually implemented within top-down logics (Arnstein, 1969). The participation of minorities in decision-making processes can be implemented to share decision-making power with minorities and delegate it to them (Shier, 2001). The subject of participation

necessarily requires reflecting on the asymmetry of power that is generated from majority-minority group relations. If the majority group holding power decides not to delegate it or not to share it with minorities, it is deciding for them without considering their voice. Simply *taking part in* or *acting on behalf of* is not participation. Participation can be achieved when there is a process of sharing decisions that concern minorities and their life within the community (Hart, 2004). Mere representation or mere listening may not also include the recognition of decision-making power, which is instead central to ensuring effective participation (Stojanović, 2014).

The issue of quotas or representation is often used as a solution to the recognition of participation. In these cases, the right to be part of a decision-making group is granted, or the voice of the minority is heard without actually including the perspective offered in the final decisions. Sharing decision-making power is what reduces the dynamics of domination (Cesareo, 2002) between majority and minority groups, but it is also the level that is often most difficult to put into practice.

Therefore, due to its complexity, participation does not mirror a one-size-fits-all approach, but includes different levels and nuances. In order to have a precise point of reference that explains what participation is and its different levels are, it is possible to refer to the *Ladder of Citizen Participation* by Sherry R. Arnstein (1969). Although dated, this scale is still particularly relevant today and especially appropriate to reflect on the participation of minorities in decision-making processes. The scale very clearly defines what participation is not and especially the various levels that are possible and achievable (Fig. 1).

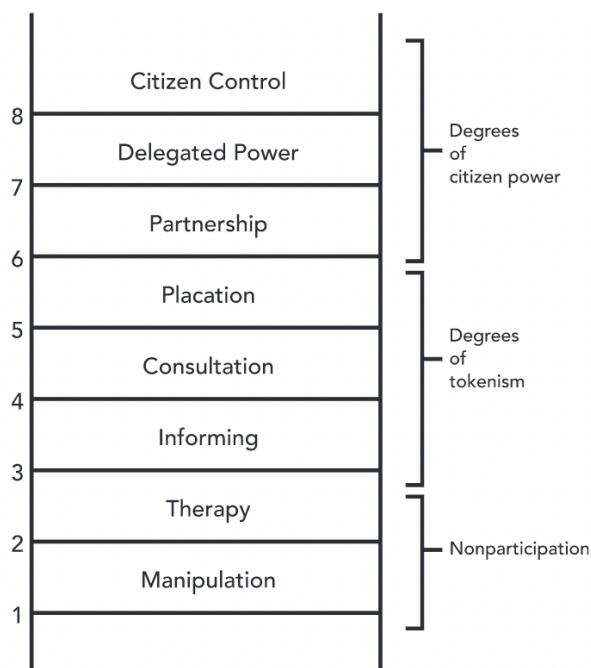


Fig. 1: *Ladder of Citizen Participation* (Arnstein, 2019, p. 26).

Arnstein's ladder consists of eight rungs in ascending order:

1. *Manipulation*: «signifies the distortion of participation into a public relations vehicle by power holders. This [is an] illusory form of *participation*» (Ivi, p. 26);

2. *Therapy*: «the objective is not to enable people to participate in planning or conducting programs, but to enable powerholders to “educate” or “cure” the participants» (Ivi, p. 25);

3. *Informing*: The most crucial first step toward legal citizen engagement can be educating citizens about their rights, obligations, and options. But all too often, the focus

is on a one-way information flow, from officials to citizens, with no channel offered for feedback and no power for discussion. At this level, a lot of tools are used to inform citizens without providing them with the chance to reply (Arnstein, 2019), like, for example, websites, newsletters, articles, etc;

4. *Consultation*: Requesting citizens' opinions and providing them with information can both be acceptable first steps toward their full participation. But if this step of the ladder is still a sham if consulting them is not done in conjunction with other forms of engagement because it provides no guarantee that their concerns and suggestions will be taken into account (Arnstein, 2019);

5. *Placation*: «citizens begin to have some degree of influence though tokenism is still apparent. [...] at this point, citizens may realize that they have once again extensively “participated” but have not profited beyond the extent the powerholders decide to placate them» (Ivi, p. 28);

6. *Partnership*: power is redistributed through negotiations between citizens and those in positions of power. They agree to delegate planning and decision-making duties to each other through forums like joint policy boards, planning committees, and dispute resolution procedures (Arnstein, 2019);

7. *Delegated Power*: Citizens can obtain dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program through negotiations with public officials (Arnstein, 2019);

8. *Citizen Control*: «it is very important that the rhetoric not be confused with intent. People are simply demanding that degree of power (or control) [...] citizens obtain the majority of decision-making seats, or full managerial power» (Ivi, p. 32).

The above scale has the merit of helping to understand what participation is not and when it is being used manipulatively. Reducing the concept of participation to representation or accessibility means continuing to perpetuate the dynamics of power asymmetry and using participation dysfunctionally and manipulatively. This issue becomes even more controversial with minorities because involvement in decision-making processes often ends up at the first rungs of the ladder.

2. The participation of minorities in decision-making processes. The role and function of decision-makers, and policy-makers

Among all the stakeholders involved, policy- and decision-makers have a key role in determining the status of minority inclusion. All international Institutions constantly stress the importance of policy and policy-makers (UN, 2010; UNESCO, 2017; OECD, 2009). When we reflect on the participation of minorities in decision-making processes, it is crucial to understand what decision-makers and policy-makers can do to ensure their participation. In education, the aspects of urgency and attention are manifold, starting from the idea that «every learner matters and matters equally» (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12). This means that policy-makers need to be constantly committed to drive educational systems – both formal and nonformal – towards reducing barriers in order to achieve: protection from discrimination, exclusion and racism; promotion and protection of identity and cultural specificities; effective and full participation in school and territorial community life (UN, 2010); intercultural dialogue (Portera, 2022); equity and equality¹ (UNESCO, 2020); empowerment of marginalized groups; and full quality learning and educational experience for everyone (UNESCO, 2017).

Legislative frameworks and policies may be the most powerful tools for working on inclusion in educational systems. Managing the process through which policy-makers enact policy and regulatory references is the key factor to ensure and implement minority participation. Of course, expecting participatory processes in all decision-making

processes may be utopian, but when decisions are made on topical and pivotal issues that mainly affect minorities, building participatory decision-making processes seems to be a vital and ambitious goal to achieve. Impacts on educational systems and society can be profound and should feature in the list of priorities of decision-makers, and policy-makers.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OPEN AND INCLUSIVE POLICY MAKING

OECD countries recognise that open and inclusive policy making increases government accountability, broadens citizens' influence on decisions and builds civic capacity. At the same time, it improves the evidence base for policy making, reduces implementation costs and taps wider networks for innovation in policy making and service delivery.

These Guiding Principles are designed to help governments strengthen open and inclusive policy making as a means to improving their policy performance and service delivery.

1. **Commitment:** Leadership and strong commitment to open and inclusive policy making is needed at all levels – politicians, senior managers and public officials.
2. **Rights:** Citizens' rights to information, consultation and public participation in policy making and service delivery must be firmly grounded in law or policy. Government obligations to respond to citizens must be clearly stated. Independent oversight arrangements are essential to enforcing these rights.
3. **Clarity:** Objectives for, and limits to, information, consultation and public participation should be well defined from the outset. The roles and responsibilities of all parties must be clear. Government information should be complete, objective, reliable, relevant, easy to find and understand.
4. **Time:** Public engagement should be undertaken as early in the policy process as possible to allow a greater range of solutions and to raise the chances of successful implementation. Adequate time must be available for consultation and participation to be effective.
5. **Inclusion:** All citizens should have equal opportunities and multiple channels to access information, be consulted and participate. Every reasonable effort should be made to engage with as wide a variety of people as possible.
6. **Resources:** Adequate financial, human and technical resources are needed for effective public information, consultation and participation. Government officials must have access to appropriate skills, guidance and training as well as an organisational culture that supports both traditional and online tools.
7. **Co-ordination:** Initiatives to inform, consult and engage civil society should be co-ordinated within and across levels of government to ensure policy coherence, avoid duplication and reduce the risk of "consultation fatigue." Co-ordination efforts should not stifle initiative and innovation but should leverage the power of knowledge networks and communities of practice within and beyond government.
8. **Accountability:** Governments have an obligation to inform participants how they use inputs received through public consultation and participation. Measures to ensure that the policy-making process is open, transparent and amenable to external scrutiny can help increase accountability of, and trust in, government.
9. **Evaluation:** Governments need to evaluate their own performance. To do so effectively will require efforts to build the demand, capacity, culture and tools for evaluating public participation.
10. **Active citizenship:** Societies benefit from dynamic civil society, and governments can facilitate access to information, encourage participation, raise awareness, strengthen citizens' civic education and skills, as well as to support capacity-building among civil society organisations. Governments need to explore new roles to effectively support autonomous problem-solving by citizens, CSOs and businesses.

Fig. 2: Guiding Principles for Open and Inclusive Policy-Making (OECD, 2009, p. 6).

For policy-makers and decision-makers, building participatory processes is not easy and, above all, methods and good practices are needed to implement them and recognise full participation. A particularly comprehensive document that can serve as a point of reference is *Focus on Citizens. Public Engagement for Better Policy and Services*, edited by the OECD in 2009. Although it does not focus specifically on minorities, it proves particularly useful in framing the characteristics of inclusive policy-making, and, more importantly, it defines the objectives that policy-makers should pursue in order to effectively manage participatory processes (Fig. 2).

There are many connections between the above OECD guiding principles and Arnstein's ladder, especially the rung recognising participation and highlighting the level of complexity required to implement and manage participatory processes that are effectively inclusive. Meeting this difficult challenge is the responsibility of local and territorial governments, which, being able to work on a smaller scale than national governments, have the opportunity to achieve a more effective management.

Additional aspects highlighted in the OECD guiding principles include the importance of working on engaging people in participating in decision-making processes with a special focus on two categories:

1. «people who are willing but unable» (OECD, 2009, p. 3);
2. «people who are able but unwilling» (*Ibidem*).

The issue of participation in policy-making processes concerns not only minorities, but also the entire citizenry. Working to ensure that everyone is recognised and granted the right to participate in policy-making processes means implementing strategies and solutions to reach those who, for different reasons, do not have access to participatory processes. This issue is even more burning for minorities. Policy-making processes, as well as their outcomes, often do not include the perspective of those who are the primary beneficiaries of decisions. The major risk is that power asymmetries are perpetuated, and the majority group continues to make decisions *for and above* the minority groups (Freire, 2018). In decision-making processes concerning educational systems, this means running the risk of adopting regulations and procedures, as well as setting up projects and financial investments, without including the perspective of minorities. This does not mean that minorities should be treated as a *special group*: the approach has to be reversed to include an intercultural perspective (Portera, 2022; Zoletto, 2020; Fiorucci, 2020). Also, the agency of minorities, which have been removed over time, need to be recognised, as it is that removal that has determined this status over time (Sen, 2010). Moreover, even when issues in decision-making processes do not directly concern them, minorities should not be excluded, but an inclusive approach should be adopted, in order to ensure that minorities are always part of society and of the educational system.

3. The role of scientific research and researchers in supporting participatory processes

Scientific research can have a significant and strategic role in supporting policy-makers and decision-makers in implementing participatory decision-making processes. The role of research can also be considered within a shared social responsibility that researchers should assume to spread knowledge and best practices (Talbert, 2019). Based on all the reflections provided so far, the following priorities for research can be identified:

1. investigate the phenomenon of minorities participation in decision- and policy-making processes concerning education;

2. identify good practices that support policy-makers in building participatory processes;
3. understand how the minorities participation in decision-making processes can affect school systems and improve minority inclusion.

Scientific research is also facing the challenge of trying to understand how research processes can be effectively participative. Indeed, the risk for researchers is to investigate social phenomena regarding minorities and their characteristics by limiting or even excluding the possibility that minority representatives can have access, and contribute, to the entire research process. All the above-mentioned aspects would require adequate and in-depth discussion. In this paper, we aim to focus on the methodological approaches that enable researchers to undertake participatory research. To this effect, applied scientific research, especially in human sciences, could provide rigorous approaches that recognise participatory processes of involvement and participation where they are active players. To understand how scientific research can support participatory processes, it is important to reflect on research methods. Among all the research methods suggested by the relevant literature, one method in particular applies the theoretical principles identified so far: the Community Based Participatory Research method.

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

The CBPR method is particularly interesting because it was developed in the field of health disparities research to improve the involvement of minorities and vulnerable groups in health prevention and the treatment of chronic and degenerative diseases, especially in the United States. (De Las Nueces *et al.*, 2012; Schultz *et al.*, 2009; Israel *et al.*, 2013). The continued exclusion, or marginalization, of specific groups from health issues has led researchers to develop a rigorous method that focuses on the participation of minorities throughout the research process. CBPR

is an approach to research that takes community involvement beyond the subject participant level. Studies employing CBPR engage community members not as subjects, but rather as partners, involving the community in every stage of research, ideally from identifying the study question at hand, to developing an intervention, recruiting participants, collecting data, interpreting research findings, delivering interventions, and disseminating results (De Las Nueces *et al.*, 2012, p. 1364).

The key feature of CBPR is recognising participants as *partners*. This leads to a radical shift in perspective and in the role assigned to participants, because it establishes equality in the power sharing of the decision-making levels of research (Israel *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, CBPR is based on the concept of *community* (Fawcett *et al.*, 2003) as a group of members who share a common vision and mission (Schultz *et al.*, 2009).

Schultz *et al.* identified a set of principles inspired by other scholars and research on this topic. The principles in the table below (Tab. 1) can also be interpreted as steps in the research process, and are particularly effective in understanding the methodological framework and management process in CBPR. Some CBPR scholars (Yonas *et al.*, 2013) have also analysed the theoretical framework offered by Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation by linking it with *Continuum of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow*, co-authored by the Clinical and Translational Science Award Consortium and the Community Engagement Key Function Task Force on the Principles of Community Engagement (2011).

Core CBPR principles	How the principles can be applied
Recognises community as a unit of identity.	Local-level groups and research partners [identify] a common vision and mission together to target placed-based community efforts.
Builds on strengths and resources within the community.	Resources [can be allocated] through mini-grants to grassroots and community-level organisations to affect change and improvement.
Facilitates a collaborative, equitable partnership in all phases of the effort.	Identification of the vision, mission, objectives and community changes [to be sought occurs] through collaborative planning between community residents, organisations, and the research partner.
Promotes co-learning and capacity building among all partners.	Success stories and data [are shared] with partners during coalition meetings. Data are reviewed by the Steering Committee to assess progress and make adjustments.
Emphasises local relevance of public health problems and ecological perspectives that recognise and attend to the determinants of health.	Action planning [can be conducted] to promote changes in the environment at multiple levels (individuals and relationships, organisational, community, broader system). Efforts [shall be focused] on implementing community-level programs, policies and practices that [address] risk/protective factors and broader determinants.
Disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners and involves all partners in the dissemination process.	The project [enables] communications between local partners through an online documentation system [allowing] instant sharing of data about change and improvement in reducing chronic disease. Newsletters, conference presentations, and reports [are] all developed collaboratively between members of the coalition and the research partner and disseminated through the coalition.

Tab. 1: CBPR principles and how they can be applied (Schultz *et al.*, 2009, p. 49)².

The Continuum of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow can be credited with broadening Arnstein’s vision by focusing on flows of community involvement. It is also particularly interesting because it specifically defines the «structures for equitable decision-making» (Yonas *et al.*, 2013, p. 100) especially regarding the involvement of minorities and marginalized groups (Fig. 3).

CBPR is a research method with considerable potential to offer divergent but rigorous approach aimed at implementing knowledge and best practices to support policy-makers. Its methodological application requires rigour and ethics from researchers and may encounter significant obstacles and difficulties because the process must be managed with full and complete participation. CBPR is obviously not the only productive and effective research tool or approach.

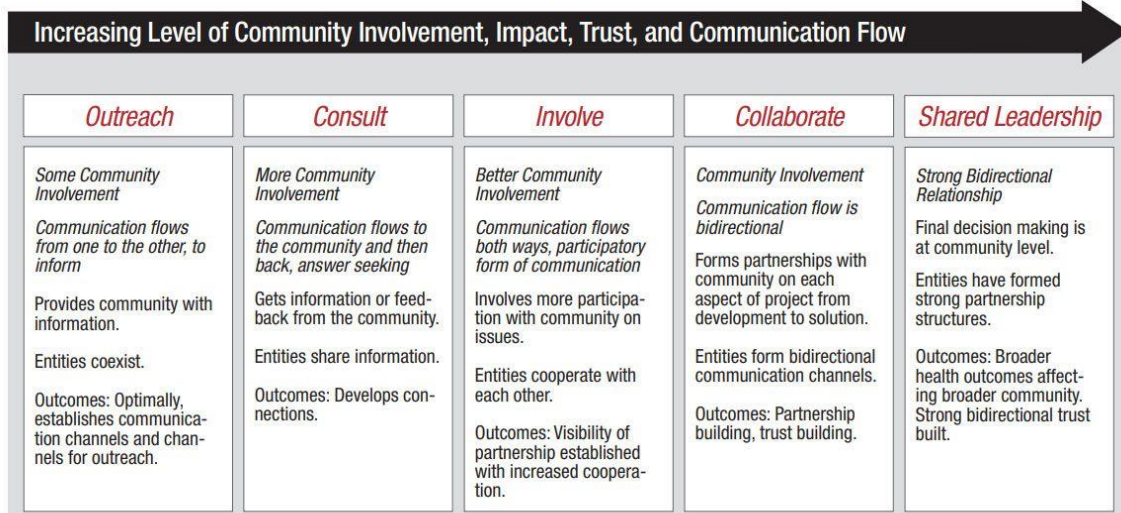


Fig. 3: Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust, and Communication Flow (Israel et al., 2013, p. 100).

For example, all participatory research methods, such as Participatory Action Research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019; Akom, 2011), can offer broad uses in support of greater inclusion of minorities in policy-making processes, but it is important to understand that CBPR can be more useful to researchers as well as practitioners in building processes in decision-making pathways where the participation of minorities is crucial. The aspects to specifically focus on are:

- the participatory process including the full participation of all stakeholders involved from beginning to end;
- the recognition of the role of the stakeholders involved as partners;
- the decision-making and co-research power shared with all stakeholders, especially with the representatives of minorities;
- the recognition of minorities' empowerment;
- the spillover effects on referral systems;
- the reduction of issues related to *professional strangers* (Merton, 1970), i.e. the risk of not having researchers representing minorities;
- the ability of the process to generate immediate spillovers to reference systems;
- the increase of the citizenry agency.

Conclusion

Participation of minorities in decision- and policy-making processes concerning education can be considered an achievement, but also an urgency. To ensure that children and youth belonging to minorities or vulnerable groups benefit from full inclusion in educational systems, the stakeholders holding decision-making power should conform to norms, adopt policies and best practices, and recognise that minority representatives should participate in decision-making processes. The reflections provided in this paper suggest what principles should be followed and implemented. International Institutions, scholars, and researchers define priorities and fields of action. However, social scenarios may differ, and the participation of minorities in decision-making processes is marginal, often used manipulatively, and still in need of a real application. Therefore, a change in cultural approach seems necessary to lead policy- and decision-makers to acknowledge the importance of participation and meet the challenge of sharing decision-making power. Based on all the reflections that have emerged in this paper, it seems important to identify

some priorities that concern first and foremost decision-makers, but also researchers, teachers, and educators who, despite having less decision-making power, can determine the outcome of the participation challenge. The following table (Tab. 2) shows the potential challenges and priorities for the different stakeholders.

Teachers, educators, social workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure participatory processes for children and youth that recognise them the full right to participate in the educational processes which affect them (Premoli, 2012); - to include the representatives of minorities in parent representative committees and recognise them co-responsibility for decision-making; - to develop internal policies to include minorities in decision-making processes; - to train training professionals to manage participatory processes with children and adults.
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To investigate the issues relating to the participation of minorities in decision-making processes; - to include minorities in the research process and not regard them only as an <i>object of investigation</i> (e.g. co-validate research questions and data with them); - to test and implement participatory research processes concerning educational systems; - to disseminate scientific results beyond the academic environment (citizens, policy-makers, etc.).
Decision-makers and policy-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To test urban and territorial participatory processes projects to include minorities in decision-making processes concerning education; - to find connections with scientific research and Universities to get support in managing participatory processes; - to create information and training paths to disseminate a culture of participation in decision-making processes; - to build specific policies, best practices, and toolkits for policy-makers concerning the participation of minorities in decision-making processes.

Tab. 2: Potential challenges and priorities for stakeholders (author's elaboration).

The above challenges and priorities are by no means exhaustive, rather they are intended as a thought-provoking stimulus to implement best practices and bring about culture changes in our society, which in turn will allow to generate social spillovers on the issue of the inclusion of minorities in educational systems.

Notes

¹ It is important to define the concepts of Equity and Equality. To this effect, we refer to the definitions provided in the *Global Education Monitoring Report: 2020 Latin America and the Caribbean report - inclusion and education: all means all*, Paris, Unesco: «Equality is a state of affairs (what): a result that can be observed in inputs, outputs or outcomes, for example achieving gender equality. Equity is a process (how): actions aimed at ensuring equality» (p. 15).

² The contents of this table replicate the contents of the table on page 49 of the article titled *Implementing Community-Based Participatory Research with Two Ethnic Minority Communities in Kansas City, Missouri* by Schultz *et al.* (2009), published by the International Journal of Migration, Health and Social Care, Volume 5, Issue I. Please note that the verb tenses and the title of the second column have been adapted to the contents of this article.

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