Systematisation of experiences within the framework of the pedagogical approach towards territorial development: a contribution to action research from the Latin American tradition

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Abstract This article attempts to link different approaches to action research by sharing a concept that holds an important place in the processes related to participatory action research in Latin America. Such a concept is systematisation.

In Latin America, the framework of the systematisation of experiences indicates that it is a particular research method generated from popular education and social work, and that it shares its commitments regarding social transformation. Systematisation arises as a proposal that is based on and learns from accumulated experiences, along with new forms of participatory research and evaluation. Thus, one of the ever-present challenges is to define knowledge production methodologies appropriate to the way of thinking and acting of those who depart from practice, from action (Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular CEPEP, 2010).

Within this framework, the concept of systematisation and its challenges in the specific context of territorial development in Argentina are addressed in order to integrate new learning into action research debates, not only in Latin America, but also outside its boundaries. To this purpose, we rely on the lessons learned by a team from the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (UTN) from Argentina based in Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) working for the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis. This team has been interacting with action research teams from the Basque Country (Spain) and the University of Agder (Norway), a space where the systematisation of experiences has emerged as a relevant and unknown methodological element in the aforementioned European contexts.

Keywords: Systematisation; Action research; Territorial development; lessons learned

Sistematización de experiencias en el marco del enfoque pedagógico del desarrollo territorial: un aporte a la investigación acción desde la tradición Latino Americana

Resumen En este artículo se intenta construir un puente entre distintas aproximaciones a la investigación acción compartiendo un concepto que ocupa un lugar importante en los procesos vinculados a la investigación acción participativa en América Latina. Este concepto es el de la sistematización.

En América Latina, el marco del trabajo de sistematización de experiencias indica que es una manera particular de investigar, generada desde la educación popular y el trabajo social y que comparte sus compromisos en torno de la transformación social. La sistematización surge como una propuesta que recupera y aprende de las experiencias acumuladas, junto con las nuevas formas de investigación y evaluación participativa. Es así que uno de los desafíos

siempre presentes es el de definir metodologías de producción de conocimiento adecuadas a la forma de pensar y actuar de aquellos y aquellas que parten de la práctica, de la acción (Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular CEPEP, 2010).

En este marco, se aborda el concepto de sistematización y sus retos en el contexto específico del desarrollo territorial en Argentina con el objeto de integrar nuevos aprendizajes en los debates de la investigación acción no sólo dentro, sino también fuera de América Latina. Para ello nos basamos en los aprendizajes de un equipo de la Universidad Tecnológica Nacional de Argentina (UTN) con sede en Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) desde el Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis. Este equipo ya viene interactuando con equipos de investigación acción del País Vasco (España) y la Universidad de Agder (Noruega), espacio donde la sistematización de experiencias ha emergido como un elemento metodológico relevante y desconocido en los contextos europeos citados.

Palabras claves: Sistematización; Investigación Acción; Desarrollo Territorial; aprendizajes

Introduction

Action research has often been defined as the convergence of various approaches that often even have different epistemological bases (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). Among them, participatory action research is widely recognised in the way it has been developed in Latin America. The authors who have been most referenced in this area are Paulo Freire (1996) and Orlando Fals Borda (2009). However, in publications that cover action research at the international level and are frequently published in English, Latin American experiences are not as present as one would expect given this referentiality. Language can be one of the reasons, since frequently, the people involved in these processes are connected to literature in Spanish and English, that are disseminated in parallel circuits.

In this article, we want to link, in a publication aimed at readers of English, different approaches to action research by sharing a methodology that holds an important place in the processes related to participatory action research in Latin America, yet it is not mentioned, for example, in the Encyclopedia of Action Research (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Such a concept is systematisation.

The interest that this concept may raise outside Latin America is derived from the lessons learned by a team from the Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (UTN) from Argentina based in Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) and the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales Praxis with teams of action research from the Basque Country (Spain) and the University of Agder (Norway) (Costamagna and Larrea, 2015; Canto and Estensoro, 2020). In these international collaborations, the systematisation of experiences has emerged as a relevant methodological element specifically used in the Latin American context and whose equivalent was not easy to find in the European experiences which were analysed. Consequently, this article addresses the concept of systematisation and its challenges in the specific context of territorial development in Argentina, in order to integrate new learnings into action research debates not only within, but also outside Latin America.

In Latin America, the framework of the systematisation of experiences has been developed, fundamentally, from the experiences of popular education and as part of a conglomerate

of the so-called critical methodologies. Graciela Messina (2005), in "Conceptions on Systematisation", says that it is a particular method of doing research, generated from popular education in Latin America and that it shares its commitments to social transformation. A key point is that systematisation started in the 80 s, in a period of great political mobilisations also linked to participatory research, in part, as a continuity and as a replica to it. In this context, systematisation arises as a proposal that is based on and learns from accumulated experiences, along with new forms of participatory research and evaluation. Thus, one of the ever-present challenges is to define knowledge production methodologies appropriate to the way of thinking and acting of those who depart from practice, from action (Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular CEPEP, 2010).

In order to respond to this challenge, this article is based on the systematisation experience in the specific context of the Master of Territorial Development programme of the UTN and the Instituto de Investigación Praxis, in order to propose an approach to systematisation based on the learnings they promote that responds to the needs of territorial development. These learnings are intended to be a contribution, first, for the people linked to systematisation processes in Latin America and, also, for all those linked to action research outside Latin America who have an interest in better understanding this methodology.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this article is based largely on the authors' participation in debates on Latin American critical epistemology and the participatory methodologies in territorial processes developed in the CLACSO Working Groups (Jara, 1994, 2008, 2012; Torres 2021, Rebola et al. 2020; Yanes et al. 2019[1])

As proposed by Palma (1992), popular education and other related practices are activities that constantly engage and interact with the groups and organizations to which they refer, coinciding with them in a political intention to transform the world towards fairer conditions. Hence, some reflections propose systematisation as an alternative method to produce knowledge and traditional research based on the most positivist perspectives, more typical of the hard sciences and which, in many cases, have operated and extrapolated methods and techniques to social research. It is a need that becomes evident when theoretical frameworks become inoperative to support actions. Systematising is organising a practice to intervene more efficiently and effectively in a given situation.

Following the proposal of the Centro de Estudios para la Educación Popular (2010) we can identify and highlight at least four fundamental purposes of the systematisation of experiences that represent a clear and specific manifestation of the presence of the principles of popular education, which is proposed based on practice or experience: learning, producing knowledge, building transformative proposals and sharing the results.

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1   This framework does not imply ignoring other contributions in the field of systematisation in Latin America as explained by Alfonso Torres Carrillo (2021) in "Hacer lo que se sabe, pensar lo que se hace. La sistematización como modalidad investigativa". Prospectiva. Revista de Trabajo Social e intervención social.

1. Learning from experience: practice becomes an inexhaustible source of learning that must be socially constructed through the leading participation of the systematisation team that has been formed.
2. Producing knowledge from experience: the systematisation of experiences is in itself a research method based on critical interpretation as a way of building knowledge.
3. Building transformative proposals from experience: in a systematisation process, new learning and knowledge must be used to transform reality and the political, social, economic contexts of the protagonists. These transformative proposals must be built in participatory settings, together with the actors of the experience.
4. Sharing the results: any systematisation process entails specific products or results that generate learning, knowledge (theory) and transformative proposals.

When understood in such a way, systematisation has strong connections with other approaches to action research oriented towards social transformation (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Bradbury et al., 2019). However, systematising is generally associated with "ordering information". For this reason, it is important to emphasise that the concept refers to a more complex process where ordering information is just one part. Thus, for Oscar Jara (1994), sociologist and popular educator who has been and is one of the main references in the methodology and praxis of the systematisation of experiences in Latin America, systematisation can be understood from two perspectives, the second being more important than the first:

As systematisation of information: refers to the ordering and classification of data. In our case, we usually also call this modality "Memory of experience".

As systematisation of experiences: an attempt is made to go beyond the ordering of information and considering experiences as complex historical processes in which different actors intervene in a given socio-economic context and in an institutional moment of which we are part in order to reflect on the information, understand it, extract meaning and produce learning from it.

In this sense, Jara states that systematising experiences means *"*understanding why a certain process developed in one way instead of another, and interpreting what happened based on an ordering and reconstruction of the process. The first step is a reconstruction of what happened and an ordering of the different objective and subjective elements that have intervened, to understand, interpret and thus learn from the practices themselves*"* (Jara, 1994, p. 55).

When applied as methodology, systematisation does not only seek to evaluate results, it also tries to identify the lessons learned from the development process of experience on the basis of dialogue with actors. It attempts to reveal the "small" actions that made an instance of experience possible or that made it difficult to obtain results.

In the field of territorial development, the contribution of systematisation is relevant to action research and as pedagogical approach, because it promotes an interest in deepening capacity building in the territory and, to this end, adopting a critical perspective towards experience allows us to develop forward-looking thinking, in order to make better decisions in relation to the dynamics of the projects, the modification of designs, the establishment of networks and alliances, among other aspects, sharing knowledge with others. Thus, the knowledge generated through this process contributes to a better understanding of our work and the way in which changes occur (Tapella and Rodríguez, 2014).

A characteristic of this type of practice is that they tend to have instances of reflection on the learning achieved, although they are characterised by two common circumstances: they tend to be informal and fortuitous, with difficulties to overcome the merely anecdotal and, on the other hand, they are limited to the internal projects and program teams, and they fail to become more widely known, documented and valued (Tapella and Rodríguez, 2014).

To address systematisation with the depth described in this framework, and avoid its interpretation as a mere ordering of information, Spinelli (2020) points out that it is important to take into account some elements at the beginning:

1. The actors who are part of the experiences are the ones who mainly pursue a reflective perspective on their actions, analyse them in that context and produce their own, as well as others' learning. To them, external actors are added on certain occasions to help build that perspective through a group view.
2. It is important to determine what is systematised, but also how it is systematised. It is important that the process is as participatory and pluralistic as possible, capturing, incorporating and leveraging the knowledge and opinions that the various actors linked to the experience have about the experience. This is why we say that as we are working on a systematisation process we are building capacities in those who participate, and in ourselves as facilitators of the process.
3. Much of the sense of systematisation is found in critically learning from experiences in order to: – Improve our own practices (experience as an instance of learning). – Share our learnings with those of other similar experiences (sharing the experiences). – Contribute to the production of new knowledge.

The systematisation carried out in this way helps to overcome the common idea that one can only learn from books or lessons and to consider one's own experience as a fundamental source of learning. Therefore, developing this perspective implies a break with a mindset and that is why it must be done in a conscious way, motivating us to learn from what we do (Peiretti, 2017).

Case presentation

The case that we take as a starting point to discuss systematisation in this article is that of the Master of Territorial Development program at the UTN and its integration of systematisation in its teaching methodologies, transforming students into researchers.

This incorporation of systematisation takes place largely because the Master's Degree programme integrates the so-called Pedagogical Approach for Territorial Development (EPDT in Spanish), with a strong influence of Paulo Freire's work. The pedagogical approach originated in the formative processes, but with the development of our practices, it began to question the traditional spaces accompanying territorial development elaborated up to now: unidirectional, implying a transference of knowledge, absence of dialogue and/or denial of conflict, and where capacity building focused almost exclusively on the classroom realm. The EPDT is a way of understanding and acting in the construction of learning processes for change in the territory that entails a way of understanding knowledge, the link between theory

and practice, the acknowledgement of the other (local knowledge, practices and experiences), the connection based on dialogue and conflict resolution promoting democratic instances (Costamagna, Spinelli and Pérez, 2013).

In this way, from its inception, the Master's Degree programme raises a broad and deep conception about the Territorial Development (TD) approach, centred on the idea that TD is a process of social and political construction with multidimensional characteristics. This includes economic, social, urban, environmental and institutional development, and complex governance with an active role of the State (Costamagna, 2015). In addition, it incorporates other elements such as the following:

– This approach discusses a view that focuses only on the macro and the sectoral, and also the idea that growth equals development.
– The key is in the people and the issue of capabilities must be worked on. Emphasis is placed on endogenous potentialities.
– It is an approach to action in which the way you do things matters.
– It raises the importance of local productive systems, decent employment, distribution and change in the production and consumption model, but also educational, health, infrastructure, environment, and gender issues, among others.
– It promotes the incorporation of productive innovations, social institutions and the importance of tangible infrastructure, but also intangible assets to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge.

This proposal is also influenced by "the ideas of complexity as an integrating framework for research and training in the territory, and proposes some breaks and new elements to obtain qualitative leaps in the relationship between the construction of individual and collective capacities. The construction of individual and collective capacities is pursued. This path promotes a process of deconstruction on our practice, which divided training and research" (Costamagna, 2020, p. 110).

Within this framework, the Master's Degree programme has included systematisation as a methodology for student learning, but also for the involvement of students in the transformation of the territory. Since 2017, 70 students of the Master's Degree programme have used this approach in projects included in their curriculum development. The lessons learned from this experience are presented in the following sections in the form of a specific systematisation approach aimed at territorial development.

Systematisation in the pedagogical approach for territorial development

As we have mentioned, there are different approaches to develop a process of systematisation of experiences in TD. Our proposal is structured around the following 7 moments.

1)   Gather the systematisation team:

The first aspect to take into account is to gather the systematisation team. Although there is usually a facilitator who coordinates the process, it is important to plan and enlist the par-

ticipation of the actors involved in the initiatives. The coordinator should be part of the experience.

The starting point of the systematisation does not necessarily occur, chronologically, once the experience object of the systematisation is finished. That is, the registration can happen as of the beginning (if systematisation is defined as part of a project from the beginning), it unfolds during the process or when it has finished. However, it is recommended that this dimension should be present as of the design stage of an experience (whether it is a project or a training process). It is important to note that systematising is a participatory process, which is expected to be carried out by the direct actors of the experience.

2)   The definition of what to systematise (core of systematisation):

At this time we define the purpose of the systematisation, what central aspects of that experience we are interested in recovering. Sometimes not everything can be systematised, but we choose/prioritise some dimension that is more meaningful to us. In territorial development, microprocesses matter. This implies specifying a core concept that will function as a common thread that runs through the experience and clearly links it with the TD approach from which it will be addressed, it can be linked, for example, to new territorial capacities, new organisation and management processes, a level of citizen participation, communication or conflict management models, new practices and innovations in productive and/or social processes, collaborative management models, among others.

The core concept(s) of the systematisation are not defined from the classroom realm only in an analytical way, as if it were almost simulated and according to our own interests, but rather it/they is/are co-constructed together with the participants of these processes according to their needs, desires, their critical view of the process, thinking about how it/they contribute(s) to analyse that dimension and not another one in relation with the projects, policies and programmes that are being carried out, specifying where to focus in order to better understand, learn and transform collectively.

3)   Reconstruction of experience (Memory):

At this time, what happened and how it happened is retrieved in an orderly manner (chronologically, in stages, by themes as defined by the team), the available information is classified and the stages of the process are identified. For this purpose, it is essential to organise the records in a clear and simple way, based on all possible sources. The records created during the experience can be used, or new information can be produced.

We emphasise here the relevance of generating tools that make the voices of the participants be heard, taking notes during the experience, but also comparing it with a retrospective look at it. The sources of information at this stage can be: written reports, interviews, newspaper articles, magazines, meeting minutes, statements, audiovisual documentaries, radio and television programmes, testimonials, key informants, photographs, etc. (this is also pointed out by Jara). All sources must be duly referenced in the writing of the report.

Elements to take into account when writing the report:

–   Title of the experience.

–   Geographic location
–   Background
–   Identification of participating actors (mapping)
–   Rationale from the Territorial Development approach
–   General and specific objectives of the experience: What problem were you trying to solve? Who were the actions aimed at?
–   Intervention process: description of the activities carried out/lines of action.
–   Main results of the experience: quantitative and qualitative.

4)   Analysis and interpretation of events: learning from dialogue processes in systematisation

From our perspective, this stage is the most relevant moment of systematisation. It is here when a reflective and analytical instance of the experience that we are systematising comes into play, but clearly it depends on previous moments.

To this purpose, once again, we adopt the perspective of Participatory Action-Research (IAP in Spanish), which emphasises that this type of learning process is not achieved by researchers alone, drawing conclusions from our observations, but that knowledge is a collective construction, a process of co-construction (Costamagna and Larrea, 2015).

From this framework, thus, to work on the analysis, interpretation and learning generated in each experience, it is essential to construct opportunities for dialogue with the actors, where it is impossible to separate reflection from action, which is praxis (Freire, 1997). Dialogue as such is constituted as a central dimension, working as key to the recognition (Huergo, 2003) of the knowledge of the territory.

Methodologically, at this moment, what we are trying to do is understand why events happened, which implies a critical reflection on the process, while examining the relationships, tensions and contradictions, and identifying the lessons learned from the process more clearly. An important point here is not to reduce learning to results (although it is important to detail how these have been achieved), nor to consider that learning is only those aspects that have been successful; we also need to problematise conflicts.

Another aspect to be developed in this section is the forward-looking perspective. This means, that, on the basis of the lessons learned, new projects, ideas and initiatives can be carried out in that territory, and that "seeds" have been sown which can be turned into new actions and continuities of projects carried out or in progress.

5)   Development of transformative proposals: stage of co-construction

The connection between theory and practice, knowledge and doing, is specified in the systematisation of experiences through the development of transformative proposals (CEPEP, 2010).

A transformative proposal formulated in the context of a process of systematisation of experiences is much more than a phrase or idea that expresses an intention. It must be a structured body of ideas with a clear transformative orientation elaborated by the systematisation team in dialogue with the main actors of the experience.

In this sense, once the process of dialogue with actors has been generated and the learning and knowledge produced during the process of analysis, and critical interpretation of the experience have been identified, transformative proposals emerge.

6)   Learning from experience: construction of new knowledge and the "return to the academia"

During the process of critical reflection of the experience, new knowledge and learning will be generated. It is important that, once identified, we can document them to capture what we have learned throughout the process, identifying and describing aspects such as theories, concepts, approaches, paradigms, attitudes, values, etc.

As we have already mentioned, from the pedagogical approach perspective towards action-research (AI) and territorial development (TD), it is interesting to share these processes of action, reflection, action in the classroom, in our case, in the process of the Master's Degree in Territorial Development programme itself. We emphasise that we are dealing with new knowledge, and that academia is one more actor in the process of collective construction where the learning generated in the territory is enriched.

In addition, these processes are taken as the basis for postgraduate theses and also as final work for diplomas or courses, and this is generating new volume in terms of learning from the territory.

7)   The communication of the experience:

This stage is of great importance because it is useless to systematise a process if we do not communicate the learnings to those who have been part of it, and to others who are in processes with similar characteristics. Therefore, we must work hard to "make them communicable" and on the development of various communication products that facilitate knowledge management, for which we need to resort to diverse, creative and appropriate ways of thinking about the interlocutors.

Upon reaching this last stage, each of the individuals who have participated in the different moments of the systematisation that precede the sharing of the results, own the learnings and knowledge obtained by being part of the entire process. The challenge is to define a set of activities that favour the social appropriation of the results by other social actors who did not participate in their construction, attempting to make them contribute to promote processes that transform their realities, spaces or contexts (knowing that these spaces or contexts are different and that the transformative proposals are not transferable from one territory to another).

Both the communication processes and the systematisation from TD have an important differential if both are directly linked with the actors, who are participants and protagonists, and not just spectators. It requires permanent practice and opening of spaces in which to approach this perspective, since we are used to being recipients rather than producers of new meanings and learnings. Something that requires us to collectively assume the challenges that these tools offer to us, obtaining training and leading processes.

Case discussion

In this last section, on the basis of the conceptual framework presented and the specific experience of the Master in Territorial Development programme, we address a series of reflections derived from reviewing, rethinking and understanding our practice of systematisation processes in the classroom with students, but also with other experiences based on building and deepening the relationship between the university and the territory.

For this purpose, we are going to take a series of core concepts for analysis that allow us to make the learnings visible. Not all of them have been resolved, but they do intend to transform themselves into new challenges and actions that allow us to build new elements to strengthen these methodologies and their dialogues with the training and research processes from the TD approach.

As we have already mentioned in the first paragraphs of this document, systematising appears at the beginning of our journey as a tool, a methodology, but also as a strategy in the construction of capacities. Now, if we consider the practices that we carry out from the university, new strengths are detected that invite us to rethink the potential of systematisation in conjunction with other processes such as research, with a strong connection with action research, training and its close and powerful link with our perspective of TD and the pedagogical approach of TD. In the following paragraphs, we address, first, our reflection on the methodology proposed in the previous section and its stages. Then we complement this reflection with our learnings grouped in relation with eight core concepts.

Learnings at each of the moments of systematisation

On the basis of the journey we have taken, we retrieve some of our learnings regarding the systematisation methodology, emphasising the difficulties and complexities inherent to the practice process that have made us delve into the idea that the methodology, as we mentioned, is a path that is modified in the doing, transforming even the theoretical construction itself. To carry out this exercise, we will return to the stages or moments that we have described to critically review them, establishing some conclusions regarding their implementation.

At the beginning of these processes, although we have never considered it in a linear way, comes the formation of the systematisation team. Based on our experience, it seems relevant to us to add new elements, such as a sort of zero stage, which we call "the negotiation process". By this we mean that in the literature we have studied, and in the implementation of the methodology, this moment does not appear explicitly because, in our understanding, it comes from different actions, programmes and policies in TD, and therefore, it is something that was already present in process.

It seems that the will to carry out the systematisation appears as something that does not require prior negotiations, a process in which the commitment and involvement of the actors that manage the policies and processes is assumed. In our experience, the opposite happens many times, or there are views that are more associated with technical assistance and consulting aimed at providing certain solutions from an external, aseptic view.

A lesson in this sense has been the importance of taking the time to establish these negotiations, meeting with the people involved in the processes to tell them what we want to do, the type of work that we are going to face. This instance is already in itself a formative experience for students in which we create spaces for dialogue that emphasise the perspective that we address and engage the participation of key actors of the experience and their institutions. This is also key to later work in the dialogue instances for the identification of learnings and for moments of co-construction of future proposals.

Likewise, there is another element that was not so explicit either: during the systematisation process, not only do we form ourselves from the scope of the Master's Degree programme, but also so do the actors who participate in this process.

The experience helps us to think about the negotiation instance as a key process where it is also necessary to take time to discuss the approach and the political sense of moving towards the collective production of a material that is not only a document for the dissemination of the successful aspects. Knowing that, on some occasions, until the process begins to unfold, many actors consider these dialogues as only "theory".

Regarding the reconstruction of the experience, which we call in this work "Report", we find it interesting to highlight the importance given to it by the different actors linked to systematisation.

In our practice, it constituted, at the beginning, another aspect of a documentary type, a precedent for spaces for dialogue and mapping of actors, and it turns out to be an almost fundamental input in terms of historical recovery for many of the experiences that we systematise. This happens, in the first place, because we are not in the habit of documenting a process, and sometimes seeing it embodied in a working document allows us to see the potentialities, the trajectories in time, and to trace the traditions that generated the conditions of possibility for those experiences to have taken place, originated in a particular territory and not in another. For this reason, we consider that the Report is a stage that must be given a different entity, and even within the dynamics of greater dialogues.

The moment of analysis and reflective interpretation of the experience and the processes of dialogue in the systematisation has been one of the greatest challenges in the methodological construction and in the relationship between theory and practice. In this sense, an important lesson learned has been working in acknowledgement key, "listening before talking", as Mario Kaplún (2002) says, adding the need to recognise knowledge as a collective construction, as a co-construction process (Costamagna and Larrea, 2015).

Therefore, it is absolutely essential to build spaces for dialogue with the actors. With spaces for dialogue, we do not refer only to conducting interviews or workshops where conversations are generated on these issues, or where the definitions that are constructed a priori and out of practice are "validated". When we speak of dialogue, we understand that our horizons must be oriented towards reflection and action, which is praxis (Freire, 1997). Dialogue is then constituted as a central dimension, working as key of recognition (Huergo, 2003) of the actors' knowledge in the territory, and it becomes the "heart" of systematisation.

Understanding that, as we move forward, we are building capacities in multi-stakeholder dialogue processes, in those who we systematise and to whom we facilitate the experience, and in other protagonists of it. The greatest difficulty we face in this regard is that, on many occasions, the first thing that arises is that learnings are downgraded to results, or only to aspects that have been successful. For this reason, we insist that in this type of processes, while

we advance along the methodological path, we are training without a plan, building moments to work together on the type of reflections that we want to generate.

There is a point of complexity here when we work on the training of our students who carry out a systematisation from this approach, which has to do with the difficulties in going from the descriptive to the analytical, to generate dialogue processes in practice and later transform them into learnings. Often, we come across situations in which questions arise about how learning is detected, how spaces for dialogue are built, and there are no recipes for this, there are convictions of being there, in the territory, linking ourselves and from that place we accompany in the training process. There are tools to put into use that are worked on in the classroom, such as conducting in-depth interviews or group interviews and designing workshops.

The stage of development of transformative proposals and co-construction was also constituted as a relevant and novel stage of the process. From our conceptual and methodological framework in the Master in Territorial Development programme, in the Reflection Workshops on Praxis I and II, we had not been working on this dimension but rather we only reached the reflective stage of identification of learnings.

The moment of co-construction was clearly a contribution that we took from the literature of Participatory Action Research for Territorial Development (IAP in Spanish) that we had been retrieving from the aforementioned exchange with Orkestra. It is from these learnings and exchanges that we incorporate the co-construction stage, also under the political sense that systematisation should not remain in the diagnostic and/or analytical perspective but should also be committed to the future.

Learnings about systematisation

In this section we present our learnings around eight aspects of systematisation.

1) Linking systematisation, research and facilitation as part of the capacity building strategy and TD process

One of the most important challenges ahead has to do with deepening the links that strengthen TD. Work is being done, but we had not made the articulations and complementarity that these practices imply sufficiently explicit. Understanding systematisation as only reduced to a tool or a methodology gave us a partial perspective of its potential to accompany processes in the territory. That is why generating bridges between systematisation, action research, facilitation and training processes as part of a capacity building strategy, invites us to broaden our perspective and, in that sense, at present, we find ourselves thinking, reviewing and enriching the approaches.

If we concentrate only on the tool, the extent of the process, and its use as a training and research space in emerging instances of territorial complexity, are lost in some way.

A clear case is the combination of past, present and future that allows us to jointly achieve systematisation and action research. Our experience and the exchange with Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) and Orkestra views mentioned in the introduction, leads

us to think that when we systematise, a retrospective perspective about the past prevails, and memory has to do with that, with the recovery and historization of each process and the view on the present moment. However, ARTD is oriented to the present and more strongly to the foward-looking perspective. It is interesting to think about how systematisation becomes an input for action-research, retrieving the collective memory of the processes that take place in the territories.

2) The lack of a method or uncertainty in the systematisation process

The reviews of the systematisation methodology of experiences from the territorial development approach is, undoubtedly, an aspect that we have been working on in our journey, and we have established a series of adaptations both in the training proposal for the students who systematise experiences within the framework of the Master's Degree programme, and from the research processes in which we promote the systematisation of experiences as a basis for the construction and exchange of knowledge.

A point of tension has to do with understanding the methodology as a path without certainty, as a process that is built as we move forward. There, we find the demand for the "method", a more rigid planning, the steps to follow, which is also related with a strong presence in the training trajectories of the most traditional modes of knowledge production, sustained and reinforced with traditional evaluation logic. This does not mean that tools are not brought to the training proposal to systematise experiences, but they are just that: tools such as in-depth interviews, maps of actors, workshops, among others.

Therefore, a lesson learned from this situation is how important it is that the teaching team accompanies this other logic regarding what the path of building and co-constructing a methodology implies as we move forward in the process. Here we highlight the importance of working to accompany each group in its uniqueness, which takes a great effort in relation to the teaching task in the workshop space, and a collective commitment in terms of the learning community.

3) Facilitation roles

We highlight the importance of deepening the facilitation of processes in the systematisation, both with regard to our roles as lecturers of the Praxis Workshop space, and to the students who also become trainers and facilitators when they systematise experiences. In TD, there are people who work to make things happen and, in systematisation, training is part of the training of facilitators, and systematisation is a great help in building capacities.

In addition, when we work on systematisation, we are developing networks, articulating actions with other sectors, building capacities. Thus, our students assume the role of process facilitators.

From the teaching coordination, it is essential to monitor each process, with its peculiarities, with the diversity of starting and ending points, sometimes making explicit dimensions that appear as we advance in the course of the methodological process.

4)   The State and systematisation

The tradition of systematisation that we describe and know comes from sectors more closely linked to social and community organisations and, from our perspective and experience, it is important to place them in local State policies, trying to involve a diverse and complex number of sectors that, at times, even imply contradictions and conflicts among themselves in connection to particular, sectoral, political and institutional interests.

That is why we also insist on the approach, assuming the challenge of systematisation as a reflective and collective practice, as a formative process, with the footprint and voices of those who play a leading role in it on a day-to-day basis, and pointing out those who should be decision-makers and are not present in the discussions today. The methodology and the conceptual perspective then become a political plot, which is not built on its own.

In this sense, systematisation has great power as a tool that allows us to detach from the dynamics of the public sector and that, in our opinion, is one of the many elements on which we should work in order to achieve new transformations. Some interesting initiatives in this regard are connected with the incorporation of experiences logs and meetings minutes that some of the local areas, within the scope of the Rafaela Town Hall, have begun to carry out frequently to document and share their processes linked directly to the presence of students of the Master's Degree programme, or with accompaniments from the Instituto Praxis. In some cases, as stated, we have adapted the tools to continue accompanying processes.

5)   Relations between University and Territory

Another lesson learned has to do with the relationships that we aim to build between the university and the territory, where there is a type and a mode of approach that is far from an enlightened perspective, in which, in many cases, the trajectories and knowledge of the communities are not recognised, but what people need is defined. In our case, we have been working with other modalities that imply building other approaches that start from recognition and dialogue (in Paulo Freire's terms) and on which we also need to elaborate in our postgraduate training processes, where, in most cases, approaches to the territory derive from a technical point of view or are based on the logic of "expert" knowledge.

It is also necessary to work on the deconstruction of the ways in which people from the local communities, institutions and organisations with which we are linked recognise the university and the type of interventions they expect (legitimate knowledge, technical and qualified interventions, solutions to problems), and this is a type of learning that we put into practice when applying systematisation, in action-research and during accompaniment.

Another issue that invites us to reflect are the time frames in practice, which are not the same as the academic time frames, and that are often tied to the times of public policy management or the strong needs of the people, and this, again, implies handling complexities. In this sense, this type of initiative with processes of dialogue, negotiation, management and reworking at its origins takes much longer than the time available in a training process. We go through the practice with this tension, understanding the need for the logic of public management or of the people, but with the need to build and promote spaces for reflection and analysis that respect the times of the territory.

6)   The shift inward

Another element at stake is the link with learnings that arise at the individual academic space, and in that logic, it is important to highlight other modes of knowledge construction and research that have been on the margins, at least for us, in the areas of territorial development, as is the case of the systematisation of experiences and action research.

From this perspective, we introduce modifications in the approach to the contents and methodologies used in the Praxis Workshops incorporating new concepts and flexibility regarding both the assembly of teams and the definition of the core of the systematisation process. This seems simple, but it requires a lot of energy due to the resistance it generates in the traditional academia realm and also, with groups that have their own stand on "going out of the classroom" and getting involved in the territory. From the pedagogical dimension, this has become an epistemological horizon, transforming the way of building knowledge, in this case, together with people who belong to organisations and institutions with territorial dynamics.

Another modification we made, in addition to the methodological ones, was on the contents, since we introduced a unit strongly influenced by Paulo Freire. Although we had been working on it more methodologically, getting to the heart of the Freirean thought regarding the notions of problematising education, the vocabulary range ("universo vocabular" in Spanish), dialogue and praxis, as well as the political sense, opened up new spaces for conversation and action with our students who come from diverse career paths, institutional affiliations, age groups and disciplinary backgrounds. Many of them had read Freire, for others he was an unknown author, but we dare to say that for all of them it was meaningful reading that made sense in their practices and biographies and that it became, at least, a leading light in the systematisation process.

There remains a great journey and debates about the teaching career, the way of carrying out extension activities and research that are part of these challenges.

7)   About the ways of narrating experiences and difficulties for writing

There is another complexity that we point out in our process in relation with the exercise of writing experiences and the complexity that it implies. It often happens to us that, as part of the reflections that arise during debates in the classroom and the writing of experiences, there appears a gap, which leads us to question ourselves, and review what we can do to promote the narration of experiences, what new formats we can explore for those who are not comfortable with writing (narratives, life stories, but also tools such as short videos, podcasts, among others, leveraging the emergence of virtual tools and the new communication skills we have developed). We also need to work on strengthening individual capacities to systematise: writing, interviews, conversation.

This challenge calls for teachers giving greater support, especially if we take into account the Master's Degree programme students' profile, the majority of whom do not have much writing experience, but vast field work experience.

8)   Systematising experiences in times of a pandemic

Finally, there is one last aspect in terms of learning that we would like to mention, and it relates to the challenges our work team faced when generating a training process on systematising experiences based on distance education in the context of a pandemic. Considering that none of us had chosen virtual tools as a method for training, but quite the opposite, we prioritised meetings, exchanges, orality and the warmth created by being in the classroom, altogether.

Even with these complexities, we dare to say that the Praxis Workshop, with its systematisation process, became a place to "connect", to support the learning community space that we so much long for. And despite all the difficulties that came up, students were able to generate spaces for dialogue with actors from the experiences with tools other than the usual ones, and they explored the virtual tools available, holding workshops and meetings that encouraged collaborative work.

Our meetings were also the ideal space to put into play the sensibilities, the pedagogy of tenderness (Maya Betancourt, 2009), as we mentioned at some point in class, the affection, knowing that everyone was willing to share. Rethinking the experiences on which we worked, where the core concept of the analysis was exploring how the pandemic had modified the processes and how, in part, the exercise of systematisation related to observing those situations, which had been totally transformed, we could not keep thinking about them as if the context did not penetrate us.

Undoubtedly, the strategies put in place, the resources, the closest accompaniment to the group and the meetings to talk especially with some groups or people, the WhatsApp audios, the "being there" were also part of the facilitation.

Final thoughts

The experience of systematisation constitutes, in the field of action research, a contribution developed in Latin America which offers interesting learnings to other approaches to action research developed in other contexts. This last section focuses on adding, based on the concepts presented in this article: what was learned in the context of the collaboration between teams in Argentina, the Basque Country and Norway regarding systematisation.

There are four basic elements that have been observed in relation to systematisation in the context of territorial development in Rafaela:

a) The focus on the pedagogical dimension, and the incorporation of students as action researchers in the territory
b) The debate on going beyond information management, but, in turn, the relevance of structured information management exercises
c) The exploration of systematisation as a curricular exercise that integrates training and research
d) The role of facilitators in systematisation as people who strengthen capacities in these processes

We conclude, in this regard, that these are specificities that possibly respond to the contextual characteristics of the experience in Rafaela (Santa Fe, Argentina) largely influenced by the experiences of territorial development in other areas of Latin America. Deepening these elements in future research can help to continue strengthening the contributions that have been made from Latin America to the international community interested in action research.

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