Organizational change from a feminist perspective: a participatory process in Valencia

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Abstract

This research process aims to explore how feminist economics can contribute to the development of de-patriarchal, demercantilized organisations, committed to the sustainability of life from a critical and transformative approach.

By using participatory methodologies, close to a Participatory Action Research process, the spaces, dynamics, and reality of a social organisation (REAS País Valencià) have been revised from a feminist perspective.

Case study

REAS País Valencià (Valencian Solidarity and Alternative Economy Network) is a non-profit association founded in 2014 with the primary mission of creating a network of institutions/entities to promote Solidarity and Alternative Economy as an instrument to develop a fairer society, walking towards sustainable development and taking into account the interdependence of economy, society, environment and culture.

Theoretical framework

For this research, the following theoretical elements are proposed to guide and support the process: education for change and feminist economics.

Education, such as culture or socialization, are not neutral elements as they may either be responsible for standardizing and reproducing unequal societies, or they can serve as transformational tools for equal citizens (Martinez, 2016).

There are a number of innovative methodological practices, developed from the field of formal and informal education, in collaboration with social and collective organizations aimed at fostering critical thinking, necessary to strengthening democracy and social participation.

The development of participatory methodologies promotes the connection of people and their environment with the realities of their neighbourhoods, towns and homes. These processes that serve from participatory techniques, allow knowing, respecting and valuing the diversity of lives, identities and knowledge that cohabit in them.

On the other hand, Feminists economists argue that everyone’s lives are equally relevant (universality) but recognize and value its diversity (singularity), focusing on the idea that we are beings embedded in nature, and we depend on it (ecodependence) and others to continue living (interdependence). From a socio-economic perspective, at least for the official economy, the sustaining of life has never been a central analytical concern (Carrasco, 2003) and the invisibility of interdependence, the devaluation of the anthropological centrality of relationships between
people and the subordination of emotions to reason are essential features of patriarchal societies (Herrero, 2013: 281).

For this reason, we must discuss the economic structures with which we generate, distribute and consume resources; the social structures that define the system of relationships between groups and within them, and the values that guide the policies with which we make decisions (Pérez-Orozco, 2014: 81).

The concept of sustainability of life is part of the proposals of the feminist economics to move away from the foundational dichotomies of androcentric discourse, questioning normativity and fighting for the care of life (Agenjo, 2013: 15). In this sense, Pérez Orozco defines it as sustaining the conditions of possibility of lives that are worth living, so that it must be established what we understand for life worth living, and how we organize ourselves for the sustaining of (2014: 74).

**Objectives of research**

This process is framed within a doctoral thesis, which pursues the following specific objectives:

1. Analyse the contribution of the feminist economics to the organizational reality of REAS País Valencià.
   1.1. Inquire about the contributions and changes generated by this new framework for organizations.
   1.2. Explore learnings generated on participants of the process and identify at what level they are given.

2. Generate actions oriented towards more inclusive, depatriarchal and demercantized practices that align with the approach of sustaining of life.
   2.1. Share new methodologies that contribute to the development of practices aligned to the feminist economics principles.
   2.2. Develop an action plan and undertake action-oriented strategies for the transformation and emancipation of grassroots innovation groups towards feminist economics proposals.

**Methodology**

In order to achieve the research objectives set out, the following qualitative techniques have been used in the development of this process: participatory observation, semi-structured interviews and discussion groups, as well as different workshops with participatory methodologies and techniques that boost the reflective and transformative nature of the research process.

Consistent with critical theories and feminist thesis, the participatory observation becomes particularly relevant as a technique in which the researcher gets into the group establishing a personal relationship with its members to describe understand, through a process of identification, their specific motivations and realities (Corbetta, 2007:305).

Through participatory methods and techniques, critical knowledge is built through a series of intellectual and motor processes that involve making relationship and formulating conclusions, actively and consciously (Jara, 2019).
In this process, five workshops were held between December 2019 and November 2020 to carry out the organizational assessment process with the members (entities) and people that take part in REAS País Valencià.

**Early results**

Further analysis must be done in order to share triangled and deeper results as the process finished by the time this abstract was written.

First, it can be stated that the process has become a seed to which it will be a deeper organisational transformation of REAS. It can be considered as the first stage of the process, which has taken form and has been appropriated by its participants. In fact, a group of participants decided to apply for funding in order to develop the “action plan” generated during the participatory process. The achievement of the funding enables the second stage of the process to go further in respect of training (feminism, horizontal management...), facilitation and depth.

The process has enhanced the building and strengthening of relations between the participants/volunteers of REAS and empowered networking and consciousness about the organizational identity.

There are also changes observed at the individual and organizational level as the transformation of some spaces and meeting dynamics, the demand of more or deeper training on feminisms and the beginning of the process of renewing the dynamics and people in the decision level.

**References**


