


# Researchers' Perceptions About Methodological Innovations in Research Oriented to Social Impact: Citizen Evaluation of Social Impact

International Journal of Qualitative Methods  
Volume 21: 1–9  
© The Author(s) 2022  
DOI: 10.1177/16094069211067654  
[journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/ijq)  


Marta Soler-Gallart<sup>1</sup>  and Ramon Flecha<sup>1</sup> 

## Abstract

Current scientific literature is outlining a profound and accelerated transformation in the relationships between qualitative methodologies of research, citizens, society and social theories. The evolution towards a more dialogic society has led to a less talked about methodological advancement: Citizen participation in the evaluation of the social impact of research. Social impact is a priority of the current scientific research programs that also emphasize co-creation. The co-creation of the evaluation of this social impact requires both, qualitative methodologies and innovation, in order to make them able to optimize the social impact of research. This study, aimed at presenting the first meta-analysis of such methodological innovation from researchers' view, includes interviews with seven researchers conducting research with social impact. In order to contrast citizens' voices, results from the interviews have been validated by seven citizens who have participated in the dialogic citizen evaluation of the social impact of research. Findings can be summarized in three main categories: first, that the participation of citizens in the evaluation of the social impact of research is possible when researchers develop their contributions within the international scientific community and by integrating the voices of citizens, which facilitates the identification of transformative realities, as well as of pseudoscientific theories that have negative consequences for society. Second, that such evaluation is grounded on dialogic interactions open to everyone and based on arguments rather than on power interactions. Third, that both citizens and researchers report impacts of participating in the dialogic evaluation of social impact, such as modifying the way in which interviews are conducted, demanding more scientific evidence, or transforming their professional practice and lives.

## Keywords

community-based research, emancipatory research, qualitative evaluation, methods in qualitative inquiry, narrative inquiry

## Introduction

We are now in the best moment for the development of social sciences. Social impact, that is, the social improvements produced when research results are transferred to society (Reale et al., 2018), is an increasing requirement for scientific research in all areas, since all of them need to present evidence of the social improvements yielded by the results they produce. The current European scientific programme of research (Horizon Europe) has included the dialogic citizen evaluation of social impact within the EU official publication of policy and societal impact of all sciences elaborated by Flecha (van den Besselaar et al., 2018). Since this publication, an increased diversity of researchers from different sciences and with very

diverse methodological options are demanding examples of the innovations they should develop in order to undertake this new priority. The research we present in this paper is the first one in the world about one example of these innovations made with the communicative methodology and that is being recreated within other methodologies. Seven of the interviewees are researchers that, before this official requirement from the

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

### Corresponding Author:

Ramon Flecha, Department of Sociology, University of Barcelona, Avinguda Diagonal, 690, Barcelona 08034, Spain.  
Email: [ramon.flecha@ub.edu](mailto:ramon.flecha@ub.edu)



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE

and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

EU, were already promoting this innovation in their own research. The other seven interviewees are citizens that have participated in the dialogic citizen evaluation of the social impact of their research.

As a consequence of an ever more dialogic society, citizens themselves demand that research conducted with public resources contributes to improving their lives (Aiello et al., 2020; Soler & Gómez, 2020). This dialogic turn (Racionero & Padrós, 2010; Torras-Gómez et al., 2019) is democratizing science and increasing citizens' access to scientific evidence. For instance, in the case of a health emergency, it is propelling higher shares of evidence-based information rather than misinformation on social media (Pulido et al., 2020). This dialogic turn is also transforming the power relationships that researchers have often held over participants into more egalitarian ones, replacing power claims by validity claims through argumentation and dialogue (Gómez et al., 2019; Gómez González, 2021; Habermas, 1984, 1987). Thus, this democratic step forward in scientific research contributes to the inclusion of the voices of those who have traditionally been marginalized in research (Pincock & Jones, 2020).

Along these lines, co-creation is now a main priority and requirement of international research programs in the diverse areas of sciences as a means to obtain social impact. This concept defines the creation of knowledge in dialogue between scientists, citizens and organizations, for which the integration of this diversity of voices in research is not only impacting scientific contributions, but also citizens themselves. Qualitative methodologies of research have demonstrated that with more plurality of voices there is greater richness of argumentations and, hence, greater excellence in the knowledge produced (Gómez González, 2021; Liebenberg et al., 2020). This dialogue is of particular importance for communities whose voices have traditionally been excluded in social sciences. Such is the case of the Roma community, whose exclusion from research has often led to increasing stereotypes and discrimination, substantiated by pseudoscientific theories (Gómez et al., 2019; Sordé et al., 2020). Moving away from such research approaches, within the qualitative methodologies, the Communicative Methodology, assumes all individuals' inherent capacity for communication and rationality. Rather than imposing their own perspectives and research objectives, researchers seek to engage in an egalitarian dialogue with participants in which power claims are replaced by validity claims (Habermas, 1984, 1987), that is, replacing hierarchical 'expert' interpretations by argumentation, which all individuals are capable of. In this way, the implementation of methodological orientations based on co-creation and aimed at social impact is not only contributing to improving the lives of the most vulnerable communities, such as Roma, but it also shows the contributions that the Roma community is doing to the community itself and to society at large (Aiello et al., 2019; Khalfaoui, 2019; Munté Pascual et al., 2020; Sordé et al., 2020; Valero et al., 2020).

Nowadays, society demands and needs quality social theories which are able to tackle urgent societal problems. Thus, in order to respond to this demand, social theories must incorporate dialogue between different persons from diverse disciplines and 'on the shoulders of giants' (Merton, 1965). In other words, in order to create new knowledge and theoretical developments that will further improve individuals' and communities' lives, researchers need to build on existing methodological advancements that have already and are currently contributing to achieving social impact. Of course, each person is free to study whatever she or he chooses; but when societies decide to fund research programs, the inevitable scarcity of resources makes the definition of priorities very important. Dialogic societies are making those decisions progressively more open and democratic. The issue of relevance and priorities is being discussed currently with increasing transparency, for example, in the process of definition of the European scientific programme 'Horizon Europe' (European Commission, 2017). Such a shift is evincing the need to incorporate dialogue from the beginning in order to establish what is more relevant to study. Scientists are increasingly accepting this dialogic process and participating in it. They ask much less than before to be the ones to decide the priorities of research, and they participate much more in the dialogic process to establish these. As demonstrated by the creator of the sociology of science, Robert Merton (1968), science depends on rewards. This explains the increasing number of authors and teams of social and natural sciences orienting the creation of scientific knowledge in this dialogic direction, now a requirement to get the approval and funding of their research proposals. Furthermore, an increasing number of methodologies are continuing the dialogue with research participants and stakeholders, not only throughout the data gathering process, but also through the presentation of results, providing participants and stakeholders with the opportunity to validate or reject the project's results.

Yet the dialogue between scientists, citizens and organizations should not end there. It is necessary to assess whether the knowledge co-created has indeed achieved or has the potential to promote social impact. It is society itself that defines social impact through democratically establishing the goals science shall attain in order to improve citizens' lives (Aiello et al., 2020; Reale et al., 2018). Thus, it is also society who must democratically assess the achievement of such goals. In this vein, the dialogic society goes a step further in the assessment of the social impact of research carried out by researchers or research institutions. It does so by introducing citizens in this process, as it is them who can best assess whether research is improving their lives or not (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020). Hence, the co-creation of this evaluation is a necessary methodological innovation to advance towards greater social impact of research. In this sense, many qualitative methodologies are moving beyond impact-assessment being just based on economic goals or quantitative data. Indeed, they are moving towards a dialogic evaluation of social impact, engaging in dialogues with a great diversity

of representatives of society, in order to hear their voices about the research results and incorporate them in present or future research (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020; Sordé Martí et al., 2020). Nevertheless, how this methodological innovation occurs and what it looks like has not been explored yet.

Along these lines, this paper presents the first meta-analysis from the perspective of the interviewed researchers about a methodological innovation they have introduced in their studies. The aim of such innovation is to take into account the new role of citizens as evaluators of the social impact of research. In the following sections, the methodological design is described. The main findings of the study gathering the views of the interviewed researchers are presented through three main categories. The obtained results are then validated through the voices of citizens that benefit from the social impact of the research results presented above. Finally, the findings in this paper are discussed, and the limitations and prospective research are outlined, including the replicability of this innovation. The contributions presented in this paper open new avenues of research within the field of social sciences and methodologies.

## Methodology

### Study Design

This study was conducted following the communicative methodology (CM) (Gómez et al., 2019). The CM has been used in several research projects from the European Commission's Framework Programme of Research, which in light of the social impact achieved through this methodology, now requires all research projects to engage in co-creation of knowledge with research participants (European Commission, 2018). Because the CM is oriented towards achieving social impact, it establishes an egalitarian dialogue with research participants that is not simply aimed at describing the inequalities they and their communities are suffering, but to identifying elements that can help transform them (Gómez et al., 2019; Valls et al., 2020). To reach such goal, researchers contribute knowledge from the scientific literature, and participants contribute knowledge from their lifeworlds and experiences, allowing the bottom-up co-creation of knowledge in which all individuals participate on an equal basis (Gómez et al., 2019).

Fourteen interviews were conducted for the purpose of the study. Seven of the interviewees are researchers from different Spanish universities. They have a long experience conducting and leading research following the CM, reflecting on and engaging in dialogues with other researchers and with the communities they are serving. All of them are currently or have formerly been main researchers in social sciences projects with social impact funded by national and international scientific agencies, and have numerous publications in journals indexed in JCR and/or Scopus that show the social improvements achieved through their projects. Their research

addresses inequalities in education and in society, particularly among vulnerable groups – such as the Roma community, women, or immigrants – gender violence and sexual harassment, and how to overcome them to improve the lives of all citizens. The social impact of their research, recognized by citizens in different dialogic spaces, includes improving academic achievements and social cohesion in schools located in low SES neighbourhoods, helping victims of sexual harassment transform into survivors, or empowering adult learners of working class, migrant backgrounds or ethnic minorities to pursue university degrees, among many other examples.

The interviews to researchers are then complemented through seven citizens who have interacted with scientific evidence from research projects funded by the European Commission's Research Framework Programme, showing their own or other citizens' evaluation of the results. Three of them are teachers in schools that apply scientific evidence of social impact, two are educational counsellors, another one is involved in two associations targeting adult learners and Roma women, and the last one collaborates in institutionalized care for young women. The following table provides an overview of the participants' profiles (Table 1):

Interviewees were contacted via email. They were provided with the study purposes and procedures, as well as with the opportunity to make any questions to the researchers. Interviewees were informed that participation was voluntary and that data would be anonymized. Interviews were held via Zoom online platform, and most of them were audio-recorded for purposes of data analysis. Participants gave informed written consent to participate and most of them to be audio-recorded. Consent forms, as well as all information regarding the study's aims and data collection and storage procedures, have been reviewed and accepted by the CREA Ethics Committee, with approval number 20210110.

Participants were selected due to their involvement in research following the CM. We particularly prioritized the information that those who have conducted such research can provide to this study's interests. Throughout the interviews, interviewed researchers have made references to different dialogic spaces in which the knowledge co-created through the CM has been discussed and reflected on with citizens. They, among many others who are working from the CM, have collaborated with different grassroots organizations, communities and individuals to engage in these spaces and incorporate the knowledge developed from them in their prospective research. Although there are many examples of these dialogic spaces, nine have been mentioned throughout the interviews. These spaces include a variety of contexts, from academic (such as conferences), to participatory virtual spaces or to more self-organized ones. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of these spaces (Aiello et al., 2019).

It needs to be acknowledged that these dialogic spaces are not exempt from power dynamics, as any other space in our society. They are formed by dialogic communicative acts (Searle & Soler, 2005) in which there are both dialogic

**Table 1.** Participants' Profiles.

Pseudonym	Profile	Gender	Description
Miriam	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact on gender studies
Núria	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact with vulnerable groups
Álvaro	Researcher	Male	Research with social impact on education
Clara	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact on gender studies
Eva	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact on education
Isabel	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact with vulnerable groups
Silvia	Researcher	Female	Research with social impact on gender studies
Alejandra	Citizen	Female	Teacher at a school that applies the outcomes of research with social impact
Tomás	Citizen	Male	Teacher at a school that applies the outcomes of research with social impact
Mireia	Citizen	Female	Teacher at a school that applies the outcomes of research with social impact
Idoia	Citizen	Female	Educational counsellor that fosters the implementation of the outcomes of research with social impact
Ixaso	Citizen	Female	Educational counsellor that fosters the implementation of the outcomes of research with social impact
Virginia	Citizen	Female	Collaborator in two associations targeting adult education and Roma women
Daniela	Citizen	Female	Collaborator in an institutionalized care facility for young women

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the Dialogic Spaces.

Name	Description
Roma women student gatherings	National gathering aimed at sharing scientific evidence on the overcoming of inequalities, sexism and racism suffered by Roma women
International congress of Roma women	International gathering aimed at sharing scientific evidence on the overcoming of inequalities, sexism and racism suffered by Roma women
Sappho platform	Scientific evidence-based participatory platform for citizens to consult, contribute and discuss scientific evidence on gender
Open egalitarian dialogue space about sexual harassment held in a Spanish university	In this space researchers and citizens watched a documentary film about survivors of sexual harassment and discussed it afterwards
Dialogic pedagogical gatherings	Seminars on reading and discussing scientific research with social impact on educational approaches
Dialogic gatherings of films	Seminars on viewing and discussing films around relevant topics for society, incorporating scientific evidence within those debates
Dialogic scientific gatherings	Seminars on reading and discussing scientific knowledge with social impact
CIMIE	International multidisciplinary conference on educational research
CICFEM	International conference of science, feminism and masculinities

interactions as well as power interactions. However, unlike in communicative acts of power, dialogic interactions prevail over power interactions (Searle & Soler, 2005) with the aim of overcoming power dynamics to the extent possible.

### Analysis

Data were transcribed and read through several times by the researchers. Following the CM, a dialogic analysis of the transcriptions was conducted among the researchers. 11 different codes were found across the interviews that responded to the study's aim. Then, the 11 codes were grouped into broader categories that comprised the main themes from the interviews, which were also in line with previously reviewed

literature on the issue. As a result of this dialogic analysis, three main categories were identified in the questions and reflections of the interviews. The first, *The inclusion of all voices on the shoulders of giants*, highlights which elements are necessary in the creation of spaces that allow the participation of citizens in the evaluation of the social impact of research. The second, *Open egalitarian dialogue*, describes the dialogic nature of the spaces that make such evaluation possible. The third one, *The impact of a new methodological innovation: citizen evaluation of social impact*, reflects how citizens report improvements from the co-creation of the evaluation of social impact. The content of the interviews with the interviewed researchers was dialogically categorized in the aforementioned categories. Then, the results gathered were triangulated with the voices of citizens.

## Results

Results are presented following the three main categories, with a few examples from each being provided.

### *The Inclusion of All Voices on the Shoulders of Giants*

The researchers interviewed highlighted the importance of building on the scientific contributions made until that point, prioritizing those that have already had social impact. They stressed that knowing the research developed so far allowed them to ground their studies on sound, validated evidence. In this line Miriam asserts:

It has been very important to be supported by an international scientific community... that it is not only me saying it, but there are many studies that corroborate it. The open access of research... has been very important to generate these debates because it has given us more arguments and more strength... We have also looked for the impact that this has had in different areas, and this has allowed us to bring together more people from different backgrounds (Miriam, researcher)

Drawing on others' contributions from very diverse sciences and counting on the support of the international scientific community allowed Miriam and her research team to provide new knowledge that built on previous scientific advancements. This enabled them to bring knowledge forward and, in turn, ensure the validity of the results they were providing. Moreover, she highlights how such approach has led to seeking interdisciplinarity in their work, looking for the integration of new approaches. Likewise, advancements in the line of open access have allowed such contributions to reach new arenas, which in turn have contributed to strengthening their validity. At the same time, the interviewed researchers acknowledged that this way of conducting research prompted them to reach non-scientific people, in order to incorporate their views in the reality under study:

in presentations in conferences, the confidence comes from really saying what participants are saying, in that sense, you're rigorous, methodologically and ethically, and that way the research you present in a conference is much more responsible and of greater quality because you're not making it up, you don't share assumptions, you're faithful to reality, to the voices of those people who have trusted you (Álvaro, researcher)

As seen in the excerpt, the orientation of research towards social impact fostered the inclusion of the voices of participants in order to truthfully represent their lived experience and reality. In so doing, the interviewed researcher explains how engaging citizens through the research methodology gave more soundness and rigour to the research he then presented to the international scientific community. Such methodological approach promoted the co-creation of scientific evidence emerging from empirical research that integrates the voices of

citizens, rather than from theories used to defend certain interests. According to the interviewed researchers, these dialogic spaces involving citizens are contributing to debunking pseudoscientific theories:

there are many pseudotheories by people who have not done any research, who claim to be experts but have never contributed any research or theory that improves people's lives, on the contrary, the pseudotheories they promote are very harmful, and they do so because of economic or personal interests... And platforms like Sappho, where citizens can question these pseudotheories, ask for or provide evidence, share their own experiences on the issue... that's where these pseudotheories are debunked, because they see they have no scientific basis (Silvia, researcher)

Thus, according to the interviewed researchers, the creation of spaces of dialogue such as the Sappho platform, in which citizens assess contributions made from research allow for the free dissemination of scientific arguments. Alongside, it unveils the falsehood behind the claims of those with personal interests, since their biased use of knowledge cannot stand a scientific debate open to all.

Such views from the interviewed researchers on the inclusion of all voices on the shoulders of giants were also shared by the interviewed citizens. They appreciated having evidence that allowed them to distinguish between scientific evidence and hoaxes. Furthermore, they identified that the evidence shared in such dialogic spaces has social impact because the creation of the evidence itself has already included the voices of citizens, making it something real and useful:

the importance for us of the existence of those spaces at a professional level, at a personal level, the scientific level, and the importance that it's the result of this co-creation that transforms lives. And those spaces that allow this dialogue of egalitarian exchange between people who work on science and people who don't, this allows a real transformation (Virginia, collaborator in associations)

### *Open Egalitarian Dialogue*

Citizens are an essential part in the dialogue not only to co-create knowledge, but also to assess its social impact, as they are the ones to tell whether it has positively or negatively affected them. Thus, as the researchers interviewed highlighted, the evaluation of social impact requires researchers but, most importantly, citizens, so these can contribute their views on the potential social impact of research:

the format of the [International Congress of Roma Women] where all of them were represented, not only researchers, but especially the protagonists, in this case the women. Seeing what intellectuals said, seeing what women said, discussing all that, women talked about their transformations, the impact... also Roma girls participating in the [Roma Women Student] Gatherings, girls who have pursued degrees years later... (Núria, researcher)

When researchers who aim at transforming citizens' lives present their results, they particularly address citizens and incorporate their voices in order to get the unique perspective of whether and how the scientific outcomes have improved their lives. In order to include the voices of citizens to discuss research and theories, to give them power in debating and distinguishing what is true and what is not, the researchers interviewed stress the need for this dialogue to be based on evidence or arguments rather than on impositions:

the way in which we thought of breaking with that false discourse was to create a public space [Sappho platform] where people could both place the evidence they had about this issue as well as question those existing theories they had doubts about. we saw the need to legitimize the voices of who says the truth and who doesn't, and that such legitimation doesn't come from the name of the collective you speak on behalf of, but from how you argue what you say and where you get the information from (Miriam, researcher)

The interviewed researcher refers to discourses that, based on non-scientific theories, are presented as the truth, not because of the arguments or evidence that those who claim them provide, but because they seek legitimization based on power positions and status. In order to evaluate social impact, an egalitarian dialogue is needed where, as the interviewee highlights, what matters is the soundness of the arguments, regardless of who provides them.

The insights identified by the interviewed researchers regarding the establishment of an open egalitarian dialogue were also identified as a key element by the interviewed citizens. To their view, this allowed them to break with the hierarchical gap between researchers and participants, bringing them closer to the research and how and why this is produced. Furthermore, they acknowledge that this is key to guarantee a plurality of voices, so that anyone regardless of their background can contribute to the discussions:

the first [dialogic space on science] where I participated had a great impact on me, I thought my participation had no place there, it was CIMIE conference, in Barcelona, and in the assemblies that are held after every area, everybody could participate, and I remember that surprised me a lot. It was the area of inclusion, and a colleague and I said that as teachers, we thought it would be important to conduct more research about a specific topic. And that was my first time in a space like that, talking with researchers, and being able to speak as a citizen about what we thought important for researchers to study (Mireia, teacher)

### ***The Impact of a New Methodological Innovation: Citizen Evaluation of Social Impact***

Interviewed researchers identified that including citizens in the evaluation of the social impact of research has led them to reconfigure the way in which they conduct research. In this

vein, they acknowledge how both, seeing the interviewee in a different role (both as participant and as evaluator), and identifying that society at large will evaluate the outcomes of research, makes them approach interviews differently:

when you are conducting an interview and you're thinking about how citizens will later on evaluate the impact of the results of the research you're conducting, not only do you ask more questions about social impact to the interviewee, but you see him or her differently, they have the role not only of research participants, but also of evaluators of social impact as citizens who will benefit from it and, hence, have to be the ones assessing it. And that itself changes the way in which you make the questions during the interview (Isabel, researcher)

The excerpt from Isabel's interview shows how this new role of citizens as evaluators of the social impact of scientific research leads researchers to pose different questions in the interviews from the ones they would have before integrating this innovation. In addition, several interviewed researchers have pointed out that when citizens come across scientific studies oriented at social impact and engage in a dialogue with them, citizens positively evaluate these spaces, as they identify a possibility for transformation:

in an open egalitarian dialogic space about sexual harassment one girl explained her case. she lived in a foster care institution, and she said she wanted to talk more about the issue. so they [the girls in the foster care institution] started reading *Radical Love* and then decided to implement [Dialogic] Gatherings. they started thinking about and reflecting on things that had happened to them and on the lives they now had. ... there are people who tell you 'you've made me understand, see things in a clear way...' (Clara, researcher)

As Clara shows, the interviewed researchers identified that participating in these dialogues led citizens to want to know more and seek more information. Indeed, interviewed researchers identified that when citizens participate in the evaluation of scientific evidence, identifying the impacts of the implementation of scientific evidence, they progressively extend this practice to other spheres, seeking for further evidence about the issues discussed or asking for more spaces for having dialogues around scientific evidence to get a deeper understanding and impact:

in the school [where I volunteer] when we started Interactive Groups and Dialogic Music Gatherings, for instance we see that we are falling behind in maths, then let's look at this. they looked for evidence, and they found Dialogic Scientific Gatherings, so they asked for a training session. it's like going beyond. sometimes it's the teachers, or the students or the families. I think that the more evidence you have it makes you look for more, or incorporate new things. there's this, you read something, you give them an article (Eva, researcher)

The benefits identified by the interviewed researchers regarding the participation of citizens in the evaluation of social impact were also shared by the interviewed citizens. In this regard, citizens explain that when they get to know scientific evidence of social impact and evaluate it, differentiating what yields positive results from what does not, many of them do not stop there and want to know even more, seeing it as necessary in order to further improve. Indeed, some interviewed citizens value the participation in the evaluation of scientific evidence as having a direct influence in changing their lives and practices, motivating them to analyse evidence for the transformations it makes possible and to incorporate key findings in different aspects of their everyday lives:

there's like a turning point from the moment when I get to know successful educational actions, because you go from moving in an uncertainty field when working, not knowing whether what you're doing is better, worse, to being confident that what you're going to do, if you do it right and implement it right, will give you results and will improve things. For example, a kid who came falling behind to school, we started with the successful educational actions and it was a kid who didn't even know how to hold a pencil at age seven and in this last evaluation he has passed everything, it's amazing! and all thanks to the successful actions, applying evidence. I completely link it to that, I haven't done anything else! (Alejandra, teacher)

## Discussion

The current research describes a methodological innovation, namely, the participation of citizens in the evaluation of the social impact of the research, from the researchers' perspective. Three main characteristics that define and make possible such advancement have been presented: first, that the co-creation of the evaluation emerges when researchers build their contributions 'on the shoulders' of previous scientific knowledge and by including the voices of citizens from the beginning of the process. Second, that the evaluation process takes the dialogic dynamic of openness and egalitarian participation based on the power of arguments. Third, that this dialogic evaluation process opens a twofold opportunity. On the one hand, it pushes researchers to improve the way in which they conduct interviews; on the other, it fosters citizens to reflect on the improvements that engaging with scientific research oriented to social impact have brought to their lives, which in turn drives them to demand more of such advancements.

Regarding the first characteristic presented, the results of the current study show how as a consequence of the dialogic society, researchers increasingly seek to incorporate citizens' voices in the co-creation of scientific knowledge. This is consistent with research that reflects how an increasing number of citizens are demanding more opportunities to engage in dialogue with others and make informed and free decisions in a democratic way (Racionero & Padrós, 2010;

Torras-Gómez et al., 2019). Furthermore, the results presented here show how the interviewed researchers identify a shift in science towards increasing interdisciplinarity.

In addition, the interviewed researchers express that working 'on the shoulders of giants' (Merton, 1965), that is, incorporating existing scientific knowledge in the development of new research, is key not only to achieve social impact, but also to understand the relevance of incorporating the voices of citizens in the process of achieving such impact. This is contributing to unmasking social theories which have been created without taking into account neither the international scientific community – in its multiple disciplines – nor citizens, exposing how, far from having social impact, such theories fall short in helping understand and improve society.

As for the second characteristic, along the transformation towards a more dialogic society, the results show that the introduction of citizens in the evaluation of social impact requires the establishment of an egalitarian dialogue based on validity claims (Habermas, 1984, 1987) so that all individuals can participate on an equal basis (Gómez et al., 2019). The need for such spaces has already been identified in the inclusion of the voices of research participants in all stages of research (Gómez González, 2021). Along this line, the current study presents evidence of how the inclusion of the voices of all citizens, not only of those that participate in the research, also demands open egalitarian spaces that allow the incorporation of an even greater plurality of voices that enriches and increases the social impact of the knowledge and evidence produced. Indeed, the evidence from this study shows how participants agree on the fact that the evaluation of the social impact of research needs to be dialogic, that is, based on principles of equality and diversity, among others.

By opening up such democratic spaces and engaging citizens' voices in a plural, egalitarian dialogue where all contributions are valued on the basis of arguments and evidence, discourses and pseudoscientific theories imposed as valid get discredited. Indeed, these are rapidly taken down when faced with scientific evidence drawn from interdisciplinary collaborations and with citizens' arguments about their negative consequences. Such advancement can be identified within the dialogic continuum presented by authors who describe the need and willingness of citizens to have their voices taken into account in research (Redondo-Sama et al., 2020; Sordé Martí et al., 2020; Tellado et al., 2020) and take contributions made from intersubjective methodologies such as the Communicative Methodology one step forward (Gómez et al., 2019; Gómez González, 2021).

Last, the interviewed researchers identify how the introduction of the methodological innovation here described has led them to improve the methodological design of their research. This is in line with contributions from qualitative methodologies that show how the participation of citizens in research beyond their role of 'participants' contributes to the overcoming of the subject-object binary and yields

improvements for society (Gómez González, 2021; Liebenberg et al., 2020).

Moreover, it is in these dialogic spaces that citizens can assess whether the knowledge produced by research has actually improved or worsened their lives. This shows how this methodological innovation is contributing to the aims set by international research programs and institutions (European Commission, 2017). The interviews conducted in the current study reveal that citizens report improvements in their own lives and in those of others in their communities when they get to interact with and assess the evidence of social impact related to the goals established by society itself (Aiello et al., 2020; Reale et al., 2018). Indeed, it helps them better understand their contexts and distinguish between scientific evidence and false assumptions that cause them so much harm. If social sciences and humanities aim at achieving and optimizing social impact, qualitative methodologies and social theories must take into account citizens' voices not only in the co-creation of knowledge, but also in the evaluation of its social impact.

### Limitations and Future Research

The current study contributes a methodological advancement yielded by orienting research to social impact. Such innovation relies on the participation of citizens in the evaluation of research results. Nevertheless, the current study presents some limitations and identifies future research that can contribute to advancing knowledge on this matter.

First, in this study the participants, both researchers and citizens have been involved in research rooted in the social sciences. It would be interesting to conduct future research that explores this methodological innovation in other sciences. Second, the current research is the first one that focuses on describing the characteristics that define and make such an innovation possible. Future research should delve more on each of these characteristics individually, in order to contribute new understandings that enlarge the knowledge on the possibilities and limitations of the participation of citizens in the evaluation of research results. Moreover, in the current study a diversity of participants has been sought, in order to gather a broad view of experiences in the first definition of the methodological innovation here presented, with researchers as the main target group, and citizens to contrast the findings. Further research may focus on specific target groups to provide knowledge on the impact it specifically has on them, providing more evidence on its replicability and its capacity to provide research outcomes that contribute to the improvement of the lives of all citizens. Last, the results here presented include a diversity of contexts and participants in which this methodological innovation is being replicated in different methodologies and sciences. Further research shall delve on this aspect, studying the ways in which citizens' evaluation of social impact is being

conducted with different qualitative methodologies, not only the CM.

### Conclusion

The dialogic turn of societies has led to changes that include more and more citizens in the decisions and matters that affect their lives, contributing to the Human Right to science. Such turn has reached research on all sciences, which increasingly include citizens' needs in their research objectives, as well as the voices of citizens in processes of co-creation of knowledge. Within this line of advancements, the current study has presented a methodological innovation, the dialogic participation of all citizens in the evaluation of the social impact of research. The research here presented provides evidence on how such innovation emerges from building scientific knowledge from previous scientific contributions, while incorporating the voices of all citizens in research. Moreover, it shows that for such evaluation to take place, researchers must create dialogic spaces in which arguments overcome power claims that rely on status and power positions. Finally, it shows how counting on citizens for the evaluation of research results not only provides evidence of how this improves the methodological design of research, but also contributes to improving citizens' lives, while it promotes the engagement of citizens in science. This, in turn, makes citizens appreciate the benefits that it brings to them and demand for more scientific contributions that keep improving their lives and communities, leading to the co-creation of further research capable of yielding social impact.

### Acknowledgements

This article draws, among others, on the knowledge created by MS-G and RF in the process of elaboration the research project ALLINTERACT. Widening and diversifying citizen engagement in science, selected and funded under H2020 program (SwafS-20-2018-2019: Building the SwafS knowledge base), of which the former is the KMC Coordinator, and the later the Main Researcher.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the research project ALLINTERACT. Widening and Diversifying Citizen Engagement in Science, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N. 872396

### ORCID iDs

Marta Soler-Gallart  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4494-4508>

Ramon Flecha  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7230-516X>



## References

- Aiello, E., Amador-López, J., Munté-Pascual, A., & Sordé-Martí, T. (2019). Grassroots Roma women organizing for social change: A study of the impact of Roma women student gatherings. *Sustainability: Science Practice and Policy*, 11(15), 4054. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11154054>
- Aiello, E., Donovan, C., Duque, E., Fabrizio, S., Flecha, R., Holm, P., Molina, S., Oliver, E., & Reale, E. (2020). Effective strategies that enhance the social impact of social sciences and humanities research. *Policy Press*, 17(1), 131–146. <https://doi.org/10.1332/174426420X15834126054137>
- European Commission (2017). *Applying relevance-assessing methodologies to Horizon 2020*. [https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other\\_reports\\_studies\\_and\\_documents/applying\\_relevance-assessing\\_methodologies\\_to\\_horizon\\_2020\\_metho\\_expert\\_group.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/applying_relevance-assessing_methodologies_to_horizon_2020_metho_expert_group.pdf)
- European Commission (2018). *A new horizon for Europe: Impact assessment of the 9th EU framework programme for research and innovation*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/00d78651-a037-11e8-99ee-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-77975709>
- Gómez, A., Padrós, M., Ríos, O., Mara, L. C., & Pukepuke, T. (2019). Reaching social impact through communicative methodology. Researching with rather than on vulnerable populations: The Roma case. *Frontiers in Education*, 4, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00009>
- Gómez González, A. (2021). Science with and for society through qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 27(1), 10–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800419863006>
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action* (Vol. I). Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *The theory of communicative action* (Vol. II). Beacon.
- Khalfou, A. (2019). Continuidades y cambios en la identidad de la mujer gitana. Un estudio de caso. *International Journal of Roma Studies*, 1(2), 185–203. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijrs.2019.4649>
- Liebenberg, L., Jamal, A., & Ikeda, J. (2020). Extending youth voices in a participatory thematic analysis approach. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920934614>
- Merton, R. K. (1965). *On the shoulders of giants: A shandean postscript*. Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=dyqZOcux9o0C>
- Munté Pascual, A., de Vicente, I., Matulic, V., & Amador, J. (2020). The invisible feminist action of Roma families. *Affilia*, 35(4), 516–532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886109920906780>
- Pincock, K., & Jones, N. (2020). Challenging power dynamics and eliciting marginalized adolescent voices through qualitative methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920958895>
- Pulido, C. M., Villarejo-Carballido, B., Redondo-Sama, G., & Gómez, A. (2020). COVID-19 infodemic: More retweets for science-based information on coronavirus than for false information. *International Sociology*, 35(4), 377–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920914755>
- Racionero, S., & Padrós, M. (2010). The dialogic turn in educational psychology el giro dialógico en la psicología de la educación. *Revista Psicodidáctica*, 15(2), 143–162.
- Reale, E., Avramov, D., Canhial, K., Donovan, C., Flecha, R., Holm, P., Larkin, C., Lepori, B., Mosoni-Fried, J., Oliver, E., Primeri, E., Puigvert, L., Scharnhorst, A., Schubert, A., Soler, M., Soòs, S., Sordé, T., Travis, C., & Van Horik, R. (2018). A review of literature on evaluating the scientific, social and political impact of social sciences and humanities research. *Research Evaluation*, 27(4), 298–308. <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvx025>
- Redondo-Sama, G., Díez-Palomar, J., Campdepadrós, R., & Morlà-Folch, T. (2020). Communicative methodology: Contributions to social impact assessment in psychological research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 286. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00286>
- Searle, J., & Soler, M. (2005). *Lenguaje y ciencias sociales*. Diálogo entre John Searle y CREA. El Roure.
- Soler, M., & Gómez, A. (2020). A citizen's claim: Science with and for society. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(8–9), 943–947. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420938104>
- Sordé, T., Serradell, O., Oliver, E., Aiello, E., & López de Aguilera-Jaussi, G. (2020). Recovering parsons through Roma's voices for constructing European societal community. In S. Saba, C. Barca, & G. Clitan (Eds.), *Collective capacity building. Shaping education and communication in knowledge society* (pp. 45–58). Brill.
- Sordé Martí, T., Flecha, R., Rodríguez, J. A., & Bosch, J. L. C. (2020). Qualitative inquiry: A key element for assessing the social impact of research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(8–9), 948–954. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420938117>
- Tellado, I., Lepori, B., & Morla-Folch, T. (2020). WIEGO: Communicative daily life stories to assess social impact in the lives of informal workers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(8–9), 962–969. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420938680>
- Torras-Gómez, E., Guo, M., & Ramis, M. (2019). Sociological theory from dialogic democracy. *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 216–234. <https://doi.org/10.17583/rimcis.2019.4919>
- Valero, D., Elboj, C., Plaja, T., & Munté Pascual, A. (2020). Social work and the Roma community: Elements to improve current practices. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(6), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1857705>
- Valls, R., Avramov, D., Macías-Aranda, F., & Plaja, T. (2020). The best diagnosis is the autopsy, but it comes too late. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(8–9), 970–976. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420938681>
- van den Besselaar, P., Flecha, R., & Radauer, A. (2018). *Monitoring the impact of EU framework programmes*. European Commission.