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In the Path to Regaining Social Sciences Legitimacy through Public Sociology

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In the Path to Regaining Social Sciences Legitimacy through Public Sociology

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Abstract

In the process of approval of the European Commission Horizon 2020, research in the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) has been under threat. Not only new liberals, but also migrant movements, Roma organizations, feminists, and other citizens have questioned social sciences as a valid instrument to contribute to overcome the crisis and its related inequalities, especially in Europe. In this framework, this article discusses the role that public sociology plays for social sciences to regain legitimacy in current times. Particularly, the article defends that this regaining of prestige can be done through the study of Successful Actions, which have proven effective in reducing inequalities wherever they have been implemented. Drawing on the INCLUD-ED research, a large-scale project of the EU Framework Programme of Research (2006-2011), the article analyses the impact of implementing Successful Actions in the improvement of quality of life in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Spain.

Keywords: public sociology, successful actions, social sciences, transformation, Dialogic Inclusion Contract

Hacia la Recuperación de la Legitimidad de las Ciencias Sociales a partir de la Sociología Pública

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Resumen

En el proceso de aprobación del programa de la Comisión Europea: Horizon 2020, la investigación en Ciencias Sociales y las Humanidades estuvo amenazada. No solamente liberales sino movimientos de inmigrantes, feministas y otros ciudadanos y ciudadanas han cuestionado las ciencias sociales como un instrumento para contribuir a superar la crisis y las desigualdades asociadas a ésta. En este marco, este artículo discute el rol que la sociología pública juega para que las ciencias sociales recuperen legitimidad. Esta recuperación puede hacerse a través del estudio de las Actuaciones de Éxito que demuestran superar desigualdades a nivel mundial. En base a los resultados de INCLUD-ED, único proyecto integrado del área de Ciencias Socio-económicas del 6th Programa Marco Europeo de investigación, coordinado por científicos sociales españoles, el artículo analiza el impacto de implementar Actuaciones de Éxito en la mejora de la calidad de vida en el barrio más pobre de España.

Palabras clave: sociología pública, actuaciones de éxito, ciencias sociales, transformación, Contrato de Inclusión Dialógica

In the process of approval of Horizon 2020 European Strategy, the new EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation of the European Commission, Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH onwards) research has been under threat. The reason has much to do with the financial crisis, which has increased inequality and has led to the emergence of many social problems that governments and citizens have to face (European Commission, 2011). In front of this difficult situation the European citizenry is sceptical about the ability of the SSH research for being a useful instrument to identify ways to deal with the worst recession experienced in Europe in current times. In other words, today many social actors mistrust the capacity of social sciences to provide solutions to the crisis and to the effects it is causing on their everyday life. Importantly, such mistrust comes not only from new liberals, but also from sectors of population such as migrant movements, Roma organizations, feminists and other citizens who are now at more risk of social exclusion.

SSH have often failed to provide evidence-based solutions to address the socio-economic problems, and it is precisely because of this that they are deeply questioned as a legitimate endeavour to be publically funded. After decades of the European Framework Programme, the capacity of social sciences to return to citizenry the collective efforts invested in them is under stake. This stance is grounded on the evidence of the often limited impact of SSH research in society. For instance, the NET4SOCIETY survey report¹ concluded that Framework Program (FP7) projects' outcomes lead first and foremost to significant progress beyond the-state-of-the-art with regard to new concepts, methodology, data, European coverage and interdisciplinary, while the relevance of outcomes for policy initiatives is assessed as less significant. It has been also observed that while researchers take the Work Programme objectives and the expected impact very seriously and despite the researchers' positive assessment, the project's actual impact is perceived as difficult to pursue and measure. This poor impact of SSH EU funded research has been object of concern for the European Commission. One reason for this poor impact in improving society is that usually, SSH research has been focused on a sociological description of social and cultural phenomena providing knowledge on the nature of the problems rather than on the venues for overcoming them. This

has been particularly the case when studies have focused on the “wrongs”, that is, research that has uniquely focused on description of failure and exclusion (Fine & Weis, 1996).

The recognition of the importance and utility of social research requires scientists to demonstrate its potential impact on solving the problems analyzed. SSH acting as a science of society is essential in the present context of economic crisis, when efficient scientifically based responses are necessary to successfully tackle the emerging societal challenges. Indeed, this role of social sciences has been used as one of the arguments supporting an independent research program on SSH within the Horizon 2020 Research Programme of the European Commission. This was the central idea in an open letter published by researchers across Europe as a response to the loss of independence and, therefore, importance of SSH in the new Framework Programme of Research of the EU. In that letter, it is argued that the current challenges that European societies have to face are social by nature. Therefore, it is central to conduct specific research in the field of SSH which provide sociological knowledge to help Europe overcome inequalities, exclusion and poverty and to better respond to the demographic change. This will contribute to create new opportunities in societies that aim at becoming more inclusive and democratic, and achieving the 2020 European objective of being a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy (European Commission, 2010a). Nonetheless, again, for this to happen, SSH research must recover their role of being a science *of* and *for* society.

Moving beyond immobilism, and along the open letter lines, the present article is aimed at providing one way out to the current SSH contestation, showing that social sciences can regain legitimacy by being oriented towards “public sociology” (Burawoy, 2007). Particularly, authors will draw from their participation in the INCLUD-ED project (2006-2011), the only SSH Integrated Project ever coordinated by Spanish social scientists in all the EU Framework Programmes of research. Particularly, it will be argued that SSH can recover their place through the study of what have been called the “Successful Actions” (SAs). INCLUD-ED was developed under the communicative methodology which, in line with the public sociology approach, has been central for reaching important scientific and

socio-political impact (Gómez et al., 2011). Thus, the results of INCLUDED have informed different communications and resolutions from the European Commission and the European Council². These communications and resolutions encourage the implementation in different areas of society (education, employment, health, housing, social and political participation) of the SAs identified (Aubert, 2011).

Two claims are made here about the SAs approach. First, the identification of successful actions and their recreation in particular context is showed to be a way to engage in public sociology, because it means putting sociological knowledge at the service and disposal of society. Second, the fact that the SA approach contributes to have a real impact on people's life opens up new avenues for the SSH to recover its legitimacy. Drawing from INCLUDED results, both claims will be supported with the example of a striking case studied in one of the most excluded neighbourhoods in Spain: *La Milagrosa*. In this case, a selection of SAs were implemented under the Dialogic Inclusion Contract (Padrós et al., 2011), an agreement between researchers and “the publics” to recreate evidence-based actions in their community in order to reduce social exclusion. The implementation of the SAs in this *barrio* has represented a profound transformation at various levels, for instance, the creation of more employment as well as the enhancement of social participation.

It will be through this case study, that this article is ultimately aimed at showing that, it is possible to develop a sociology that goes beyond the understanding of social dynamics and the causes and consequences of social inequalities. Thus, it points out a type of sociology that analyses social actions that are already successfully reducing inequality and its associated problems in order to make them available to other contexts or sectors of society.

The article is divided into three sections. In the first section, it is reviewed the scientific literature in regards to the role played by sociology as a science that informs social action, its crisis and its loss of legitimacy. Among others responses, the orientation to make sociology publically relevant is particularly explored, providing different examples worldwide. The SA approach is also presented at the end. In the second section, through the case of *La Milagrosa* neighbourhood, the implementation of

SA approach is reviewed as it has led to crucial improvements in the life of the neighbours. As a result, the citizenry living there recovered their trust in the social sciences' utility and research in general. The article finishes with some concluding remarks.

Times of Crisis and the Sociological Responses

Relevant authors in the social sciences have extensively analyzed the role that crisis play in society, but also how times of crisis affect the role played by social sciences in relation to society. According to Habermas (1984), Marx was the first in developing a sociological concept of crisis. Thus, Habermas (1975) saw the undermining of the legitimacy of the capitalist system resulting from the governments' failure to intervene in order to ensure economic prosperity. Generally, the validity of a governing structure or a system falls into question when it does not demonstrate to fulfil, in practice, the end for which it was instituted. At present, this is what has occurred with the capitalist system and with most governments in capitalist countries. But what does happen to sociology when governing systems lose legitimation? And even more, is it possible to transfer the same phenomenon of legitimation crisis to sociology as a knowledge system?

Sociology, as the science of society, does not remain untouched from social processes. Contrarily, throughout history, sociology has been deeply influenced by socio-economic crises. Episodes of crisis can entail resistances to change, periods of stagnation or transitions towards more innovative approaches that challenge the existing social problems. For instance, Lee (2003) studied the impact that the socioeconomic context has on the social sciences academia in the United States. According to him, looking back to 1968, three axes can explain the crisis: a reduction of resources that coincides with the increase of demand (economic level); an increase of expectations based on the rhetoric of success that clashes with a reality with limited possibilities of success (political level); and, the dualism between pretensions of objectivity and value neutrality in the university institutions, challenged by scepticism and complexity (intellectual level). The appearance of the two first is clear in the context of the recent global finance crisis.

The particular crisis affecting the sociological academia has been tackled

by scholars like Piotr Sztompka (1991). He identifies three dilemmas which can generate certain crisis in the social sciences and on which social scientists have to take a stand: the knowledge-action dilemma; the focus on the individual or on the collective dilemma; and the role of values in social sciences (the neutralism-axiologism dilemma). In Sztompka's view, when these dilemmas remain unsolved, then sociologists find themselves without the guidance of any unambiguous and universally accepted paradigm and suffer an acute sense of crisis. Establishing a parallelism with Merton's (1957) contributions about anomie and normlessness, Sztompka has established four possible patterns of responses to such sense of crisis. In the *ritualistic pattern* sociologists follow blindly the scientific routines or procedures established, not taking into account the validity or utility of the final outcomes. In the *retreatist pattern* theoretical and methodological eclecticism is considered a virtue, being close to a methodological "anything goes". In the *rebellious pattern* new objectives and processes are suggested, although new questions appear about whether sociological knowledge either approaches or moves away from scientific knowledge. The response to the crisis of sociology that Sztompka considers to be the most promising is the *innovative pattern*, in which the traditional objective of science is accepted, but the traditional approaches to this aim are rejected. For the author, it is only through innovation that the full creative potential of the crisis can be utilized. In addition, Sztompka proposes the *dialectic critique of assumptions* as a method to overcome the traditional dilemmas. This implies a *dialectic sociology*, where sociology becomes a science of society, but also a practical force for improving society. However, this has not been always the role that sociology has played, being precisely the root of the problem, which in Habermas' words it is the "legitimation crisis" of sociology.

Besides Sztompka's dialectic sociology, in the recent decade, the importance of producing socially relevant sociological knowledge has been also advanced as a way out of the crisis. Michael Burawoy is one of the main defenders of what has been denominated public sociology. His work promotes a shift in sociology to focus on issues that reflect and respond to the publics' concerns and interests. By "publics", Burawoy refers to the social movements, organizations and other social actors, the ones that under

the public sociology approach engage in a dialogic relation with sociologists. Burawoy (2005) analyzes the different ways of making sociology and he states that public sociology is part of a broader division of sociological labour that also other types of sociologies: policy, professional and critical sociology, all different forms that are interdependent. According to him, this shift can serve the purpose of regaining the loss of meaning in which the sociological endeavour was falling.

Many sociologists all around the world have been working along with this public orientation. With the aim not only to understand the world but to contribute also with solutions to the problems that society faces, these public sociologists attempt to focus on the possibilities of achieving a balance between the different approaches to create sociological knowledge and, at the same time, to guarantee the incorporation of the civil society's point of view in this knowledge. This is what Marshall Ganz (2010) claims when arguing that the studies of leadership in social movements have focused more on a structural point of view, analyzing the difficulties of such movements to achieve their goals, rather than on their transformative possibilities. Focusing on agency rather than on structures enable sociologists to connect with the objectives of social movements and perform sociological analysis that is useful for those movements and for society in general. The "Real Utopias" project developed by Erik O. Wright (2010) is also aligned with the purpose of doing public sociology. This project starts from the need to combine the normative discussions on the basic principles and the *raison d'être* of different emancipatory perspectives with the analysis of the pragmatic problems in the institutions. More precisely, it is based on the idea that what is pragmatically possible is not independent of our imagination. Instead, it is shaped by our vision on reality. The *real utopias* are ideals that seeming to be impossible are grounded on the real potentialities of humanity, of the people; they are designs of our institutions that seeming to be impossible exist and can nurture the practices oriented towards social change in a world that needs transformation. Therefore, through the engagement of the publics in research public sociology perspective adequately responds to the rise of dialogic process in today's society, and also to the *dialogic turn of social sciences*. According to Flecha et al. (2003), that is, the increasing role played by dialogue in the scientific

field and the need for dual theories of society that explain the relationship between systems and subjects. The incorporation of the citizens' demands in the research agenda and its priority of addressing the most pressing social problems make public sociology a key approach to contribute to regain the democratic origins of social sciences (Dumay et al., 2013). In both American and French revolutions, citizenry rebelled against the laws imposed by a king who supposedly reigned as "sovereign of God", and decided to implement self-government based on norms agreed among citizens themselves (Rodríguez & Flecha, 2011). In order to achieve self-government, society needed to know itself; thus, to attain this major task social sciences were created. Now it is time to recover the original purpose, and to engage again with serving society (Bergmann et al., 2014, p. 64).

Similarly, the Successful Actions approach presented in this article constitutes another of the answers from public sociology to the current economic crisis as well as to the questioning of the social sciences' utility. The SA approach consists in identifying those actions that have been scientifically proved to be successful in addressing social problems in any of the contexts where they have been implemented (Valls & Padrós, 2011). The result is a series of actions that have common universal and transferable elements; taking different forms in the very diverse environment they are recreated.

In this regard, the Successful Actions approach is committed to the normativity without losing the descriptive character of sociology and rigorously respecting Weber's valuative neutrality (2009). The identification of actions in different areas (education, social and political participation, employment, housing, health, etc.) are not based on ideological positioning or those of the researcher but are the result of a rigorous scientific process searching for evidences of success. Therefore, the scientific knowledge accumulated by the international scientific community about what works is not implemented blindly, but engaging in dialogue with the end-users.

The fact that the SA implementation is carried out by and with the citizens, with a democratic and transformative orientation serves as a guarantee for its ultimately social utility. Hence, it serves to regain the original meaning of sociology by contributing to address social problems based on the knowledge provided. Contrarily, this meaning of sociology will

be lost if no improvements for society result from social research. Citizens demand both: to decide on their own lives and on the governance of the societies they live in. But in order to decide the best way citizenry needs to know the causes that explain social phenomena and also which are the most effective (scientifically validated) possibilities of overcoming the problems encountered. Similarly to what Fung and Wright (2001) has analyzed: real-world experiments in the redesign of democratic institutions which has achieved to empower ordinary people to effectively participate in and influence policies that affect their lives. These experiences are examples of what they call “empowered deliberative democracy”, as they have the potential to be radically democratic in their reliance on the participation and capacities of ordinary people, they institute reason-based making through deliberation; and they empower citizens since they attempt to tie action to discussion (Fung & Wright, 2001). Similar to this but within the scientific domain, the SA approach requires the direct participation of the “researched people” throughout the investigation.

An Example of How Successful Actions Can Address Current Social Problems

Nowadays one of the most important challenges social sciences have to cope with, as part of their role of public service, is to contribute to promote social cohesion. This challenge includes approaching the reality of ghetto neighbourhoods where a closed circle of inequalities has been long established. According to Brandsma (2001), in these underprivileged urban areas the opportunities to access to societal, cultural and economic spheres are less as compared to other contexts, and problems affecting education, housing and health worsen. These areas are often segregated from the rest of the city, and suffer from a lack of education and economic disadvantage including high and long-term unemployment rates. Thus, these circumstances are contributing to perpetuate exclusion and poverty dynamics (European Council, 2010; European Parliament, 2008; European Union Agency for Fundamental Right, 2009). As a response, the European Platform Against Poverty and Social Exclusion set as a priority the need to

develop an evidence-based approach for social innovation and reforms, requesting to social scientists to offer global alternatives (European Commission, 2010b, p. 14).

The INCLUD-ED overall objective was to identify strategies that promote social cohesion in Europe. The Successful Actions approach upheld by the INCLUD-ED project is in line with the European Commission priorities as it provide both, scientific knowledge to deepen in the comprehension of the European ghettos and also evidence-based actions to reverse them (Flecha & Soler, 2013). The case study presented here was conducted in *La Milagrosa* neighbourhood in Albacete. It was built in the early 80s through a local plan aiming at eliminating shanty towns, most of them inhabited by Roma who could not afford housing in any other part of the city. With this initiative the shanty town was eliminated but social and economic precariousness persisted in their new location. Years later, 7% of the neighbourhood's population was illiterate and 79% had not completed basic or elementary education (Ministerio de Educación, Políticas Sociales y Deportes, 2008). As regards employment, 35% of working age people was registered in social employment plans, mainly addressed to unemployed people in precarious situations.

INCLUD-ED has shown to be effective in connecting research in the social sciences and the public, or in other words, the analytical sphere with the practical sphere. In the case of *La Milagrosa*, the implementation of SAs started at the school, and when the mayor and the other social actors realize about the improvements, they decided to extend the same procedure to the other social areas. In doing so, a procedure called the Dialogic Inclusion Contract (DIC) was developed. This contract consisted in an agreement between all parts to implement the SAs, while researchers were in charge of presenting to the neighbours the identified SAs, the end-users, the public administration, the professionals working there were the ones in deciding in which ways they could be recreated in *La Milagrosa* (Brown et al., 2013). This recreation process consists in a dialogic relation of decision-making established among researchers and end-users. Therefore, the DIC is grounded on the contrast between scientific knowledge and the experience of citizenry or what is known as their “lifeworld” knowledge. The system (accumulated scientific knowledge) is contrasted with the public perspective

that is the diversity of social agents' inputs (neighbours, family members, members of the community, end-users). On the one hand, researchers provide the analysis of these actions as well as the evidence that prove that they have been successful elsewhere. On the other hand, end-users debate about *which* and *in which* way the successful actions can be better implemented in their own context. This is another main achievement of this approach: to equally value the different contributions that the diverse participants make during the knowledge creation-process, not considering the arguments of power but the validity of the arguments (Habermas, 1984). The required conditions to achieve this equal epistemological status between researchers and the end-users of research are met through the communicative research methodology (Gómez et al., 2006; Gómez et al., 2011). Resulting from the DIC procedure is that solutions provided to the difficult situation of ghettos are not based on assumptions, intuitions or superstitions. On the contrary, decisions are based on combining, both the contributions that the international scientific community has developed and proved their success throughout the years, and the knowledge and life experience of the people living in the very area, that is, their lifeworlds (Puigvert et al., 2012).

The implementation of the DIC was not the first attempt to reverse the situation of social exclusion in *La Milagrosa*. Since 1999, an Urban Plan³ was implemented in order to promote the transformation of the neighbourhood, but it did not attain the expected impact as none of the educational, political and social actions that had been undertaken did actually contribute to improve the situation of poverty and exclusion (Padrós et al., 2011). For instance, one local plan were vocational training courses that unemployed people attended for a month, followed by a three-month employment contract offered by the local public sector such as the Albacete City Council. In conversations with the neighbours, they explained that these actions did not help them to access to sustainable jobs, as it was a temporal solution that did not break with their dependence on the public sector. In other words, the type of training courses that they used to take did not make them more competitive in the labour market, as at the end, they remain unemployed. Beyond the neighbours perceptions, time showed them that the program was not useful to insert them in the labour market and that they

were in the same situation of unemployment once the three months of employment were due.

There are evidences that after ten years the situation of the neighbourhood and the people living there did not improve. The effect was the opposite: the exclusion and marginality situations did not decrease but increased, making life in the neighbourhood even more difficult, and as a consequence the levels of social conflict rose to the point that not even the police dared to enter the neighbourhood (Aubert et al., 2010; INCLUD-ED, 2010). The reputation of the neighbourhood as an extremely dangerous place did not help. Disenchantment and distrust were part of the neighbourhood's climate as a response to ineffective actions and policies that had been applied following a top-down model. The majority of neighbours believed that nothing could be done to change their lives and the future of their children. This idea was fed by the low expectations of the professionals that, having been working in *La Milagrosa* since the 90s, considered themselves as “experts on the neighbourhood” and that its transformation “was very difficult, if not impossible”.

In the DIC implementation, the first necessary step was to overcome the negative perception that professionals had of the neighbourhood, explaining them how change was also possible there. With this aim, it was necessary to listen to the voices and experiences of the neighbours. The INCLUD-ED main researcher, disregarding the voices that did not believe in transformation and considered the neighbourhood too dangerous to stay there, not only went there to talk with the neighbours but also spent one night in the home of one of the families (Aubert, 2011). The night in the *barrio* demonstrated that the stereotypes about the neighbourhood and its people were far from the real situation, and that professionals who worked there had only contributed to stigmatize it even more. Thus, contrary to what he had heard, the people were deeply concerned and motivated to improve their families' and their own lives. The house where he spent that night did not have even the minimum conditions to live decently, but still, that night was full of hope and dreams. This served researchers to gather the information about people's objective reality, their opinions and needs in order to subsequently provide them with actions that had demonstrated to be

successful. That night in *La Milagrosa*, life started to change and transformation could not be stopped.

The second step implied to institutionalize a system to guarantee that the neighbours' voices were heard throughout. Up to that moment, the neighbours in this area, who were the end-users of the actions, had not had the opportunity to participate in the decision-making about what needed to be done in their community. This phase was based on the communicative perspective which considers both critical reflection and self-reflection, as well as to the intersubjectivity, a process in which researchers and social agents get to agreements through dialogue (Gómez et al., 2011). This process of dialogue has led to increase both the social impact of the knowledge generated as well as its scientific impact. In this dialogic engagement, researchers proposed different successful actions, which were discussed with the neighbours. The main objective was to reach a consensus on which were the best ones and most appropriate to be implemented in *La Milagrosa*. Everyone involved had the opportunity to participate and they took part in the decision-making in the changes that were about to begin. The areas which the community considered that needed to be urgently addressed for the improvement of their lives were mainly three: education, employment and social and political participation.

The school in the neighbourhood was the first priority in the transformation, and from the success accomplished, the same procedure was implemented to the rest of the areas (participation and employment). Just like in the neighbourhood, the school was suffering a situation of exclusion, marked by high rates of school failure, absenteeism and conflict. In the case of the San Juan school, the implementation of the DIC meant to start the process of transformation of the school based on Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) (García et al., 2010). This implied the administrative close down of the San Juan school and the reopening of the school with a new name: La Paz school. In this change, instead of redistributing the pupils, which is oftentimes done with migrants and cultural minority children, the teachers were the ones who were redistributed. Only those that committed themselves with the educational project that the centre was about to start remained in the school. A series of discussions among families, community members, teachers, public administration, and university were organized

leading to decide to start implementing several SEAs, such as heterogeneous interactive groups or dialogic literary gatherings (Sordé and Mircea, 2011). Through the DIC, each social sector involved defined and agreed upon which was going to be everyone's role in the transformation of the school. Hence, in the second term of the same year in which the process of transformation started (2005-06), the situation of exclusion and school failure was reversed and the improvements in the learning processes and the coexistence were starting to be sustained. The results obtained nowadays demonstrate the positive progress in learning, decreasing absenteeism and the growing improvement of coexistence (Gatt et al., 2011).

After the transformation experienced in the school, the process was extended to other areas of society, being the social actors' participation in the decision-making a core element. For the first time, the actions that had to be carried out to overcome exclusion were not imposed by researchers, political representatives, professionals or by social scientists. Instead they were counting on the participation of the social agents. Many meetings and assemblies were conducted with the neighbours. One of the SA that was implemented was the creation of a Consultative Neighbourhood Council. The council was in charge of monitoring the implementation of the other SA agreed with the community. It was based on the Citizens' Assemblies in British Columbia (Canada). Thus, under the DIC process, the dialogue oriented by communicative rationality required the participation of the people who live in *La Milagrosa*, as a critical element for the transformations' success. The atmosphere in the neighbourhood is very different now. Frustration and despair prevailed in the past and now this new sort of leadership, as Ganz (2009) would express it, fosters and re-enchants the social movements and the community, and mobilizes the people in the neighbourhood in order to act in the direction of transformation.

In the third place, the neighbourhood needed an economic alternative to unemployment and poor jobs a reality that affected the majority of the population. Based on the successful cooperativist actions such as those implemented in the case of the cooperatives of the Mondragon Group (Redondo et al., 2011), the creation of a cooperative in the neighbourhood was launched. The people in the *barrio* were the ones who proposed that some of the activities that were carried out in the informal economy could be

made in a more efficient way with a cooperative. The cooperative gave them the opportunity to exploit the strengths of the community, identifying new possible job opportunities and facilitating the conditions for it, at the same time that they were following the successful cooperativist actions presented by the researchers. This project became an important way for the neighbourhood to promote access to employment for many families who were working in the informal economy in different areas, such as street vending, in construction, in cleaning services or taking care of the elderly. Through the means of the cooperative, many of these activities were formalize and what is most important represented a means to make a living for the cooperative members.

The process of creation of these cooperatives has been developed as one of the projects of a local NGO (*Asociación Miguel Fenollera, 2011a*). The representatives initiated different contacts with regional companies, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the University, neighbours' associations and the public administration and several agreements were achieved. There have already been two agreements with two important saving banks in the region such as *Caja Castilla La Mancha* and *Caja Rural*, and further agreements with a company that offers consulting services and management, and with the Association of Entrepreneurs of Campollano ADECA. An agreement with the University of Castilla-La Mancha was also signed in order to collaborate in the training and preparation of workers and associates of the cooperatives (*Asociación Miguel Fenollera, 2011b; García Ortiz, 2011*). The knowledge, the experience and the resources of all these organizations have been put at the service of the neighbourhood and the community, and to ultimately pursue the cooperative success. In this regard, success means to generate stable and sustainable employment to the neighbours, while offering competitive and useful services for the community and the public in general. The combination of sociological scientific knowledge, the experience of the professionals and the crucial participation of the people living there made possible to identify new employment opportunities not explored before.

The case of *La Milagrosa* neighbourhood shows how the successful actions recreated through the DIC have made possible to generate a profound social transformation. This serves as an example of how to put

public sociology into practice, and supposes the sort of scientific work that brings legitimacy back to the social sciences research.

Concluding Remarks

Sociology needs to be rethought in order to recover its legitimacy, being the reorientation to the public—to engage with society and to respond to the citizenry claims—one way to do so. In this sense, the SA approach presented here makes sociological research to be oriented to the definition of emancipatory alternatives which are transferrable to very diverse social contexts. This approach puts scientifically validated alternatives at the service of society with the goal to enable citizens to choose and decide themselves about their possible recreation in their communities. It enables to recover citizenry's trust in social sciences and promote, at the same time, a public sociology aimed at addressing the most pressing problems of our society. The SA approach proves to be a useful methodological tool in this regards, placing sociology at the people's service. Thus, once the SAs have been identified by researchers, it is through the inclusion of the views of the people living there—the end-users—, that these actions are recreated and possibly effectively transferred to their contexts.

The INCLUD-ED project has identified, and monitored the implementation, of several successful actions that contribute to the overcoming of social exclusion in different areas from education to employment. The effective achievements of the SA approach in terms of reducing poverty were explained in the previous section with the illustration of the case of *La Milagrosa* neighbourhood. The ongoing dialogue between grassroots people and the researchers had a high scientific and socio-political impact. The results published in top scientific journals ranked in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) show the interest that international scientific community has about researches that are contributing to improve people's life.

The European Commission has already integrated this approach in the 7th Framework programme (FP7). Based on the Horizon 2020 European Strategy, the FP7 Work Programme of the SSH included different topics in

which researchers are required to go beyond quantitative and descriptive projects and to incorporate the participation of all social groups involved in the phenomenon analyzed (European Commission, 2011). It also demands to evaluate the innovative approaches that already demonstrate to contribute to improvements and to put special emphasis on the dimensions of gender and vulnerable groups such as young people, migrants or elderly. In this same vein, the flagship initiative “the European platform against poverty and social exclusion”, established by the European Commission in order to accomplish the Horizon 2020 goals too, expects research to contribute with scientific evidences, to be of relevant size and extension, focused on issues that are of political and social utility, and to reassure that the results are transferable to another context (European Commission, 2010b). Many more examples can be provided, not only from governmental bodies but also from a wide range of sectors of the society, from NGOs to individual grassroots citizens, from progressives to conservatives. All of them share the same concern regarding what role is expected for social sciences to play. It is now time for sociologists to reflect about their own theory and praxis in the light of these new challenges, and to better serve the original purpose of the sociological endeavour.

Notes

¹ SSH experiences with FP7 – A commentary "NET4SOCIETY survey report" ftp://ftp.cordis.europa.eu/pub/fp7/ssh/docs/net4society-fp7-commentary_en.pdf, p. 9. Elaborated from results of the project NET4SOCIETY: Trans-national cooperation among National Contact Points for Socio-economic sciences and the Humanities, an FP7 project funded by the EUROPEAN COMMISSION (Grant Agreement 217152).

² European Parliament (2009). Resolution of 2 April 2009 on educating the children of migrants, (P6_TA-PROV(2009)0202). (Brussels); Council of the European Union (2010). Council conclusions of 11 May 2010 on the social dimension of education and training, (2010/C 135/02) (Brussels); European Commission (2011). Tackling early school leaving: A key contribution to the Europe 2020 Agenda, (COM(2011)18) (Brussels); European Commission (2011). Proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, (COM(2011) 19) (Brussels).

³ The Urban Plans are funded by the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) as a tool to regenerate deprived urban neighbourhoods in the European Union.

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