

Research Article

Collaboration, Innovation and Resilience of Local Communities in Times of Economic Crisis

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Abstract

Collaboration between individuals, groups, and organizations become more important in times of distress or economic crisis. Nevertheless, resilience and collaboration, due to natural disasters, are different from an economic crisis, where the deterioration of the quality of life is extended over a longer period and, therefore, needs additional help to improve collaboration. This study aims to establish a relationship between the commitment shown during the planning stage of civic projects and their likelihood of execution, whilst reflecting on how to improve democratic participation and decision making in times of crisis. Using a large-group method built for the purpose, nine civic forums were planned and executed in order to develop the participation of civil society in democracy. A total of three hundred and eighteen civil society representatives produced action plans for the celebration of the anniversary of the 25 April 1974 (Portuguese Revolution), as well as for local development. The work was conducted according to a methodology adapted from the technique *Future Search*, and project commitment was assessed at the beginning and end of each session. The results obtained demonstrate the effectiveness of the method in producing action plans in little time, and an increase in commitment to projects as a result of the sessions; however, it did not reveal itself a successful predictor of projects' execution. The forums allowed us to improve the large-group method, which may be used as a tool to help improve local resilience against adversity by promoting civil participation in decision making and regional development.

Keywords: *Civil Society; Democracy; Large-Group Methods; Portuguese Revolution; Project Commitment*

Introduction

This study is intended to establish a relationship between the commitment shown during the planning stage of civic projects and their likelihood of execution, whilst reflecting on how to improve democratic participation and decision making in times of crisis. A large-group method was adapted to civic forums, as a way to develop citizen commitment to projects and their likelihood of execution. The relationship will be displayed based on the result of the execution of eight forums, held over a year in various parts of the country (Portugal), aimed at planning and carrying out actions that were connected with the anniversary of the 25 April revolution in 1974, as well as performing a local development forum in collaboration with a district authority in Lisbon.

Building on the grounds of the forums, and including contributions to the meetings that took place using a large-group decision-making method, some discussion about civil society and the development of democracy in Portugal is included, as well as some considerations about its antecedents.

The reasons behind this work have to do with the increasing separation between the representative bodies of democracy and the basis from which they arise. Indeed, despite all the freedom of expression allowed by the existing governance structures and technology, citizens are increasingly moving away from political life and placing less and less confidence in the ability of their vote to influence the future in a positive manner. It is therefore important to determine to what extent it is possible to encourage people to join and participate in political life, creating something beneficial to the collective rather than only making petitions, protests, demonstrations, voting for the rotation of political parties, or creating new ones, with the consequent increase in the fragmentation of the society. Within

this purpose in mind it was considered that the anniversary of 25 April 1974 revolution could constitute a valid objective for bringing people together. Also, the building of fast decision-making processes with large groups could increase the civic engagement of participants tired of meetings where time is consumed and nothing is solved.

It is this experience that is reproduced in this article, where it will presented a decision-making model, based on working methods with large groups and the use of a measure of commitment as a predictor of success in implementing the planned projects. Prior to the discussion of the results it will be important to present a literature review on democracy and civic participation, especially in the case of Portugal, as well as the decision-making methods with large groups and the adaptation that was used in the forums.

Democracy and Participation

As stated by Keane [1] in his work, *The Life and Death of Democracy*, democracy has its roots in Islam, in the region that corresponds today to Iraq, Syria and Iran, the Mycenaean civilization (1500–1200 AC), and in urban areas of the Peloponnese. This first phase, called “public meetings”, where the example of Jesus (sentenced to death in a “democratic” way) had special importance, formed the basis of the design of representative governments and principles such as resistance to tyrants, petitions, free press, popular elections, periodical mandates and the abolition of the monarchy, without which there would have been no change in the vision of political power.

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The second phase of democratic construction, called “representative democracy”, began with the Spanish Cortes (Alfonso IX of Leon), in the tenth century, a format in which the king chose representatives from the clergy and nobility. According to Fernandes [2], these meetings were continued with the parliamentary assemblies and the “aristocratic democracy” of the Netherlands, at the end of sixteenth century (in 1581 the first representative government declared the Netherlands free of Spain). Finally, in the eighteenth century, with the French and American revolutions, democracy and representative government were consolidated around the control of public spending, following the existing principle in the Middle Ages of “no taxation without representation”. Although they represent, according to Huntington [3], the “first wave” of democracy, it should be noted that none of these revolutions instituted democracy as we know it today. Indeed, in the French case, Robespierre was established as the first democratic dictator, later followed by the “caudillos” of South America. In North America, the Washington government model was far from being democratic and favourable to the existence of a civil society. Only at the end of the eighteenth century, after several rebellions, and especially after the War of Secession (the Southern Confederate States had the Greek slave model as an ideal of democracy), did the country see the birth of political parties. However, shortly after the war against the English (1812), the US revealed the divisions within, and the subsequent discrediting of the party system — beginning with Abraham Lincoln as president (1861-1865) when one fifth of state jobs were occupied by affiliated supporters — that would increase between 1890 and 1920. The building of democracy and the accountability of political parties was won by civil society thanks to the contribution of movements such as the Suffragettes (1881-1919). Similarly, the movement of human rights and the rights of African-Americans, with activists such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, were instrumental in the growth of this phase of democracy.

Still drawing from Huntington’s work [3], the “second wave” of democracy occurred in the post-war period (1945-1960), with examples such as India, South Africa, Senegal, Tanzania, Japan, Israel, and others. Indeed, a third of existing democracies in 1958 were established after the end of the Second World War. The German example of “co-determination” (*Mitbestimmung*), born of desperate circumstances, deserves to be highlighted in the context of the fall of the Nazi regime and the slave labour basis of the coal industry of the Ruhr Valley. The committees of miners were mandatory to the recovery of the region and provided the touchstone for a form of labour and political organisation that had the distinctive character of the participation of employees in management, still visible today in German firms.

Finally, Huntington’s “third wave”, or the “monitored democracy” of John Keane, began with the establishment of democracy in Portugal with the 25 April revolution in 1974, which was followed by other countries, particularly in Europe and Central and South America. For Keane [1] this type of post-parliamentary democracy is characterised by the rapid growth of many extra-parliamentary forms of scrutiny of power, ensuring that the political elected parties and governments are in permanent imbalance, being questioned in their authority and forced to change schedules. Using many forms (e.g., “think tanks”, observers, regional assemblies, participatory budgets), civil society transforms democracy into something that is more than a mere parliamentary assembly or a government majority party, to create a government in which power is everywhere, and subjected to checks and balances so that no one can exercise it without the consent of the governed or their representatives. Of course much of this interference is permitted by technology and the internet.

However, despite this development of democracy, when we take into account the reduction of the effective participation of

people (an issue that will be discussed later) it is not certain that “monitored democracy” is here to stay. Indeed, and because of the end of ideologies, the fact that the political parties have reduced their potential as employers of excellence and are to be financed by the state, the quota of party militants is decreasing [1]: from fifteen per cent in the 1960s to ten per cent in the 1980s and less than five per cent in the year 2000, with European countries at the top. It is true that the parties do everything to achieve greater popularity, such as associating with movie stars, holding primary elections or inventing new parties, but this does not prevent that more than eighty per cent of the electorate feels unrepresented by the traditional parties, and turn to extremist parties, as suggested in the analysis of Tony Blair [4]. This is perhaps why this type of regime may be seen as obsolete and a curiosity of the North Atlantic countries by, for example, Arab countries such as Dubai, or Asian countries such as Singapore, which serve now as global references for forms of government.

Let us now, more specifically, consider the evolution of civil society that, according to Fernandes [2], refers to voluntary associations of citizens, independent of the State and the Church, whose origins lie in the modern age itself.

The Associations in Portugal

As Martins [5] states, influenced by the great European movements (the Industrial Revolution in England in the late eighteenth century, and the French Revolution, from 1789 to 1793), associations acquired greater expression in Portugal with the liberal movement of 1820. Furthermore, boosted by the consequences of those European movements in our country, such as the poverty caused by the French invasions (1807-1811), the withdrawal of the court to Brazil, and the English military occupation, from 1808 the associations won a place of greater social relevance. The first associations were of workers who came together around the provision of services for consumption and credit, as well as to the fight against disease and illiteracy. This movement was accentuated in the second half of the nineteenth century, fading later with the fall of the monarchy, the birth of the Republic, and the crisis that followed.

However, it was following the military coup of 28 May 1926 and the birth of the Second Republic that the popular associations suffered major difficulties because totalitarian systems do not deal well with democratic forms of popular expression. Thus, although not systematically dismantled, Salazar’s (dictator over 48 years) government did not encourage private associations, preferring to control them by monitoring their leaders and replacing them whenever possible by state corporations and alternatives such as FNAT (National Foundation for Joy at Work), the People’s Houses, and the Houses of Fishermen.

It was with the advent of the revolution of the 25 April 1974 that the association movement developed, almost doubling the number of associations, very much due to the support of municipalities, and thus reflecting the political party majorities in the various regions. In the 1980s the state encouraged the associations and strengthened its presence with the creation of the legal figure of the IPSS (Private Social Solidarity Institutions), supported by social security. Nevertheless, and as pointed by Monteiro [6], Portugal is the European country with the lowest rate of civic membership, a weak indicator of the Portuguese society in terms of social capital. Thus, unsurprisingly, it differs greatly from countries such as Scandinavia, England, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Belgium, for example, where more than eighty per cent of the population belong to associations, whereas in France and the Italy the percentage does not exceed forty per cent, with less than thirty per cent in Portugal and Spain [2].

Today, the relationship between the state and the associations tend to be weaker given the decrease in financial aid from municipalities.

Furthermore, if the great civic associations (e.g., trade unions, political parties) face militant reductions, some local associations survive only thanks to their own revenue (e.g., bars, contributions) and some outside support. In the case the other type of associations, the IPSS, the state provides seventy five per cent of the revenue and only four per cent is derived from voluntary donations, which, according to Monteiro [6] is the reverse of what happens in other countries, thus reflecting the acceptance of a state policy and programmatic guidance outlined by the government regulator.

Reasons for Civic Association Decline

As to the reasons for the weakening of the associative movement, Putnam [7] places the use of leisure time as one of the greatest dangers threatening the American society (in 1929, six per cent of personal income was spent on clubs and social support, falling to half with the advent of television), as well as the education factor as the major predictors of civic engagement.

Notwithstanding the gregarious movement that followed the great crises of the twentieth century (world wars and the Great Depression), Putnam locates the causes of social isolation, fundamentally, in the generational perspective. Thus, and despite the apparent increase in tolerance for social issues, such as racial segregation, women's emancipation, abortion or gay marriage, it is not possible to conclude that the younger generations are more tolerant than those that preceded. Indeed, there is evidence that the generation of baby boomers, who came out of the Second World War, is more ignorant politically, marries later and divorces faster, has a higher youth suicide rate and is linked to half of the associations the generation of the 1920s was.

Several factors contribute to this generational evolution, which explains fifty per cent of social isolation, at the head of which appears the television and electronic entertainment (twenty five per cent), the distance to the suburbs of the cities (ten per cent), and time and money pressures (ten per cent). With respect to electronic entertainment, television is the main reason of the isolation, as it cuts people out of social life in an almost compulsive manner. As to the internet, it has ambivalent effects because, although the contact mediated by the computer deletes emotions and body language, it creates a more equal relationship, and promotes youth volunteering and self-help groups. Both television and the internet reduce reading of printed newspapers, a factor considered to be an indicator of civic and political concern.

The urban phenomenon is also complex, in terms of isolation regarding factors such as the contraction of the family's core, the automobile saturation of urban centers, the proliferation of shopping centres and the end of local businesses, increasing insecurity, residential instability, and the time spent on transportation. On the question of time and money, Putnam [7] refers to aspects related to work, which not only absorbs more and more time from the individual, but also generates increasing dissatisfaction, is subject to greater control (in 2000, two-thirds of employees were subjected to electronic surveillance), individual and market competition, reduced mutual trust and friendships in the workplace, and an increase in temporary contracts. Explaining social isolation as a consequence of lack of money is not convincing, if we compare it with previous periods (e.g. Great Depression) where people had far fewer resources. Although the welfare state did not exist, the gap between the rich and the poor — considered to be the most important factor of social fragmentation — was smaller.

Heming [8] analyses the resulting solidarity in dramatic events as due to the protective instinct of the human species, as happened, for example, in the war of 1642, before which there was no association in his country (UK). For Heming, associations are the most effective

barrier for opposing the transformation of a liberal democracy into a totalitarian regime. He cites the example of collaboration between enemy troops during the First World War, which is also discussed by Axelrod [9], who mentions collaboration as the probability that actors recognise that if they cease to collaborate the results are always worse than the if they do collaborate. Behaviours expressing dislike, dropout threats, or irresponsibility, are destructive for any collaboration, making it clear that there we be retaliation for any aggressive behaviour and the initial altruism will continue only as long as it is reciprocal.

Adaptation of decision-making methodologies with large groups

Research on decision-making methods in large groups, with the intention of initiating innovation and change to organisations and communities, through the involvement of many people in the decision-making process, is well documented. Kurt Lewin, Douglas McGregor, Mary Parker Follett, Fred Emery, and Eric Trist are just some of the names considered by Weisbord [10] in an extensive review of the theoretical foundations of the methods for large groups, also described in [11].

These methods are intended for interventions in groups where the number of participants is greater than thirty, with meetings ranging in duration from two to four days, and that are suitable for several types of problems. As to the optimal size of the group, this varies between thirty and one hundred and fifty, the ideal size being seventy to eighty people, which is considered the ideal number to achieve sufficient diversity of opinions and types of knowledge. The methods have their own sequences but, on the whole, they rely on an organization around groups of eight to set a vision of the desirable future. The next phase is that of diagnosis, during which a better understanding of the history of the organisation is gained and where the necessary tension between the definition of the obstacles and the desirable future is created in order to achieve the vision. Finally, the method establishes strategic directions, necessary actions, and a schedule, as well as the follow-up sessions.

As to its relation with the approach to small groups, where the pre-consultation with the manager is particularly important, with large groups it is the action of the steering group (steering committee) that is responsible for designing the session, and for designating who will be present.

Given the involvement of all stakeholders in the same place at the same time, the methods with large groups allow change to occur at a much faster rate than normal. They also promote a flat hierarchy and provide opportunities for conflict management and for setting the focus on common ground, as defined by the various parties concerned, rather than stressing the differences.

The *future search* method was adopted as a reference for this study because of its suitability for group decision-making, its extensive description in the literature [12], and because of our previous experience. The method involves organising a meeting of sixty to seventy participants over a period of sixteen hours, spread over three days. On the first day, the first two and a half hours are devoted to defining the organisation's historical landmarks. In this phase participants gather around mixed tables, that is, with people from different areas and experiences. This is because homogeneous groups have more difficulty in building a comprehensive picture. On the morning of the second day, participants work around stakeholders tables, that is, people belonging to related fields; thus gaining the homogeneity needed for the construction of common scenarios. At this stage the time is devoted to the analysis of current and future trends. The afternoon is dedicated to the definition of the desired future, in terms of "common ground", and an action plan

is built on the morning of the third day. The most common themes are confirmed, specifying the policies, programmes, procedures and projects for each, which may include short and long-term plans and the identification of the actors who will execute these plans.

Using an adaptation from a small-group method

As the duration of the sessions required for the method of large groups was incompatible with the limited time available for the forums, it was necessary to search for models that had already been used in previous studies, on problem-solving procedures with groups of fewer than twelve people, and for examples also associated with commitment measures [13]. First, the method was adapted to large-group functioning, following the principles of Future Search method, and used with higher education students [14] in a three-hour session. It was a four-step model, comprising the steps: (1) define the objective; (2) define the problem; (3) action plan; and (4) the action itself. The definition of the objective takes place during a pre-consultation with the organising committee of the forum, which also defines the group’s composition and logistic details. During the stage of problem definition the group lists all possible barriers and challenges to achieving the goal and then the person in charge of the forum selects the problem definition to work with. During action planning the group suggest possible actions for solving the chosen problem and, during the break, the steering committee, together with the facilitators, organise the whole list of projects. When the group re-enters the room after the break, each member chooses one of the listed projects to work on, thus organising stakeholder teams. The rest of the session is spent discussing tasks for each participant, sharing conclusions, setting deadlines, coordinating actions and ways of sharing results, and possible result evaluation indexes. The final step — the action — begins after the planning session.

This small-group problem-solving method was adapted to work with large groups. The main similarities and differences with Future Search are indicated in Table 1, and details are described in the Method section.

Method

Headed by the Portuguese Association of Creativity and Innovation (APGICO), with the support of the Association 25 April (A25A), and the Portuguese Confederation of Collectivities of Culture, Recreation and Sport (CPCCRD), the work was done with local associations in planning activities, together with other reliable people from each region. With the local associations it was possible to organise eight forums on the mainland and in the islands of Madeira and the Azores, in order to produce action plans for a joint celebration of the anniversary of the revolution (25 April 1974) — still considered as a unifying factor for most of the Portuguese population. The design methodology used, as described, derived from the Future Search method, adapted to work as our four-step model, first during eight hours, and then for just four hours. In collaboration with the Parish Council of Misericordia (one of the twelve administrative regions of Lisbon), a forum for the promotion of local development was organised, gathering together local associations and people representing the different types of knowledge and authority in this parish of 40,000 people (e.g., police, firefighters, theatre, art galleries, libraries, music, primary, secondary and higher education schools).

Subjects

In the nine citizenship forums, from the three hundred and sixty-seven invited people who said they would be present, three hundred eighteen (eighty-seven per cent) attended the sessions, and a total of two hundred and forty five (eighty-one per cent) remained until

the end. Chart 1 shows that one hundred and seventy-six people participated in the eight-hour sessions (fifty-five per cent), and one hundred and forty-two in the four-hour sessions. In the first type of sessions, thirty-six per cent (fourty-five) of the participants did not stay until the end and, in the second type, eighty per cent (one hundred and fourteen) of the participants completed the sessions. Thus, the dropout rate in the eight-hour sessions was higher, as expected.

The participants had very diverse experiences. Thus, eleven per cent were military, belonging to the A25A, either on active duty or retired; fifteen per cent belonged to the boards of sports, social support, and recreational local associations, and thirteen per cent to organisations linked to artistic activities, including theater, music, museums and art galleries. About eight per cent belonged to regional state entities (six per cent to the municipalities), and the local media participated actively, representing eight per cent of the participants. Teachers and students from secondary and higher education schools accounted for twenty per cent of participants, and ten per cent were professionals from various fields such as trade unionists, banking or administration. Entrepreneurs and business managers from different sectors of activity (seven per cent) participated, as well as retired professionals, representing eight per cent of the total.

Some people travelled considerable distances to participate in the forums, especially for the meetings held in Faro, Rio Maior, Viana do Castelo and Vila Real. Most sessions took place in local association facilities, in which a catering service was provided.

Instrument

A questionnaire of thirteen items, adapted from [15], was administered in order to assess commitment to the project. This had

Hours	Local	Registrations	Session start	End of session	Losses in session
8	Viseu-Tondela	20	19	13	30% (6)
	Faro	64	51	29	34% (22)
	Lisboa	39	32	28	10% (4)
	Rio Maior	39	39	31	20% (8)
	Viana do Castelo	51	35	30	10% (5)
Total 8 hours		213	176	131	21% (45)
4	Ilha Terceira	40	44	41	7% (3)
	Funchal	20	17	17	0%
	Vila Real	54	54	40	25% (14)
	Junta de Freguesia da Misericordia de Lisboa	40	27	16	27% (11)
Total 4 hours		154	142	114	18% (28)
Total		367	318	245	19% (73)

Chart 1: Participants per 8- and 4-hour sessions

Table 1: Main similarities and differences between the large-group method *Future Search*, and the small-group method *Four-Step*, adapted to large groups.

Procedures	<i>Future Search</i> method	<i>Adapted Four-Step</i> method
Duration	16 hours	4 to 8 hours
Groups	Maximum 8 groups of 8 members each	Same
Emphasis	Reaching common ground	Setting an action plan
Past history; present and future trends	Yes	No
Time for sharing small-group conclusions	Yes	Yes
Pre-consult	Steering group	Steering group
Mixed and homogenous groups alternate	Yes	Yes

three subscales: affective, normative, and instrumental, in a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = Totally Disagree; to 7 = Totally Agree), the closest to 7 being the more favourable response to every aspect. The questionnaire was administered at the beginning and at the end of each session, and the final score was obtained by comparing the change in O1 (initial observation) with O2 (observation at the end of the session) of every participant (questionnaires were identified with a name or a symbol so that they could be paired together).

Procedure

In each forum a steering committee was established in order to designate a location for the meeting, if possible at no cost for the organisation; to find a well-respected personality from the region to agree to chair the forum; to designate a project coordinator whose mission would consist of stimulating the whole process following the meeting; and to invite a maximum of sixty four participants chosen on the basis of their power, knowledge or interests being coincident with the purpose of the forum. Participants came from a wide range of backgrounds, as described before, including people representing the youth.

The forums initially lasted for eight hours, as in the cases of Viana do Castelo, Lisbon, Viseu (Tondela), Rio Maior and Faro. However, given the logistical complications, dropout rate, and costs associated with the food service, it was decided to reduce the sessions to half of the time, thereby avoiding lunch, as in the cases of Angra do Heroismo, Funchal, Vila Real, and the Parish Council of Misericordia.

Before each session a document with the description of the session, a list of participants, and the agenda was sent to everyone. Later, a complete report of the meeting was sent to all participants. The commitment questionnaire was applied in all forums except in Viana do Castelo, Rio Maior and Misericordia, where various types of difficulties prevented the collecting of the questionnaires at the appropriate times, at the beginning and at the end of the session. It should be noted, however, that only questionnaires where it was possible to make pairs (before and after) were scored and, thus, all those questionnaires that did not enable the identification of the participants, or those who did not stay until the end, were discarded.

Initially it was thought that it would be possible to administer the questionnaire a third time, at the end of each project, but since none of the groups that met at the end of the project contained a significant percentage of the participants, no further questionnaire was administered. At the end of each session time was devoted to a debrief and evaluation of the session.

Results

This section includes quantitative results concerning commitment measures obtained during the sessions, and the qualitative results for the content of the forums.

Commitment measures

As can be seen in Table 2, the level of commitment to the project increased significantly during the sessions for the three factors: affective, normative and instrumental commitment.

There was a statistically significant increase in project commitment as a result of the session in all three factors, and all values are beyond the average point of the scale (4) but not much more. As might be expected, the average in the instrumental commitment is below the middle of the scale (4), since participation in civic projects did not provide any material advantage to people but only accomplished satisfaction (normative commitment) and working with colleagues (emotional commitment). These results were not found in all forums,

and there were sessions where there was no difference, or even others where the difference was negative (although not significant — e.g., Lisbon). Furthermore, differences did not vary depending on the session length, with the eight-hour sessions obtaining similar results to the four-hour ones.

From the analysis of the content and observation of the sessions, it was not possible to establish any objective relationship between the evolution of commitment and the ways teams were formed, or sessions run, having retained only the impression that, in the forums where there was more conflict (e.g., Lisbon), commitment suffered. However, as shown later, it was not possible to establish a relationship between the results of the questionnaire and the degree of implementation of projects, as the instrument was not administered at the end of each project (because participants did not meet together at the end).

Finally, as can be seen in Chart 1, for reasons that, in some cases, it was not possible to understand, there was a considerable rate of absence from the sessions (13%) by participants who had assured they would be present. The case of Funchal is interesting in that eighty four participants initially registered were reduced to twenty, after the Regional Government issued a non-official negative opinion about the meeting (the commemoration of the revolution had never been done before in Madeira). However the remaining twenty made it become one of the most successful forums in terms of project implementation.

Qualitative Results

The chosen challenges were mostly connected with the need to reach out to the younger generation and to develop intergenerational projects of civic collaboration. With regard to the tasks, the concentration was on events and surveys, as well as the construction of messages to be disseminated and the use of appropriate media.

With regard to the project implementation rate, it was not possible to obtain quantitative elements but there was information that most of the projects had some level of implementation, and some were fully implemented (e.g., Viana do Castelo and Funchal). There were others where nothing was done (e.g., Lisbon, Terceira and Vila Real). In the majority, some of the tasks were executed but without the possibility to talk about the implementation of the planned projects.

There was no systematic collection of reasons for not implementing the projects, but it became clear that where there was already a structure of civil society dedicated to the celebrations of 25 April (as in the Viana and Funchal), the implementation rate was higher than where this did not exist. In terms of the reasons for dropout, this was mainly connected with the progressive increase of absenteeism at meetings of project teams, until, eventually, everyone ceased to attend. In the cases where there was knowledge of some of the reasons for withdrawal, no reference standard existed beyond that of progressive loss of interest, the shift to other priorities, or the lack of performance of the designated team coordinators. In some meetings after the sessions, with teams of several sizes, some lasted for hours without any particular results

Table 2: Significance test for average difference in the factors (affective, normative and instrumental commitment) before and after the sessions (N=183).

Moment	Factors					
	Affective Commitment		Normative Commitment		Instrumental Commitment	
	Av	SD	Av	SD	Av	SD
Before the session	5.2	.95	4.9	1.3	3.7	1.3
After the session	5.3	1.00	5.1	1.4	3.9	1.4
Sig.	.02		.05		.02	

or decisions about the distribution of tasks, which was in sharp contrast to what had been achieved during the large-group session. In these cases it seemed that nothing had been learned about group decision-making.

During the debriefing at the end of each large-group meeting, comments were favourable to various aspects of the session (e.g., time went by quickly, the diversity of attendants, willingness to participate) and less favorable to unjustified absences and having little information available about the session. In fact many found it surprising that they had not come there to discuss or give ideas but to develop projects themselves. Even though this was explained in the agenda sent to every participant before the session, it was clear that the main factor for withdrawal during the sessions was due to the surprise of having to do some homework.

Discussion

With regard to the assumptions made, and although the effectiveness of the planning session, in terms of increasing project commitment, has been proven, as already noted with small-group sessions [13], it could not be established a clear link between this commitment and the likelihood of project execution. Although there were cases with increased commitment where the projects have been implemented, there were also sessions with increased commitment (e.g., Vila Real, Terceira) in which nothing was done. In the success case of Viana do Castelo, in which questionnaires were not collected, it is assumed that the commitment rates would have been positive, given the assessment made by the participants. To supplement this data, Table 1 provided information on attendance and dropout rates, which may also serve to strengthen the prediction of project implementation probability. Indeed, in all cases where nothing was done afterwards, session dropout rates were above twenty per cent. These dropout rates occurred mainly during the task distribution, which reinforces the less committed nature of some participants. Overall, everyone was interested in providing ideas and expressing their support for the initiative, but not all were willing to take action that might compromise their free time. Although this factor (planning to take action) was mentioned in the documentation sent before the session, the lack of experience in this kind of decision-making methodology meant that many participants only realised the implications during the sessions.

As to possible reasons for the contrast between the success in the attendance of groups willing to participate in the anniversary of the revolution, the increased commitment in doing something with the team, and the low rate of success in project execution, several considerations need to be taken into account.

- First is the fact that the initiative for the sessions came from the researcher rather than the partner organizations — CPCCRD and A25A — or the local associations. Indeed, and despite all the efforts revealed, these entities agreed to participate in the project but did not take the initiative, nor it was possible to do the extensive preparation required for the sessions.
- Another comment can be made about whether some structure of the civil society was already in place to organise the celebrations, as happened in Viana do Castelo and Funchal, and, therefore, was more likely to be successful. Indeed, these structures served as recruiters of important elements, enhancing their wishes and adding new volunteers. However, in the cases where the existing structures were linked to the state (e.g., municipalities or university), as in the cases of Faro, Viseu and Vila Real, almost nothing happened with the planned actions.

- The fact that it was possible to rely on natural leaders, who encouraged others to implement actions, was important because where the leadership was weak nothing happened. The leading role that was thought could be played by the chair of the forum did not turn out to be as relevant, unlike the local coordinator, who was responsible for organising and coordinating the various teams, which proved to be crucial. Similarly, our initial idea that media agents would be the ideal coordinators proved to be wrong, despite the role they played in spreading the news.
- For many people, discussing ideas, making suggestions and even participating in something, is different to engaging in building something that, although important, is not a life goal and does not bring particular personal advantages. Thus, it is not surprising that the projects have been carried out by small groups of participants — a small fraction of those who said they were willing to undertake these projects.
- The fact that projects were always in favour of building something, rather than being against something (other than inertia), was an important contribution to the success of the sessions. Indeed, at no time were options chosen that would require demonstrations or conflict against something that already existed.
- One of the most important aspects learned was connected with the definition of which entities represent the powers and the existing knowledge in a region. However, the fact that many of the people invited were members of governance boards, and were not accompanied by their assistants, was relevant to the reduced probability of execution due to the time available and priorities that these leaders had to cope with.

Regarding the limitations of this research, and despite the involvement of a considerable number of organisations and individuals, it cannot be said that they are representative of the country as a whole, much less that the results can be extrapolated to other contexts. However, based on the available knowledge and results, it is clear that some leadership must occur, in order to get a revitalisation of Portuguese civil society. Portuguese society appears fragmented by interests of various kinds, with weak capacity for fulfilling ideas and for generating common ground or establishing a strong supraordinate goal. Taking the example of political parties, as long as they will show themselves unable to reach agreements in strategic issues, we cannot expect citizens to do the opposite.

The model proposed attempted to stimulate more effective ways of decision making within large groups, to serve as a pedagogy for a community tired of meetings where nothing is achieved, and to show that this inefficiency is not a cultural fatalism but more a lack of experience and knowledge of group work methods. The fact that, in every session, it was possible to complete the whole process, is an indicator of the effectiveness of the method, which has been adapted in order to work in more structured groups, as those of the corporate world, where there is a considerable space for evolution. As to collecting data during the sessions, regarding project commitment, results demonstrate that it is not worth the effort.

The main importance for future research is to look of ways how collaboration can bring innovation and resilience to local communities, especially in times of economic crisis.

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