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Quality of Education: Global Development Goals and Local Strategies

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PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO EVALUATION IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT[1]

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Abstract

In this paper we are reconsidering which approach to evaluation suits the best to education for sustainable development. We approach the evaluation in education for sustainable development through mapping key points in a technical and participatory approach to evaluation. In the central part of the paper, based on outlined characteristics, we propose a sketch of the potential model of a participatory approach to evaluation. The proposed model is based on interconnection between reflection and action. The principles that shape the model are flexibility, listening, multi-perceptivity, trust, negotiation and participation which emerge in a complex context. In the final part of the paper, we are highlighting the necessary steps for achieving a potential model of participatory approach to evaluation as a support to education for sustainable development. For establishment of such a model we need to reach a consensus in understanding the purpose and expectations of education, to reconsider the previous approach to evaluation in education and to increase number of researches on different approaches in evaluation.

Keyword: evaluation in education, evaluation for sustainable development, technical approach to evaluation, model of participatory approach to evluation

Introduction

The world is rapidly changing in the last few decades. According to the social, cultural, and environmental changes, the focus of education is changing (Barnett and Eager, 2017, p. 293). Education is changing from a traditional

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approach where the focus is on the prescribed in advance and designed contents that need to be transferred from an expert on students, towards education for sustainable development, in which the focus is on the lifelong learning and on the knowledge built in the learning community. The education for sustainable development is becoming a global trend, and there are more and more scientific studies dealing with this subject. Many organizations, with its research, projects and publications, seek to support the education for sustainable development. Among them the most prominent is UNESCO.

UN 2030 Agenda of sustainable development (hereinafter Agenda 2030) represents the continuation of the implementation of the Millennium development goals and promotes 17 global goals of sustainable development (World health organization, 2000). In the Agenda 2030, education is recognized as one of the goals (goal 4), that by promoting opportunities for lifelong learning refers to the inclusive, high level quality education (UN, 2015, p. 17). Besides the fact that education is seen as a specific objective, it is also recognized as a part of discourses of the global education policy, or of the national and local policies aimed at strengthening all 17 goals of sustainable development through education for sustainable development. UNESCO has published the book *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, that acknowledge education as a mechanism to support the objectives set out in Agenda 2030. Therefore, education for sustainable development is defined as holistic and transformative education, that is interdisciplinary, value oriented, focused on solving problems, based on multi-methods, participatory and locally relevant (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7).

According to the publication *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, education for sustainable development should empower individuals by specific knowledge and competencies for the purpose of achievement of the goals of sustainable development. "Education for sustainable development enables all individuals to contribute to achieving the goals of sustainable development by equipping them with the knowledge and competencies they need, not only to understand what the goals of sustainable development are about, but to engage as informed citizens in bringing about the necessary transformation" (ibid, p. 8). The competences stated in this publication, that are crucial for the sustainable development are: systemic thinking, strategic, anticipatory, normative, self-awareness, collaborative competences, competencies related to critical thinking and solving problems (ibid, p. 10). They cannot be "prefinished packages of knowledge which have to be transmitted to individuals" (as it appears to some extent in the publication!). Over more, it is not enough that competencies are only individually directed and reduced only to the responsibility of the individuals, because the issue of sustainability of development is not only an individual's matter, but a systemic issue that depends on both individuals and groups, institutions and on the entire socio-political context (Urban et al., 2012, as cited in Pavlović Breneselović, 2014, p. 9).

Education for sustainable development as a holistic and transformative education, because of its comprehensiveness and complexity, is most often described

through its three supporting elements: 1. educational outcomes, 2. educational content, 3. pedagogical prism (RootAbility, 2019).

Educational outcomes relate to the proactive relationship of the individuals and to the development of critical thinking. This leads to a dilemma whether they should be reduced to individual aspects of development (cognitive, socio-emotional, behavioral) as it is shown in the UNESCO publication *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives* (UNESCO, 2017, p. 11).

Educational content. The question one could be pose related to the educational content is "What we learn?" Learning is perceived as an integrated process, in respect to the sum of individual teaching subjects. By learning the competences necessary to respond to the challenges of sustainability, in professional and personal development arise (UNESCO, 2014, p. 67)

Pedagogical prism. The third element that describes education for sustainable development, that is our knowledge base for understanding of evaluation, is a pedagogical prism. The pedagogical prism is not the tool for explication of the content that will be taught, but the way for development of strategies: How we do it? Whose voice is heard? How do we create an environment that supports sustainable development?

Based on the notion of understanding of education for sustainable development and based on the mentioned publication, in this paper we deal with the question: What kind of approach to evaluation in education is necessary to support education for sustainable development?

What is certain and with what authors of the Agenda 2030 agree is that a more resolute evaluation strategy is necessary. That evaluation strategy should be able to recognize and appreciate the role of the evaluator as a contributor to the change. The role of the evaluator cannot be reduced to the collection of data, but it should be extended to the proactive inclusion as moral obligation to society, to the reflection and to the reexamination, with which we form a sustainable future (Bearnett and Eager, 2017, p. 293; UNESCO, 2017, p. 53). The continuous evaluation that is in the function of development and support could be an important factor of sustainability (Elmor and Burni, 1998, as cited in Florian, 2000, p. 4).

In the continuation of the paper, we will show the differences between the two most common approaches to evaluation, a technical and participatory approach, by examining their potential to support education for sustainable development.

"Tensions" between the technical and participatory approach to evaluation

The approaches to evaluation in education were changed and positioned in accordance with certain socio-historical circumstances and needs, with certain understanding of education, and in line with the development of science and

scientific thought (Booth et al., 2001, p. 27). Evaluation in education has been developed and interpreted differently, for its historical development it can be said that each phase of development has its significance and that it is "a field with many models, approaches and purposes" (Patton, 2010, p. 23).

The "tensions" can be identified as key points (ontological, epistemological, contextual, tensions related to the power, methodological and organizational) that help us to make a clear distinction between the technical and participatory approaches to evaluation, but also to indicate challenges that can arise during the process of evaluation (Chouinard, 2013, p. 243). Different authors (Chouinard, 2013; Mack, 2010; Carter and Little, 2007; Cousins and Chouinard, 2012) as "tensions" between these two approaches distinguished:

- *Ontological tensions* – they deal with the issue of relationships among evaluators and other actors of the process, often referred in the literature as stakeholders. Some of the questions raised within this "tension" are: What is the relationship among them? and What is the role of evaluator? From the attitude of evaluator involved in the process of evaluation depends what kind of relationships will form in the community in which the evaluation is carried out.

- *Epistemological tensions* – they deal with issue of the origin of knowledge. Is knowledge something that exists outside of individuum, is it something that is finished and preset, or is it a construct built through relationships in a community? Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as "a theory of knowledge that is embedded in a theoretical perspective, and therefore in a methodological one" (Crotty 1998, as cited in Mack, 2010, p. 5).

- *Contextual tensions* relate to non-engagement of context in the process of evaluation. The term context is explained through the micro and macro context. The micro context refers to *us* in the local community and to the evolving program, while the macro context implies a wider socio-political context.

- *Relational tension of power* –deal with the tensions related to the power: Who has the power in the process of evaluation? Is the power being "shared" or is it the right of "one side"? How is the power distributed and controlled in the relationships that exist among those involved in the process of evaluation?

- *Methodological tensions* – include a methodological solution, i.e. a philosophical assumption that provides a framework for processes of social research, and helps to establish questions, goals and design in the research process (Carter and Little, 2007, p. 1316). Methodological issues mostly relate to the practicality and applicability of what we are dealing with.

- *Organizational tensions* – imply that the success of the evaluation depends on the organizational structure and availability of resources (time, financial, and spatial support) (Cousins and Chouinard, 2012).
- *Pedagogical tensions* – deal with access to learning, i.e. whether based on an explanation through learning terms evaluation is seen as a "technical endeavor" or as a "conceptual practice" (Schwandt, 2003, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 244).

By mapping key issues, we try to examine which of the two approaches to evaluation has more potential to support education for sustainable development. The relationship between a technical and a participatory approach is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Tensions between the technical and
participatory approach to evaluation

Tensions	Technical approach to evaluation	Participatory approach to evaluation
Ontological	Stakeholders are involved in the final phase of evaluation. Absence of dialogue among those involved in the process of evaluation. **Role of the evaluator:** more independent, objective, neutral approach, external control. Evaluators work according to predetermined indicators that are inconsistent with the propagation of their independent role (Gauthier et al., 2010, p. 8).	Evaluators and stakeholders are not separated, they are in unity, related and create the "inter-space" (Heron, 1996, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 243). Trust among them is evident. **Role of the evaluator:** to create conditions that will enable and empower interested parties to participate through the process of evaluation (Trickett, Espino, 2004, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 243).
Epistemological	*Instrumental knowledge.* Knowledge is constructed by experts, professionals, while "objective" evaluators are those who provide "guidance" toward knowledge. Accordingly, knowledge can be measured and controlled. The role of the context is ignored.	*Critical knowledge* is emancipatory knowledge (Habermas, 1971). Knowledge is a social construct that is conditioned socially, politically, historically, and by context. "Knowledge is perceived as something that is constructed collectively with all actors through the process of social interaction." (Long, 1992, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 244). All parties participate in the construction of evaluative knowledge (Rebien, 1996).
Contextual	It is more focused on the macro context and how to fulfill all the obligations and universal standards that are passed from the state "top", than to what happens in the environment in which the process of evaluation takes place.	Evaluation is related to the political, social, historical, program and to the context in which it takes place. Micro and macro contexts are included.

Tensions	Technical approach to evaluation	Participatory approach to evaluation
Relational tension of power	Focus is on the external control, there is no "sharing of power". Existing power structures are strengthened further, while other participants in the process of evaluation have an executive role.	Evaluation is a political as much as a methodological process (Gaventa, Creed and Morrissey, 1998, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 246). It is based on democratic principles, sharing power and taking responsibility. The responsibility is shared based on the competencies of participants in the process, that is constantly being built through interactions with others and with the environment, in accordance with the situations in which they are involved. The emphasis is on shared leadership grounded in relationships, build on ethical principles in a particular community.
Methodological	Predetermined methodology, usually with quantitative design. All methods that do not meet the "gold standards" (objectivity, neutrality) are expelled from further use. It runs linearly according to the established recipe.	The choice of methods depends on the context and involves all interested parties. Usually with qualitative design. It runs circularly and many phases cannot be viewed separately from each other. It primarily emphasizes the importance of the clear value base on which a methodological design is based.
Organizational	Top-down access. The hierarchical structure has central control, driven by effectiveness rather than by democratic principles (Behn, 1998, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, p. 247). The organization is designed "externally" and as such implies that the direction of change occurs from the outside to the inside.	Bottom-up approach. Collaboration is strengthening that empowers participants to organize themselves according to the situation and context. All parties are involved in the process of organization from the very beginning.
Pedagogical	*Technical venture* Evaluation as a set of tools that if used properly can improve practice with the tendency of generalizing the obtained results. (Schwandt, 2003, as cited in Chouinard, 2013, 244). Evaluation is focuses on proving the efficiency and effectiveness of what we are evaluating. Learning takes place through repetition of established forms.	*Evaluation as a conceptual practice* Evaluation is grounded through dialogue, situational learning and learning through practice. Through evaluation, it seeks to changes. The knowledge is created through the dialogue of the participants in the evaluation as a response to the questions of what works best in the given practice and what helps us in a certain context to co-create a better future (Purešević, et al., 2019, p. 110).

Starting from the understanding of education for sustainable development as "a holistic and transformative education" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7), one can notice that to the such understanding of the education correspond the evaluation based on a participatory approach.

In accordance with given understanding and based on the analysis of various sources, we will try to outline an evaluation model based on a participatory approach. We are aware that creating a model based on a participatory approach to evaluation requires more longer-term and fundamental researches of a participatory approach to evaluation, that goes beyond the scope and purpose of this paper. In our article, outlining the model has the function of "litmus test" for recognizing different models based on a participatory versus the technical approach to evaluation, which we will deal with in the forthcoming researches.

Through "tension" to the model of a participatory approach to evaluation

For the purpose of this paper, we defined participatory approach to evaluation in education as a "learning system through which social groups build knowledge oriented towards action on their reality, clarifying and articulating their norms and values and reaching a consensus on further actions" (Brunner and Guzman 1989, as cited in Garaway, 1995, p. 87).

The foundation of model based on a participatory approach to evaluation is a process of continuous learning based on interconnection between of reflection and action (Figure 1). Reflection and action are supported by the principles of flexibility, listening, multi-perspectivity, trust, negotiation and participation. Evaluation based on a participatory approach is firmly linked and consistent with the context in which it takes place.
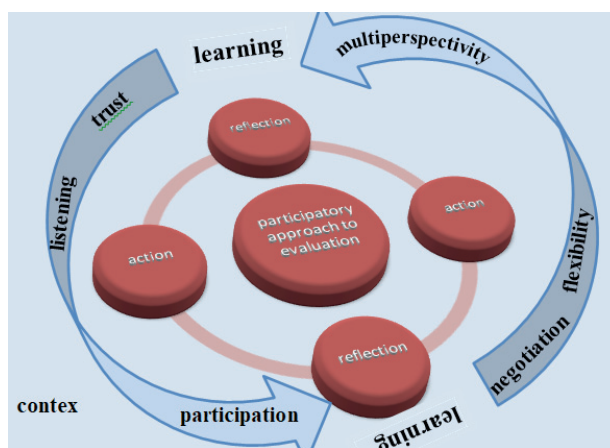

Figure 1. Model of participatory evaluation approach

Learning

In this model learning is considered as a collaborative process through which participation changes qualitatively, participants are being transformed, but also the way of learning in a community (Rogoff et al., 2001; Mac Naughton, 2003; Krnjaja, 2014a; Pavlović Breneselović, Krnjaja, 2017). The knowledge that arises in the learning process is a co-constructed meaning, where each participant authentically contributes to his own experience. It is not "flowing" of knowledge from experts (in this case, an evaluator), as something outside of man, universally given; on the contrary, it is social co-construction (Bandura, 1977, 1986, as citad in Cousinse and Earl, 1992, p. 401). In accordance with this reflection, Estrella and Gaventa gave a figure that show a circular learning process in a participatory approach to evaluation (Figure 2) (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998, p. 30).
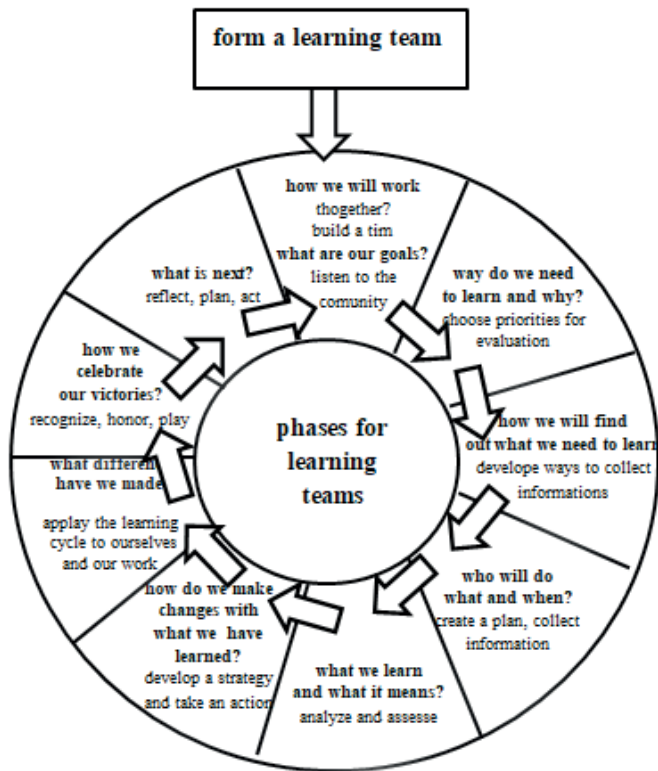

Figure 2. Circular learning process (Estrella and Gaventa, 1998)

Through the demonstrated circular process, learning is realized from the very beginning of the process of evaluation. By forming a team, by listening to the community and by team efforts, actions are being designed, followed by

analyzing, making strategies and reflecting in order to understand, and then, based on acknowledgement, actions are re-designed. "The transformative nature of learning means that through the process of learning we change ourselves, our understanding of the world, our relationships, and thus the community in which we live and work" (Pavlović Breneselović, 2015, p. 272). The transformation we aim for can be achieved *with* and *through* an evaluation based on a participatory approach, because it leads to "the consolidation of new practice" (Engeström, 2001, p. 152).

Creation of a new practice and opening new possibilities leads to the collective development zone (ibid, p. 137). The transformative nature of learning in a participatory approach to evaluation can be monitored at the levels of individual participant, educational program seen as a practice, and at the level of community of participants.

Personal level – By participating in a participatory approach to evaluation, we learn to negotiate, to develop empathy and understanding, to plan and accept new roles, to accept responsibility, to build confidence and to strengthen our competencies based on the confidence that other participants point to. In this way, we become co-researchers in the evaluation, who plan actions and transform their initial roles.

The educational program – educational program in a participatory approach to evaluation represent a practice based on the quality of the participants' relationships, their knowledge, beliefs and experiences (Krnjaja, 2014, p. 198). Continuous reconsideration through evaluation gives us the opportunity to understand as participants values on which our practice is grounded, to monitor how practice changes through action, and how the evaluation contributes to changing practice.

Community of participants – is changing by strengthening confidence in individual strengths, as well as by development of the strengths of the entire community and by development of a culture of dialogue. The key mechanism for connecting members of the community is realized through dialogue (Pavlović Breneselović, 2015, p. 273). Evaluation based on a participatory approach enables us as participants to share ideas, proposals, to build a community that is open to researches and changes.

Reflection and action

In the participatory approach to evaluation reflection can be defined as relation of the participants *in evaluation* and *toward evaluation*, that enables them to reconsider a certain event or situation from several perspectives, to pose questions and to develop new ways of thinking and understanding of themselves and their actions (Miller, 2011, as cited in Krnjaja, 2016, p. 96). The reflection we practice in the evaluation implies intellectual engagement, in order to change

practice by transforming knowledge (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 3). Understanding why something is in progress and how it takes place is a continuous process by which we examine and change practice through what we do in practice. Reflection is in synergy with action, and therefore, they are inextricably displayed and shifting in a model based on a participatory approach to evaluation. Through them, we learn in the process of evaluation, but also, we follow up our own learning, we reconsider what has been done, we understand our position in that process, we understand the position and the role of others, and we determine the priorities for improvement. We do all of this in order to initiate the following actions and to make a change, while we resist routines and support reflexive action (Miškeljin, 2016, p. 396). The learning through evaluation without action and reflection is monotonous, clichéd and alienated from the participants in the process of evaluation.

Principles

For continual interconnection between action and reflection to lead to change, it is essential that their interconnectedness and interaction are supported by certain principles. Estrella and Gaventa (1998, pp. 17–27) have established principles as a basis for a participatory approach to evaluation, which we extend with the principles of trust and multi-perspectivity. All principles are dynamic and interconnected:

- *Negotiation.* Each participant in the process of evaluation brings their own values, which do not have to match the values of other participants. That is the reason why there is a need for negotiation, through which are formed common meanings. This does not mean that once "negotiated" is forever established. Since evaluation is a process, this means that negotiation is constantly going on and that what we negotiate can be changed, shaped, upgraded. Participants work together and reach the focus of evaluation together, they participate in the process of evaluation outlining, they decide together what will be done with the data and what actions will be undertaken. This often results in different opinions, but that is the essence, that by the process of negotiation we come to a common view. The basis of the negotiation is the dialogue, that is realized between the different parties, and its basis is the word. It is more than an instrument that allows dialogue, because through the word action and reflection are achieved (Freire, 2005, p. 87). However, as Freire states, if a dialogue is devoid of reflection, then it becomes just pure activism, and if it is devoid of action, then it becomes just "rambling talk" and "pure verbalism" without the desire to do something (ibid, p. 87)
- *Listening.* Listening is not a passive reception of information, but an active exchange process consists of discussion, dialogue, interpretation and

constructing meaning (Clark, 2005, as cited in Pavlović Breneselović, 2015, p. 18). Listening is closely related to negotiation and these two cannot be separated, because if there is no negotiation in the listening process, and if there is no listening in negotiation, then there is no building up of a common meaning. This process is not easy, because it requires the absence of biases and judgment. Listening is open and welcome differences, recognizes the values of a different viewpoint and interpretations (Rinaldi, 2001, as cited in Pavlović Breneselović, 2015, p. 288)

- *Flexibility.* As flexibility, many authors consider only the flexibility that relates to the methodology in a participatory approach to evaluation: "Flexibility involves the use of a creative methodology to respond to the skills, needs and available resources of participants (US Agency for International Development, 1996 and the Institute of Development Studies, 1998, as cited in Zukonski and Luluquisen, 2002, p. 2). However, flexibility is much more than that, it doesn't encompass only methodological "creativity", but also the consistency of the entire process of evaluation with the context in which it takes place. Therefore, a participatory approach to evaluation cannot consist of a set of fully predetermined steps to be taken, because evaluation is the process inseparable from the socio-political, historical, cultural and from the context, as well as from the educational programs (Pavlović Breneselović, 2014a).

- *Trust.* Trust is developed through the open communication of community participants, through the joint planning, through the mutual support in action and through the reflection on changing practice (Krnjaja, 2016, p. 160). To give confidence means that evaluators provide support to those involved in the process of evaluation. Each of the parties has its own competencies at its disposal, that in the process of evaluation should be respected; for further development of these forces it is necessary to have confidence in them.

- *Multi-perspectivity.* In the evaluation that is based on a participatory approach, we have a lot of different perspectives and here we can say the more perspective involved, the better. By intersection of different attitudes, views, values, it is possible to get a more complete impression of what is being evaluated and supported in further development through the process of evaluation. Multi-perspective examination and participation in change means that "no one is excluded" (Segone and Tateossian, 2017, p. 26).

- *Participation*. It implies participation of all involved in process. Besides, we tend to include those who are "quiet" and have something to say. The participation is "opportunity and possibility to provide and to contribute to the community, by overviewing own activities as

efforts that environment considers valuable and important" (Pavlović Breneselović, 2010, p. 262).

Context

Consider that the micro and macro context form an approach to evaluation, a participatory approach to evaluation cannot be developed without taking into account the nature of the context; and reversing, for a participatory approach to evaluation it is necessary to build the context in which participatory evaluation is possible. The micro context includes everything that happens in the relationship between us and our environment (local community) and the relationship between us and the educational program that we are creating. The macro context implies the wider picture, it refers to the socio-cultural, political, historical circumstances (Choinard, 2013, p. 245). What will happen at the micro level depends greatly on the macro level, but also the changes on the micro level could significantly affect the macro level.

Snowdon and Boone (Snowdon and Boone, 2007, as cited in Cousins et al., 2012, p. 16) designed *Cynefin* (the Welsh term for a habitat) for easier planning and decision-making, depending on the different contexts. Subsequently, Paton (Patton, 2010, p. 108) adapts that design by examination of the process of evaluation in different contexts. Acknowledgement of the existence of different contexts is necessary to emphasize those in which it is only possible to develop a participatory approach to evaluation.

A simple context – the context in which evaluators collect all information according to a well-established procedure, categorize them and make a conclusion. In this situation, well-founded procedure is embraced, according to the principle "what has worked in many cases will function in each of the following ones".

A chaotic context – the context in which the evaluators take responsibility to "establish order" by focusing on the examination of practice by keeping the set of norms in the evaluation, while ignoring all unexpected and unforeseen circumstances. The evaluator, with limited role in introducing a change in practice, immediately makes a recommendation or decides to normalize the practice in accordance with a pre-set evaluation procedure (Snowdon and Boone 2007, as cited in Cousins et al., 2012, p. 17).

A complicated context – there are more than one correct statement. The evaluator should analyze the situation and to examine all possibilities. The context cannot be controlled as is the case with a simple context, but it has a certain degree of predictability. "Good practice" here works more than the only possible "best practice" (Cousins, et al., 2012, p. 17).

The complex context is dynamical and not fully predictable. The obtained information is based on the perspectives of different participants. Practice is emergence; because it is built through the whole process of evaluation, it is not

"prescribed". In such context, there are many opportunities for creativity and innovation. Therefore, instead of imposing the existing method or to jumping into a conclusion, practice of evaluation is explored, and taken into consideration. Evaluators focus on identifying the current situation, providing feedback, documenting and tracking in the function of changing practice. Reflexive practice is introduced among the involved parties in the process of evaluation to bring a common reflection on change in practice (Patton, 2010, p. 110).

Just in a complex context, we initiate a complex thinking that drive us to change the metaphor into education from the system as a "machine" to the system as a "living entity" (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Cousins, et al., 2012, p. 18). In the field of evaluation, Paton welcomes complexity as a "big unexplored rug" (Patton, 2010, p. 106), while evaluations based on a participatory approach are embedded in such a rug.

Instead of the conclusion: an overview of a participatory approach to evaluation in education for sustainable development

Approaches to the evaluation in education differentiated depending on the understanding of education and on the attitude toward education that is supported in the micro and macro context. In this paper we have followed the definition of education for sustainable development according to the UNESCO publication *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, as the education that "empowers those who learn to take decisions and responsible actions ... for present and future generations, with respect to cultural differences" (2017, p. 7).

From this understanding of education, one can conclude that, consequently, approach to the evaluation based on continuous learning through evaluation and based on the mutual relationship of action and reflection is necessary. It is an approach that is participative, multi-perspective, flexible, based on dialogue, listening, and trust relationships. Therefore, we highlight the considerations given by Barnett and Eager (2017), pointed to the increasing evaluation practice based on a participatory approach. In the years ahead, access to evaluation will increasingly require:

1. methodological pluralism with cohort evaluation design,
2. systemic thinking and complexity,
3. increased engagement and flexibility, and
4. step forward in relation to previous understanding and use of data that are mainly used for the purpose of confirmation of a certain practice, rather than in the purpose of making changes in the practice (ibid, p. 303).

In order to keep up with such understanding, it is necessary to develop a strategy at the level of education policy to strengthen and to support education for sustainable development, and thus a participatory approach to evaluation.

For start, we offered a sketch of a model that represents initial considerations of possibilities as well as potential constraints of evaluation based on participatory approach. For establishment of such a model, it is necessary to step forward in reaching a consensus in understanding the purpose and expectations of education, to reconsider the previous approach to evaluation in education and to increase number of researches on different approaches in evaluation.

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