Transcript of the Video

Gonzalo Gamboa

Hello! In the following, I will present some tools for public decision making. In this case, we will focus on the social multi-criteria evaluation.

In the real life, we face many situations where conflicts and conflicts of interests converge.
In these situations, where different knowledges and values encounter, the social multi-criteria evaluation is an adequate tool for public decision making.
We face complex socio-ecological systems, and we could differentiate between two types of complexities.

The ontological complexity, that has as consequence the social incommensurability, that is, that in society a set of contradictory and legitimate values exists, and based in different perceptions of the situation we have. And this ontological complexity calls for public participation.

Then we have the epistemological complexity, that relates with technical incommensurability, that is, it is impossible to put express all the (e)valuations under the same measuring unit.

So we can say that these two types of complexity are participative and multidisciplinary.

The social multi-criteria evaluation frames into three phases: approaching, representing and evaluating.

In the first part, the approaching, we have the first step, which is the identification of social actors.

Then, we would define the problem we have in front of us, for which we must decide. As methods, we have different ones: historical-institutional analysis, interviews, focus group, that we will review later.

Then representation would come: that implies to generate a multi-criteria structure with alternatives to tackle the problem we are facing, and different valuation criteria to evaluate these alternatives. Again, in this step we could make use of participative tools such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, workshops

Finally, we evaluate the different alternatives, basing in different criteria; which requires a multi/inter-disciplinary work; we compare the different alternatives and analyse and discuss results. Once again participation comes into play.

This is a non-linear, cyclical process since we go back to the beginning in the sense that we go back reinterpreting the problem and re-define them, if necessary, and go back into the various steps until when someone must decide.

Some tools? To identify social actors, we have the historical-institutional analysis that is basically based in document review so to generate a timeline so to identify in which moments which actors are present in the situation we are analysing.

To define the problems, we have dynamics like the participatory mapping or the problem tree, that generate a vision of what are the roots and consequences of what problem.

Then we represent. We need to create a multi-criteria structure... Again, the problem tree is a good tool because in identifying the causes of the problems we can define some alternatives to solve it. And then we have for instance the narrative analysis, that is a methodology where we conduct a text analysis of interviews, newspapers, opinion articles, so to identify narratives and from that to define evaluation criteria for the evaluation, we must evaluate the criteria, compare the alternatives and dynamize the discussion.

In this case, we use the multicriteria evaluation where –in this case, for example- it is presented an impact matrix with different alternatives that are evaluated under different criteria. The interesting part is that each of the criteria maintains its measuring units and not everything should be reduced to a single measuring unit. Here we can see, for example, as only by colouring with different colours the different cells of the impact matrix we can have an idea of what is the best alternative – or the less bad- in order to solve a determined problem.

We can also use algorithms, that tells us the order of alternatives according to the input parameters. Always keeping in mind that these algorithms should be a tool that help us in making a decision, and they are not the ones who take the decision. We should made responsible for the decision on the basis of the information we collected.

Then, these impact matrix with a lot of information should serve as basis to go back discussing the problem and, if it's the case – take a decision, or go back defining the problem and seek for alternatives.

Here I present you a manual with many participatory dynamics for identifying actors, determining the problems, and a series of participatory dynamics that allow us to face these situation of high complexity

As conclusion, in general, the social-multi-criteria evaluation is a framework for the public decision making, mainly – I would say - at a project level, that allows us to include different visions of the problem that we are dealing with. It combines public participation with multi/inter-disciplinarity work.

When we invite to participate social actors in these kinds of processes, we need to take into consideration and be very cautious with the fact that the expectative of participants and of whom dynamize the process can be very different. Transparency is required, and be very clear on what are the premises, the time span, and all the factors that are taken into account for both the development of alternatives and the definition of evaluation criteria. We need to comply with the acquired compromises, for example with giving back information to participants. And there are key issues as: who decides who participate, how they participate, and what is the knowledge that is relevant in the process? For the same reason, ethics and transparency are very important in the participative processes. We need to have clear who and why someone participate.

Another thing: the participation is necessary, but not always sufficient...
...for this reason... It is promoted the shift from the quality of the product to the quality of the social process, in which everyone has the right in participating, and in which we can facilitate the participation of all sort of actors, with more or less resources or more or less possibilities for expressing their opinion in these processes.

The quality of the process requires engagement, multidisciplinary work, and transparency. The software we are utilizing should provide results that are consistent with the information at hand.

And more important: the ethics and responsibility of the process... how do we incorporate the vision of who cannot participate, or of whom do not have the tools to participate. And, to assume the responsibility in the moment in which we make a decision based on the information at hand.

That it's. Thank you very much