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Combining participatory action research and emerging ways of collective action to promote institutional change toward social commitment: Groundings, strategies, and implications of an experience

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Abstract

Aims: This study reports the foundations, strategies, and results of an institutional change experience based on the combination of participatory-action-research and new currents of collective mobilization and political participation. It aimed to achieve the institution's greater social commitment and a more participatory and transparent management.

Methods: The process took place in a Spanish public university and was promoted and coordinated by a Work Group that emerged from grassroots university community. Collective diagnosis was performed through face-to-face strategies (global, sectorial, and faculty meetings) and virtual tools (web-blog, on-line surveys, shared documents). Collective action combined nonformal with formal institutional participation and applied hybrid activism, self-organization in horizontal structures and integrative conflict management.

Results: A sequential process of diagnosis, collective action, and negotiation was implemented. As a result, the university Governing Team, representatives from different sectors and members of the Work Group worked jointly to define several institutional actions that were thereafter launched. Those actions aimed to improve institutional participation and transparency, and greater institutional social commitment.

Conclusion: The combination of participatory-action-research and new ways of collective action can be an excellent tool to draw institutions towards greater social engagement, thus contributing to sustainable social change. A model to guide institutional change is drafted.

KEYWORDS

collective action, institutional change, institutional transparency, organizational change, participatory-action-research, social commitment

1 | INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in the social and political space has been a recurring element in Western democratic societies. However, the forms of collective organization have undergone significant transformations since the first decade of the 21st century in some Western countries (Flesher-Fominaya & Cox, 2015). The severe consequences of the financial crisis that began in 2008 served as a catalyst for the emergence of citizen movements in different international contexts, calling for new forms of economic, social, and political organization. In the first period, they include those linked to the so-called *Arab Spring* (Noueihed & Warren, 2012), and subsequently, the emerging movements in different Western countries such as the *15-M/Indignados* in Spain (Calvo, 2013), *Occupy Wall Street* in the United States (Gamson & Sifry, 2013), or the protest actions in Greece (Hadjimichalis, 2013). The evolution of these movements has been very heterogeneous depending on the geographical contexts (Fernández-Savater & Flesher Fominaya, 2017). In the specific case of Spain, the mobilizations led to different forms of political action and to different organizational and citizen participation initiatives (Alberich, 2017; Lobera, 2015). These initiatives have had an important influence in various local contexts, contributing to the creation of new forms of citizen involvement in political and institutional life (Subirats & García-Bernardos, 2015).

In this study, we present the theoretical basis, development, and implications of a process of institutional change that combined participatory-action-research (PAR) with the new currents of collective mobilization and political participation. Specifically, this is about a PAR process promoted and coordinated from the foundations of a university institution to achieve the institution's greater social commitment and a more participatory and transparent management. It combined the implementation of informal organizational strategies with participation through the institutions, alternating presential collective mobilization strategies and virtual tools.

2 | THEORETICAL BASIS

2.1 | The classic foundations of PAR

PAR is a consolidated strategy of social analysis and transformation in many areas of community and educational intervention (Bradbury, 2015). The classic proposals of PAR can be summarized in some fundamental points, following reference texts such as those of Fals Borda, (1980, 2001) or the synthesis of authors like de Miguel (1993), López and Scandroglio (2007), López et al. (2010), or Park (1990). From an epistemological point of view, PAR's approach rejects the neutrality arguments and calls for social scientists' transformative commitment. In this sense, the objective is the implementation of systematic processes of recovery and construction of collective knowledge that stimulate a transformative practice. From a methodological point of view, it proposes the development of collective processes that flexibly and yet systematically combine research and intervention. In these processes, active individual and community participation in all phases is an essential element. In turn, it is considered all-important to return the knowledge and the results generated to its protagonists. From the point of view of the validity of the research process, the criteria are the theoretical-practical bases, the integration of popular knowledge, inter-subjective verification, and the social utility of the knowledge produced.

2.2 | Learning from new forms of collective action

The experiences of organization and collective action developed by the new social movements, which emerged in the second decade of the 21st century, provide learnings that are worth integrating in the development of PAR processes in our current context. These learnings illustrate the effectiveness of new forms of participation adapted to the resources and practices of our societies. Here are some of the elements that we consider the most important.

Hybrid activism: The analysis of the participatory processes of the new social movements shows a new type of activism, different from that carried out through high intensity and long-lasting involvement in a single organization or collective process. Heaney and Rojas (2014) use the term hybrid activism to define a form of activism that tends to avoid hierarchical organizations, replacing them with more informal and decentralized groups. These activists develop flexible and intermittent actions that may, in turn, be in a state of "latency" in those periods when collective action is not perceived as possible or necessary. In this way, participation would be irregular and would shift between manifest and latent modes, in which the autonomy of the citizenry to enter and exit in the participatory processes is clear (Pudal, 2011; Sánchez Duarte, 2016). This allows collaborating punctually with concrete proposals, even without a specific commitment, crossing the boundaries of various movements and causes (Subirats, 2015a, 2015b). Thus would emerge the so-called "cross-over activists" or "bridge leaders" (Heaney & Rojas, 2014), militants who can fulfill the function of intermediation between different movements. These militants compare experiences, connect movements to each other, and enable coalitions between different networks.

Self-organization, horizontality and role alternation: traditional PAR initiatives were the result of the involvement of academicians and professionals in work with communities and basic collectives (see Fals Borda, 1980; Scandroglio & López, 2010). In these situations, despite the position of equality sought by the researchers, there was an initial situation of asymmetry with respect to the base participants. However, the initial framework for new forms of collective organization is different. In this sense, the grassroots militants themselves can initiate the actions of dynamization and social construction of knowledge, acting simultaneously as protagonists and drivers of the process (see, e.g., Coordinadora La Uni en la Calle [The University in the Street], 2013). This is possible because these movements usually integrate different population sectors, with a great diversity of training levels and qualifications (García, 2015). This dynamic generates systems of organization, communication, and dynamization of a basically horizontal nature. In turn, both the philosophy of the movements themselves and the demands of the

context promote the alternation of different people in the roles of dynamization and organization. The organization of collective action does not depend on specific actors, nor on the participation of a particular group of persons; on the contrary, it is organized conjointly in temporary situations that require it, with the resources of the individuals who are present (Coodinadora La Uni en La Calle, 2013; Sánchez Duarte, 2016).

Virtual tools and presential spaces: the use of New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) is a hallmark of these new forms of collective action. A new concept, techno-politics, defined as the "collective capacity for appropriation of digital tools for collective action," has thus been coined (Alcazan et al., 2012, p. 8). According to Feixa (2014), techno-politics implies a change in the forms of political mobilization, as the spatial and temporal specialization of traditional politics is abandoned in favor of dispersion by multiple modalities of participation, exchange, and action, using the multiplying power of digital tools. However, especially when it comes to the local or small institutions, the new collective movements have continued to maintain presential meeting places (Alberich, 2017; García-Mendoza, 2016). These spaces allow more fluid interaction processes, facilitate decision-making processes with greater social validity, and reinforce the relational and identity aspects of collective action.

Transparency, accessibility, and collective devolution: One of the central demands of social change movements that emerged in the 2010s was the demand for transparency of governments and institutions. This requirement of transparency has been met from the practice of the movements, favoring the use of communication and decision-making systems where information was at all times transparent and openly accessible to the public (Subirats, 2015b). The use of NICTs has made this possible, as we have mentioned.

Leadership: The emergence of leadership is a common element in group processes, and thus, also in self-organization processes (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001). However, emerging leadership in such phenomena departs from the traditional control roles assumed from positions of power. Thus, evidence of the role of leaders in the processes of self-organization show that they act mainly as enablers, disrupting existing patterns of behavior, encouraging novelty, and making sense of emerging events for others (Plowman et al., 2007). From the perspective of the new ways of collective action, it is assumed, on the one hand, that the exercise of specific roles by specific people can contribute to a more effective management of collective processes. In this sense, collective processes would greatly benefit from the existence of people with proficient skills who assume temporarily the role of articulation and dynamization (López & Soria-Oliver, 2019). However, new forms of collective action emphasize that leadership-related roles are transitional positions that are defined, maintained, and subject to feedback from collective processes. In this sense, they should be subject of rotation and relief (López & Soria-Oliver, 2019).

2.3 | Conflict and collective action

The traditional view of conflict, postulated by functionalist sociologists such as Elton Mayo or Talcott Parsons (see Touzard, 1981), conceptualized conflict as a negative element that should be avoided in social and institutional life. The perspective proposed by guidelines such as the sociology of conflict (Coser, 1961; Dahrendorf, 1990), the so-called *new paradigms in conflict management* (Fried Schnitman, 2000) or the line of work of constructive controversy (Johnson et al., 2000) is quite different. These guidelines indicate that conflict is a substantive element for the proper functioning of the social system and its organizations. They also emphasize that social conflict contributes to revealing latent problems and that it implements mechanisms of social and intellectual activation that allow the search and adoption of new solutions. As Lewis Coser (1961) indicated in his lucid analysis of social conflict, a conflict that develops with limited use of coercive actions in contexts with an adequate level of social cohesion does not necessarily jeopardize the existence of the system. On the contrary, it can contribute to the strengthening of relations and to a functioning more adapted to the demands of the context.

PAR processes highlight collective demands. They can therefore lead to the emergence of conflict with institutional perspectives and groups that hold political power. However, if an appropriate perspective is adopted that anticipates the cyclical nature of conflict processes and considers the conditions that favor constructive

conflict management, conflict can be turned into an excellent tool for the strengthening social and institutional cohesion.

3 | DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

In this section, we will develop the description of the PAR experience that is the subject of this study. Due to the epistemological and methodological conceptualization of a PAR process, it is not possible to offer a standardized description based on the establishment of predetermined objectives and actions that correspond to them. Therefore, we will systematically describe the different phases of the process, combining the presentation of analysis strategies and collective knowledge construction with the description of the action and negotiation strategies. We will start with a brief description of the context and continue with the presentation of the structured PAR process, taking as reference the proposals of de Miguel (1993), López-Cabanas and Chacón (1999), and the CIMAS (2009) collective. In turn, we will dedicate specific sections to clarify how some concrete strategies inspired by new forms of collective action were applied during the PAR process and how several risks, obstacles, and resistances were identified and faced.

3.1 | Institutional and socio-political context

The experience was conducted at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM) in the period from 2014 to 2015. The UAM is a public higher education institution. It is a medium-sized university made up of 33,600 students (23,000 undergraduate students and 10,300 graduate students), 2370 full-time professors and researchers, and 1030 administration and service Personnel. It offers training in various areas of knowledge, covering Humanities, Social Sciences, Law, Health and Behavioral Sciences, Basic Sciences, and Engineering, with an offer of 53 Undergraduate Degrees and 114 Postgraduate Degrees. The UAM occupied and occupies an excellent position in research production at the national and international level (UAM, 2018). In accordance with the regulatory rules of Spanish public universities, the UAM has different governing bodies elected by weighted universal suffrage, that have competences at the university, faculty, and department level. The governing body of the UAM is the so-called Governing Council, which brings together a total of 56 members of the university community, including the Rector, who presides over it, and the Vice-Rectors. The university's highest representative body is the Academic Senate, an organ that usually meets once or twice per course and that marks the university's general lines of action.

At the time of the start of the experience we are reporting, the public university institutions of the Region of Masdrid were going through a period of several years of budget reduction, suffering a decrease of 21% of their endowment in the period from 2009 to 2014. On the other hand, the students had suffered a progressive increase in the enrollment fee, which, in the area of Humanities and Social Sciences, was of 100% in a period of 2 years. These measures had been imposed by state and regional governments under the so-called austerity policies implemented after the financial crisis in 2008. The UAM strategy during this period of 2009–2014 had been fundamentally adapted to government-imposed constraints through the contained management of resources and the use of its previous surpluses, focusing primarily on the internal area. In 2012, following a statement issued by members of the Academic Senate, the University spoke out duly against the restrictions and increase in fees. It also established a fund to support students without resources and a commission to monitor the actions linked to that declaration. By 2014, the commission had ceased its activity and there had been no further actions of pronouncement or opposition to the restriction measures.

3.2 | Development of the PAR

The development of the PAR was structured according to the phases and objectives that are shown in Figure 1 and described in the following sections.

3.2.1 | Initial contact phase

In early 2014, some members of different college community levels began exchanging ideas in different forums and informal meetings about the lack of a clear university response to the restrictions imposed by state and regional governments. Through the initiative of some persons involved in representative or management bodies, it was decided to make a broad call of an informal nature to form a group to articulate ways to demand a stronger positioning and concrete measures by the UAM's governing bodies. This led to an email to members of the Academic Senate and to all the members of the university community, calling them to a presential meeting to address this issue.
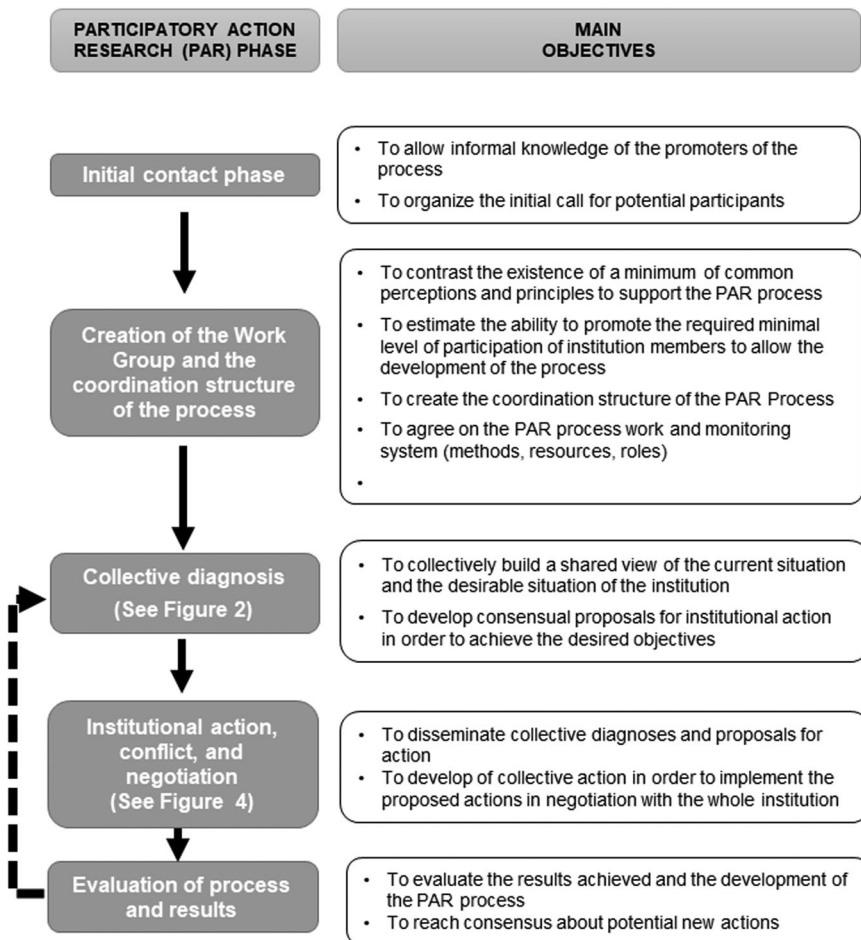

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR) PHASE	MAIN OBJECTIVES
Initial contact phase	• To allow informal knowledge of the promoters of the process • To organize the initial call for potential participants
Creation of the Work Group and the coordination structure of the process	• To contrast the existence of a minimum of common perceptions and principles to support the PAR process • To estimate the ability to promote the required minimal level of participation of institution members to allow the development of the process • To create the coordination structure of the PAR Process • To agree on the PAR process work and monitoring system (methods, resources, roles)
Collective diagnosis (See Figure 2)	• To collectively build a shared view of the current situation and the desirable situation of the institution • To develop consensual proposals for institutional action in order to achieve the desired objectives
Institutional action, conflict, and negotiation (See Figure 4)	• To disseminate collective diagnoses and proposals for action • To develop of collective action in order to implement the proposed actions in negotiation with the whole institution
Evaluation of process and results	• To evaluate the results achieved and the development of the PAR process • To reach consensus about potential new actions

FIGURE 1 Phases and main objectives of PAR process. PAR, participatory-action-research

3.2.2 | Creation of the Work Group and the coordination structure of the process

The meeting convened to form the Work Group was attended by approximately 50–60 persons from all the levels of the university community, including members who are very active in associations and grassroots representative bodies, representatives of trade unions, and single-person positions. The session began by exploring the existence of common perceptions of the university's situation and clearly revealed some shared ideas. In this regard, it was decided to establish a Work Group with the following objectives: (1) To reactivate the processes of discussion and participation in the UAM, with particular attention to the recovery of the role of the Academic Senate; (2) Participatory design of a response strategy that would: position the UAM socially in defense of public education and research; have an impact on the promotion of social and political change at the short-to-medium term; combat the negative effects of the cuts and the university's market-driven management. In accordance with these objectives, an organizational structure was established to coordinate the development of the process, composed of the following committees: Coordination Committee; Documentation/Analysis Committee; Mobilization/Proposals Committee.

All the people gathered decided as a medium-term strategy to call for an extraordinary Academic Senate meeting in which: (1) The result of the diagnosis of the impact of restriction policies on the public university would be presented; (2) Proposals for the response of the UAM to the situation, arising from participatory work open to the entire university community, would be presented and submitted for approval. The call for this Academic Senate meeting would take place on the initiative of the grassroots university community. It was therefore anticipated that it would involve a process of conflict with the governance team (Rector and Vice-Rectors) and could lead to fractures in the university community. To properly manage the potential conflict, it was agreed to maintain a permanent avenue of communication and negotiation with the UAM governance team and to inform it transparently of the calls and results of the process in the hopes of reaching possible agreements. The movement was called "Work Group: Academic Senate in Defense of the Public University."

3.2.3 | Making the collective diagnosis

Through the work of the different committees, a system was articulated to collect the contributions from the university community as a whole. This system is shown in Figure 2.

In a *first phase*, the proposals for action of all sectors of the university community were collected through different pathways. Such information was channeled by:

- *Face-to-face meetings*: Presential meetings for the collection of proposals open to the entire university community were convened and dynamized by the members of the Work Group. Some were convened by Faculties, simultaneously including all the sectors; others were convened sectorally, including groups not linked to specific faculties, such as the general service personnel. Meetings were convened through email lists that included all the faculties and/or sectors. Likewise, the call was published on the initiative's web-blog. A total of 10 face-to-face meetings were held.
- *Web-blog*: A web-blog was designed and launched that served as a tool to articulate the whole process. This web-blog presented the initiative, reported on the times and places of the different meetings and, through an online form, allowed the presentation (anonymous or not) of proposals. One of the fundamental features of this web-blog is that it allowed *open and real-time access to all the information of the process* through an online shared document system. This included *all* the minutes of the different coordination and diagnostic meetings and the proposals themselves generated through the online form. In this sense, *all* the information was accessible to anyone who wanted to consult it. At the time we are writing this study, the web-blog maintains its active link
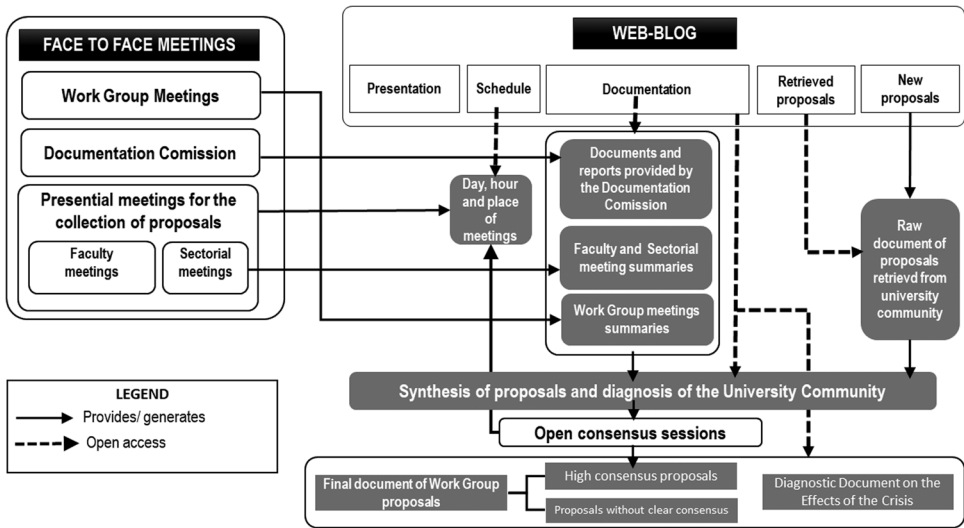
FIGURE 2 Tools and procedures of collective diagnosis

and can be accessed at https://claustrodefensauniversidad.wordpress.com/. According to the counter included, the blog received a total of approximately 2500 visits during the period of development of the process.

In *a second phase*, the Coordination, Proposals/Mobilization and Documentation committees worked to develop a synthesis both of a diagnosis on the effects of the restrictive policies on the university and the proposals generated by the different pathways. A total of 66 proposals were collected and subjected to a consensual *content analysis* process by the members of the Coordination Committee. The proposals were classified into different thematic areas to facilitate discussion and decision about them and were eventually summarized in 35 specific proposals to avoid redundancies. These proposals concerned: (1) Internal UAM actions in the general area, student area, and staffing area; (2) External projection actions in the areas of visibility, strike, and institutional relations with the authorities; (3) General strategies for action in response to the restrictions.

In *a third phase*, after making available to the entire university community the summary documents of proposals and the diagnostic document of the effects of the cuts, *an open Consensus Session* was convened and carried out. The objective of that session was to agree about which ones of all the proposals would be submitted for approval by the Academic Senate. In this way, the different proposals were reviewed, discussed, and classified into two types according to the level of consensus: (1) High consensus proposals: they would be included for debate and approval by the Academic Senate; (2) Proposals without clear consensus: they would not be subject to debate and approval by the Academic Senate, but they would be mentioned in the documents submitted.

The end result was a Diagnostic Document on the Effects of the Crisis and a Document of Proposals to be presented to the Academic Senate. The synthesis of the Proposal Document is shown in Table 1.

3.2.4 | Institutional action, conflict, and negotiation

After the development of the Diagnostic Document of the effects of restrictive policies on the University and the Proposals Document in defense of the public university, the Work Group promoted an Extraordinary Academic Senate meeting to submit the documents to approval of the university community. This Academic Senate, in accordance with the university's statutes, could be convened on the initiative of a minimum percentage of

TABLE 1   Summary of proposals in defense of the public university developed through the work of collective participation

1. Internal Actions

Proposals for General Functioning

- To advance in the transparency and publicity mechanisms of the documents and processes linked to institutional management.
- To implement transparent and democratic control of the hiring of projects and studies by the university.
- To express on the part the university a commitment not to promote outsourcing/privatization of services.
- To institutionally implement the generation and dissemination of essential indicators of the university's training and research activity.
- To improve the level of participation in the design of the university's budgets.
- To develop direct advisory systems for the university community as a whole to raise awareness of the state of opinion regarding the effects of the cuts and interference policies.
- To make binding consultations to the university community as a whole on matters of particular relevance.
- To promote the regulation of academic stoppage situations in the university.
- To establish more effective procedures to demand responsibility and accountability of institutional posts.

Proposals in the Student Area

- To strengthen the Social Fund of the UAM through adequate allocation and an easier procedure to access its resources.
- To promote the creation of the Student Council in the UAM.

Proposals in the Personnel Area

- To promote the maintenance of the UAM's access program for new researchers.
- To further the maintenance of the program of promotions of teaching and research staff and administration and services Personnel.
- To promote the recovery of precrisis workforce wage levels
- To promote a plan for updating, training, and endowing human and material resources.

2. External Projection Actions

- To maintain, from the university, a position of maximum firmness in the face of the different competent authorities (State Government and Autonomous Government) in the defense of public education and research.
- To develop an active communication strategy in defense of the University that publicly influences the social importance of its work, the need for respect for its autonomy, and sufficient financing of its activities.
- To take legal measures against decisions that may harm or infringe university autonomy.
- To promote the development of mobilization, visibility, and vindication actions in defense of the role of the Public University and public services in general.

members without the intervention of the Governing Team (Rector and Vice-Rectors). In any case, it would be valid if a quorum and consensus were reached for the establishment of the lines of action of the university. Therefore, at the beginning, the initiative provoked a situation of institutional conflict, as the Governing Team faced the possibility of lines of action foreign to its initiative being developed. The Governing Team proposed that Work Group should integrate its proposals within the discussion of the general lines of action of the university that would take place in an ordinary Academic Senate meeting. However, to gain greater negotiation power and avoid the risk of dissolving the mobilization, the Work Group decided to maintain the call for the extraordinary Academic Senate meeting. This extraordinary Academic Senate had sufficient quorum to be held, and was carried out with a debate in which the Work Group presented its proposals. In the final moments of the Academic Senate, before the proposals were put to the vote, a negotiation process was established between the representatives of the Work Group and the Governing Team. In that negotiation, it was agreed not to submit the proposals to a vote at that time and to reactivate a committee, called the Academic Senate Monitoring Committee, to generate the proposals in a consensual way and then submit them to a vote in the ordinary Academic Senate. The Work Group agreed to

this study system on the condition that the Committee would be open to any member of the university community. Acceptance of this condition meant that a logic of consensus, and not of sectoral majorities, should be established for the generation of proposals in that Committee.

3.2.5 | Evaluation of the process and the results

During the development of the negotiated institutional action, as described in the following section, the Work Group held regular face-to-face meetings to assess the progress of the process and agree on how to manage work in the institutional forums agreed on with the Governing Team. The outcome of these meetings was summarized in documents that were openly available on Work Group website to the members of the university community.

3.3 | Strategies used to overcome risks, obstacles, and resistances

To provide a more comprehensive overview of the strategies used during the PAR experience, Table 2 summarizes the risks, obstacles, and resistances present in the process and details the fundamental strategies for addressing them.

3.4 | Articulation of collective action strategies during PAR process

We dedicate this specific section to clarify in more detail how some concrete strategies linked to new ways of collective action were implemented during the process.

Hybrid activism, cross-over activism, and bridge leaders: the process enabled the participation of people who played different formal and informal roles within the institution, both in leadership positions and in base positions. On the part of the student collective, it incorporated people who were leaders or members of college or university student associations, as well as people who were leaders, promoters or participants of informal assemblies arising from inspiration from the *15-M/Indignados* movement. On the part of the administration and services staff, the Work Group counted on people linked to the university's trade unions, usually in formal leadership roles, who were also representatives of workers in the formal governing bodies of the university and also participated in informal initiatives; it also actively integrated base participants who, until then, had not found a way to canalize their critical perspective in the formal forums. With regard to professors and researchers staff, the process integrated the participation of professors and researchers with different levels of stability in their jobs (professors, associated professors, assistant professors, predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers), some of them linked to trade unions and, in some cases, with responsibility in governing bodies of the faculties (deans, vice-deans). The structure of the process enabled the participation of each person in different forums, formal and informal, of the institution (*cross-over activism*). The process also made it easier for people to participate at any time and with different levels of involvement, regardless of their previous participation (*hybrid activism*). In turn, the performance of leadership roles in different formal and informal forums of some people (*bridge leaders*) allowed for much better dissemination and management of information and more effective action.

Leadership, horizontality, and role alternation: emerging leadership roles during the PAR process were primarily focused on the exercise of critical analysis, dynamization and action organization. An explicit effort was made to *empower* people and groups of lower institutional status (mainly base students and staff with temporary contracts) to promote the horizontality of internal dialog. Therefore, their incorporation into the Coordination Committee and all the Commissions was favored, the expression of their opinions was explicitly sought in the exchange forums and their assumption of spokesperson roles was enhanced. Similarly, the *depowerment* of high-status leaders in the

TABLE 2 Risks, obstacles, and resistances during the process and solutions adopted to overcome them

Risks, obstacles, and resistances	Adopted solutions
Distrust of PAR promoters, suspicion of secondary interests	Constant promotion of horizontal debate and open and transparent decision-making systems
	Depowerment of high-status members in the internal actions and *empowerment* of the institution's low-status participants to stimulate their prominence in the process
	Transparency and open access to all information about the process and its results
Lack of involvement of the university community as a whole and, consequently, lack of representativeness of the results and proposals	Diversification of information collection pathways (face-to-face, joint/sectoral, individual/collective)
	Open and diverse dissemination (face-to-face/virtual, formal/informal) of the process and its results
	Explicit effort to integrate divergence and minority positions into diagnosis and proposals
	Establishing argumentation and rationality logic (informative influence), not majority logic (normative influence)
Seeking prominence or attempts to use forums to raise sectoral or particular interests	Establishing rotating leadership
	Group and collective self-regulation facilitated by the heterogeneity of interests and sectors present among participants
	Transparency and open access to the process and its results
Fear of the most vulnerable members of the university community of criticizing the institution due to possible negative consequences	Establishment of anonymous and confidential avenues for the collection of information
	Channeling conflicting actions through participation in the process of people with high institutional status
	Surveillance of coercive actions towards individual members by the Work Group
Perception of threat and loss of power by formal institutional leaders	Maintaining communication channels between Work Group coordinators and institutional formal leaders
	Transparent information about the process and its results to institutional formal leaders
	Emphasis on shared common goals
	Prioritization of integrative negotiating strategies
Use of institutional mechanisms to decrease the prominence and effectiveness of the process	Maintaining pressure measures and process tension until formal agreements are reached
	Use of procedures, roles, and institutional spaces to support and channel the process
Burn-out of process coordinators, reliance on one-person leaders	Rotatory development of leadership and spokesperson roles
	Distribution of organizational tasks and information resources to a broad core of committed participants

Work Group internal interactions was promoted, favoring rotation in the performance of coordination and dynamization tasks and limiting spokesperson functions. In this sense, i.e. the public communication of the proposals made by collective in the Senate of the University, instead of being assumed by a single spokesperson, was divided and structured to incorporate sequentially a spokesperson from each of the groups.

Participation and implication: In Figure 3, we present a diagram of the different levels of participation and involvement developed during the process by the members of the university institution. These levels of participation are differentiated according to the time of regular development of the process, on the one hand, and the moments of special relevance that required greater involvement, on the other hand. As can be seen, we have categorized participation at the following levels in decreasing order of involvement, following in part the terminology proposed by reference works in the area (CIMAS, 2009): (1) *Motor Group*: a small group of people with high and constant level of involvement who are responsible for the activation, dynamization, and organization of the process; (2) *Support group*: a relatively small group of people who offer direct and constant support to organizational and dynamization actions; (3) *Support network*: a relatively large group of people who explicitly support the process and develop moderately involved actions; (4) *Active members of the institution*: a large group of members of the institution who participate as recipients of the process by providing their vision through low-involvement pathways; (5) *Members unlinked to the process*: a broad group of members of the institution who do not participate in the process or do so based on strictly personal interests.

Other aspects linked to the new forms of collective action *(Transparency, accessibility, and collective devolution; Virtual tools and presential spaces)* have been described in detail in the presentation of the process methodology.

3.5 | Results: Negotiation and development of institutional actions

As a result of the initial negotiation process, the so-called Academic Senate Monitoring Commission, which included representatives of the Governing Team, representatives from different sectors of the university community, and members of the Work Group, was reactivated. The commission actively worked for four weeks to agree on the
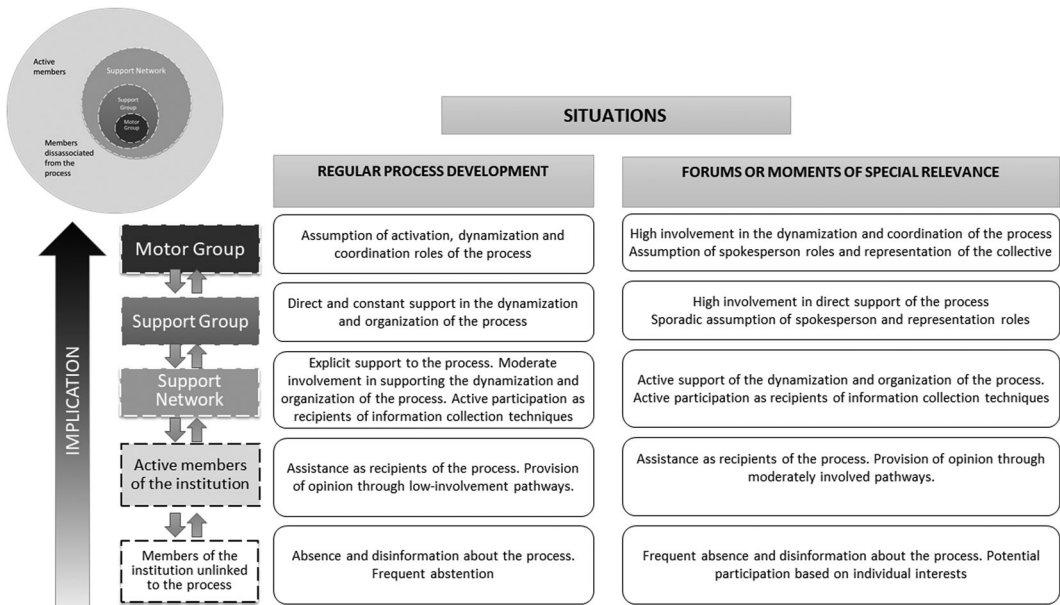

FIGURE 3 Participation and implication levels during PAR process. PAR, participatory-action-research

document called "General proposals for action in defense of the public university," which would be submitted for approval in the ordinary Academic Senate. The commission worked in a constructive climate of discussion, and contrasted perspectives to structure, analyze, and negotiate on the basis of the initial proposals. The negotiation process included some fundamental strategies: analysis of the perspective of each of the parties; clarification of the legal and economic limits for the development of some proposals by the institution; promotion of a more comprehensive view of the role of the university as an actor of social change and the needs of different university sectors by the Work Group; anticipation of positive results derived from institutional cohesion; and assuming concessions by each part in *low priority* issues to achieve high priority objectives (*logrolling*). The resulting proposals were presented and unanimously approved by the Academic Senate in its regular session.

Following the adoption of the general lines, the Monitoring Committee continued its activity to supervise the implementation and development of the binding actions. Throughout 2015, different specific task groups were created on the initiative of the Governing Team to finalize the approved proposals, issuing a report in June 2015 on the different actions carried out. It is beyond the scope of this study to carry out a detailed analysis of the multiple institutional actions implemented over the period considered in different areas. For illustrative purposes, we offer in Table 2 some of the most relevant ones, taking as reference the institutional reports. The outcome of the negotiation and consensus process can thus be examined by comparing Table 3 (actions proposed by the Work Group) and Table 3 (actions finally developed by the institution).

Likewise, as an illustration, we want to reflect the way in which the UAM defined and prioritized its general lines of action in 2014, before the actions related to the aforementioned process were launched, and in 2018, after the above experience and the actions derived thereof had taken place. Table 4 highlights clear differences both in

TABLE 3 Actions resulting from the proposals in defense of the public university

Actions of institutional organization and functioning

- Reactivation of the Monitoring Committee of the Declaration of the Academic Senate, as a coordinating element for the design and implementation of the proposed actions.
- Creation of task groups and distribution of responsibility for actions to the different committees. Specifically:
  o Creation of the Budget Work Group, in which the university community is openly informed about the elaboration procedure of the budgets.
  o Establishment of a Work Group on Transparency, chaired by the Secretary-General. Dissemination of the existence of the UAM Transparency Portal.
  o Creation of the Work Group on Communication
  o Reactivation of the Administration and Services Personnel Committee to address the points relating to that group.
  o Inclusion of the items referring to teaching and research staff in the agenda of the Committee on Teachers
  o Inclusion of student items in the agenda of the Student Commission

Specific actions:

- Development by the Governing Team of a "Communication Plan in Defense of the Public University."
- Creation by the UAM of the Forum "The Madrid Public University of the 21st Century," aimed at discussing the situation of the university and the proposals to act in its defense. This forum held the Seminars "Challenges of the Madrid Public University in its social environment" and "Financing and budgetary challenges of the Madrid Public University." A summary can be found at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEPnEZfcYbM
- Insertion on the UAM website of various Official Notices, Manifests, and Declarations of various instances, appearance in the media of articles by Professors of the UAM, dissemination in institutional social networks of news in various media in defense of the university.
- Review and improvement in procedures and access to the Social Fund for Students in the period 2014–2015, with an increase in its budgetary execution.
- Maintenance of the workforce in the 2014–2015 period.
- Maintenance and reinforcement of the UAM's programs to incorporate new researchers
- No outsourcing of new services in the 2014–2015 period.

TABLE 4 Design and formulation of the UAM's vision of its objectives and signs of identity in 2014 and 2018

2014	2018
Source: "Líneas de actuación" [Lines of Action] (UAM, 2014)	Source: "Señas de Identidad" [Signs of Identity] (UAM, 2018)
Procedure: Proposals by the governing team and derived from the electoral program presented by the Rector in the last election process	Procedure: The result of a sequential participation process that included single-person positions, collegiate bodies, making available to the university community as a whole the working documents to collect members' contributions.
Proposals	Proposals
1. Incorporation, training and promotion of excellence	1. Public university with strong social commitment
2. Internationalization	2. Sustainable, healthy, and supportive
3. Quality of the studies	3. Concerned about the continuous improvement of teaching quality to promote the teaching-learning process
4. Leadership in research and innovation	4. Intensive in high-quality research
5. Commitment to society	5. With a commitment to innovation and the transfer of knowledge as an driver of social and economic development
6. Transparency, communication, and institutional relations	6. With prestige and international projection
	7. Integrator of new technologies as an opportunity for continuous improvement
	8. With a committed, participatory community in a setting of transparency

the procedure for generating objectives (greater community participation and transparency) and in prioritizing objectives (greater relevance and salience of social commitment in the definition of institutional identity).

4 | DISCUSSION

Through this study, we have sought to show how PAR procedures inspired by new collective action strategies can be applied to promote institutional change processes for greater participation, transparency, and social commitment. We have illustrated this possibility with the example of a PAR process performed at a university institution. In this process, the mobilization of the grassroots of the institution and the combination of actions of formal and informal participation allowed the launching of various institutional actions aimed toward a greater commitment to collective interest. This experience illustrates one of the ways in which community psychologists can promote effective social change strategies. Thus, among many possible ones, we offer a concrete way to respond to the limits that our discipline has faced when undertaking its goals of social transformation (López, 2019; Nelson, 2013; Wiesenfeld, 2014). In Figure 4 we synthesize our experience, proposing a model that reflects how PAR could be combined with new forms of collective action to promote institutional change.

As observed in Figure 4, our experience highlights the divergence that can exist between the operational perspective of institutional leaders and the perspective of the grassroots members of an institution. The former, more focused on achieving the formal objectives, on preserving the institutional resources, potentially detached from the daily lives of the members of the organization, and with a tendency to self-validate its own management.
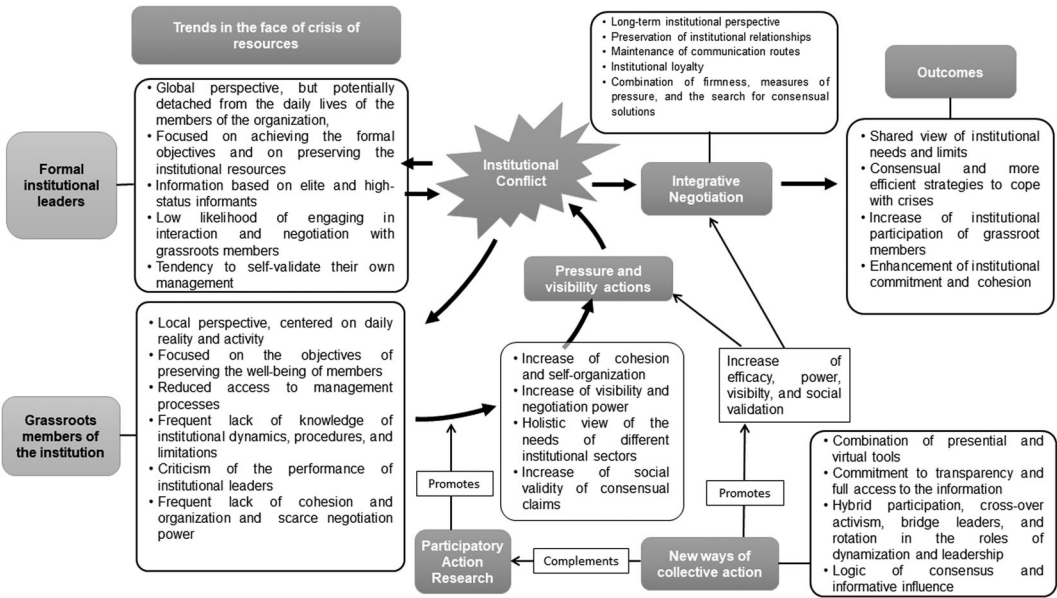
FIGURE 4 A global model of institutional change based on the integration of PAR and new ways of collective actions, PAR, participatory-action-research

The latter, more focused on the objectives of preserving the well-being of its members, who have reduced access to management processes, and more critical towards the performance of institutional leaders. The existence of crisis situations in which restrictions particularly affect the grassroots members, as in this case, may promote the emergence of processes of mobilization that question institutional functioning (Snow & Benford, 1992; Van Zomeren et al., 2008). However, some aspects differentially characterize the experience we have recounted, largely connected to the learnings derived from new forms of collective action. First, the combination of presential and virtual tools, which conferred important power to collect and transmit all the information about the process. Second, the commitment to transparency and full access to the information of the process, which conferred great social validity. Third, the adoption of a hybrid participation strategy, which allowed the entry and exit of different members, the participation of *bridge leaders* and rotation in the roles of dynamization and leadership. This perspective fractures the logic of mere representation or normative influence and fundamentally establishes a logic of consensus and informative influence (Martin & Hewstone, 2003). This implies that the proposals and agreements are mainly channeled through their ability to convince the members of the institution, not through the imposition of majorities.

On the other hand, we believe that a fundamental element in the related experience was that it maintained an integrative perspective of the processes of conflict. From this viewpoint, it is understood that institutional conflict may be necessary to implement processes of institutional transformation. However, the fact that adequate institutional functioning requires a good climate of long-term relationships is also taken into account. It is therefore essential to maintain institutional loyalty and promote integrative conflict management. This form of conflict management combines firmness and measures of pressure, also considering the institutional perspective, the maintenance of communication routes, and the search for consensual solutions. This allows the result of the conflict to be cohesion instead of institutional fracture. Likewise, it allows the resulting institutional functioning to better respond to the needs of the organization and its context as a whole and to incorporate innovative strategies. We believe that, within its limitations, the experience presented herein exemplifies this process very appropriately.

In any case, it is necessary to critically reflect on the limitations of the process and its results. First, we should point out the difficulties to achieve adequate participation in the institutional setting and, consequently, the difficulty to guarantee the representativeness of the collective diagnosis and the resulting proposals. In fact, despite efforts of transparency and dissemination, only a small part of the organization was effectively involved in our process. As has been outlined in previous sections, the strategies to cope with this limitation include the following actions: diversification of the pathways for information retrieval (face-to-face/on-line, joint/sectoral, individual/collective); open and diversified (presential/virtual, formal/informal) dissemination of the process and its results; explicit and constant effort to integrate divergence and minority positions into diagnosis and proposals; establishment of consensus-based decision-making processes based on the exchange of arguments (informative influence), ruling out decision-making processes based on the imposition of the majority (normative influence); constant reference to common objectives; and periodic questioning of the actions themselves. Second, it is necessary to highlight the difficulties to maintain the process over time, due to potential burn-out produced in the members with the greatest involvement and, especially, the most vulnerable groups. Strategies to address this difficulty include: the organization of structures with a wide distribution of tasks among committed participants; the alternation in the roles of dynamization and organization of the process; and the concentration of high levels of involvement at decisive times with the reduction of involvement in the regular development of the process. Third, we should point out that a PAR process like the one we have described does not allow or intend to isolate the factors that produce institutional changes. The description of the process and its time sequence highlight, in our view, the clear catalyst role of the PAR experience in the changes undergone by the institution. However, this change must necessarily be understood within the framework of other internal and external processes that contribute to driving the transformation described.

We must also reflect on the inter-relationships between the PAR, collective action, and institutional change. In our view, not all activism necessarily involves PAR development. However, the PAR provides an excellent basis for the implementation or reactivation of collective action for various reasons: (1) It promotes group cohesion by stimulating positive interaction among members and making explicit some shared objectives; (2) It promotes involvement in collective action by reinforcing the perception of the potential success of institutional change; (3) It gives greater strength and social validity to the proposals of change as a result of the critical and shared diagnostic process. In turn, the new aspects of collective action adequately enhance the factors mentioned by promoting higher levels of efficiency in the exchange and collection of information. Likewise, they give it greater social validity for its commitment with the principles of horizontal participation and transparency. We understand, in turn, that the combination of PAR and new forms of collective action is an excellent tool of institutional change for similar reasons. However, the implementation of processes combining PAR and collective action in the institutional context should place particular emphasis on the development of inclusive conflict and negotiation processes. This emphasis is essential so that divergence and contrast processes do not fracture relations between members of the institution (who will necessarily need to develop long-term interactions) and they promote institutional cohesion.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

PAR processes can be an excellent tool to promote transformation processes that draw public institutions closer to greater transparency, participation, and social engagement. This strategy represents a useful resource for energizing effective social changes that respond to the approaches and objectives of Community Psychology. In these processes, combining the classic foundations of PAR with the learnings derived from new forms of collective action can make the transformative process much more efficient. In this sense, the adoption of strategies of hybrid activism and self-organization in horizontal structures is of great utility, as well as the alternation of roles in the dynamization and development of the process. Likewise, the combination of virtual tools, which allow participation and open access to information, with meetings in presential spaces confers great power to collective action. The

integrative view of conflict management, which combines firmness with the preservation of institutional relations, promotes greater cohesion and institutional effectiveness of the result of the process.

PEER REVIEW

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available at https://claustrodefensauniversidad. wordpress.com/

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