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# **Lessons for Research Policy and Practice: The Case of Co-enquiry Research With Rural Communities**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between institutional funding for research and community-based or co-enquiry research practice. It examines the implementation of co-enquiry research in the COMBIOSERVE project, which was funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme for research and innovation, between the years 2012 and 2015. Research partnerships between Latin American and European civil society organisations, research institutions, and Latin American rural communities are analysed. Challenges for effective collaboration in co-enquiry and lessons learned for research policy and practice are outlined. Based on our case study we suggest that: (1) the established values and practices of academia seem largely unfavourable towards alternative forms of research, such as co-enquiry; (2) the policies and administrative practices of this European Commission funding are unsuitable for adopting participatory forms of enquiry; and (3) the approach to research funding supports short engagements with communities whereas long-term collaborations are more desirable. Based on our case study, we propose more flexible funding models that support face-to-face meetings between researchers and communities from the time of proposal drafting, adaptation of research processes to local dynamics, adaptation of administrative processes to the capacities of all participants, and potential for long-term collaborations. Large-scale funding bodies such as European Commission research programmes are leaders in the evolution of research policy and

practice. They have the power and the opportunity to publicly acknowledge the value of partnerships with civil society organisations and communities, actively support co-enquiry, and foment interest in innovative forms of research.

**Index Terms:** European Commission; civil society organisations; co-enquiry; Latin America; participatory research; research funding; research partnership; research policy; Seventh Framework Programme

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Nature and Scope of Co-enquiry Research

Over the past three decades, participatory approaches have become increasingly important in research practice. They lie at the heart of the transformation of modes of engagement between researchers, practitioners, and indigenous and rural communities, particularly in the context of community development and biocultural diversity conservation (Gavin et al., 2015). Participatory research theories and practices have been specified, applied, revised and debated to great extent (Ander-Egg, 2003; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991; Gonsalves et al., 2005; Gudynas & Evia, 1991; Hall, 1975, 1981, 1992; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Vio Grossi, Gianotten, & Wit, 1988). It has become apparent that the concept of participation can be implemented in many different ways in the research context: ranging from perfunctory participation to community control over the research process (Pimbert & Pretty, 1995).

Co-enquiry is an approach to participatory research in which external researchers, educators, or extension workers are the facilitators to community-led research aimed at addressing community needs and common concerns (Armstrong, Banks, & Henfrey, 2011; Boavida & da Ponte, 2011; Borio, Pozzi, & Roggero, 2006; Ferreira & Gendron, 2011; Heron, 1996; Reason, 1988, 1994, 1998, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Co-enquiry seeks to establish partnerships: community members and outside researchers are partners throughout the entire research process in terms of sharing power, resources, credit, data ownership, results, and so on, including the definition of research priorities.

There are multiple ways of doing co-enquiry. In some cases, communities, based on their stated needs, concerns, and curiosities, determine research objectives, methods, and analyses. In others, co-enquiry involves the collaborative development of research objectives and research processes, through continuous negotiation among all partners. In all cases, external researchers are facilitators and co-subjects of the research process, rather than the intellectual leaders of the process (Heron, 1981; Heron & Reason, 1997).

Successful co-enquiry is built upon certain key elements: attention to research ethics, building and nurturing of trust, respect for communities' rhythms and schedules, and commitment of the researchers. In co-enquiry research, power is equally shared between communities and researchers and all aspects of the research are subject to negotiation between researchers and communities. However, as hosts of the research process, communities have the right to veto or demand changes to research processes by way of their right to free, prior, and informed consent (Caruso, Camacho, del Campo, Roma, & Medinaceli, 2015).

The scope of co-enquiry extends beyond the realms of research, addressing issues of politics and power. It works to overcome the historical "epistemic injustice" resulting from the assumption that local and indigenous ways of understanding the world are not as valid as scientific ones (Fricker, 2009) and to overcome current blind spots of environmental research through seeing co-enquiry as a form of translation between different worlds and practices of knowing (Escobar, 2011; Green, 2013). Rooted in the goal to "decolonize" research practice (Smith, 2012), co-enquiry's ultimate aim is to strengthen a community's capacity to respond effectively to current and future problems. For this to occur, external researchers engaging in co-enquiry are often active and engaged in the social, environmental, and political issues faced by the communities they work with.

Co-enquiry also involves the notion of continuous engagement in research, where research is a relationship-building, knowledge-creation, and knowledge-sharing process among collaborators rather than merely data gathering and giving back results. While "giving back" maintains the two sides of research and researched, "continuous engagement" reduces such dualistic relationships but implies the multiple ways of relating to each other in research (Bhan, 2014; TallBear, 2014).

## **1.2 Barriers to Co- enquiry Research**

However, co-enquiry remains a complex aspiration that is sometimes difficult to justify or implement fully in formal research settings. Within an increasingly commoditised, competitive, and audited academia (Collini, 2013; Shore, 2008; Strathern, 2000; Yuni & Catoggio, 2012), researchers find themselves bound to "rules of the game" that are often incompatible with the requirements of participatory research (Hall, 2005), let alone deeply collaborative approaches to research such as co-enquiry. The constraints on academics include the pressure to publish according to strict regimens of impact factor, authorship order and number, time pressures, growing administrative load, job insecurity, and funding shortfall, to name a few (Alcántara & Serrano, 2009; Lucas, 2006; Shore, 2008; Sparkes, 2007; Waitere, Wright, Tremaine, Brown, & Pausé, 2011). Some researchers find, they simply cannot pledge the degree of commitment required for co-enquiry. Others may feel obliged to choose between advancing their careers and exploring co-enquiry approaches, given the latter's marginal status in the academe (Hall, 2005; Wiesmann et al., 2008).

### **1.3 COMBIOSERVE Project**

In this context of existing tensions between the ideals of participatory research, co-enquiry research and academic practice, the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme funded the COMBIOSERVE project, during 2012-2015 (project title: "Assessing the Effectiveness of Community-Based Management Strategies for Biocultural Diversity Conservation"). This project aimed to develop, through participatory and interactive research, new scientific and technological knowledge to understand and characterise community-based conservation and to collaborate with civil society organisations to engage in a process of co-enquiry and mutual learning that allows research methods and outcomes to be shared among communities facing similar challenges.

These overarching aims were achieved by: analysing past and present trajectories and future scenarios of land use and environmental change; assessing the cultural traditions, knowledge systems, and institutional arrangements that have allowed communities to devise collective conservation strategies; examining the dependence of household and community livelihoods on natural resources and ecosystem services, and their capacity to adapt to multiple stressors; and identifying drivers, challenges, and opportunities for biocultural diversity conservation.

The present article deals with the project's co-enquiry experiences. We analyse the challenges to effective collaboration among researchers and their institutions, practitioners represented by civil society organisations, rural communities, and funding agencies and outline lessons learned for research policy and practice.

## **2. Project Context and Relationships Among Partners**

The European Commission (EC) has sought to engage with the demand for stakeholder participation by funding projects that involve collaboration between research institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs). In 2007, as part of its Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), the EC launched a new funding scheme named Research for the Benefit of Specific Groups – Civil Society Organisations (BSG-CSO). This scheme sought to respond to the emerging need to collaborate upstream in the research process by helping to structure possible partnerships between research institutions and CSOs. In 2010, a new call under the EC BSG-CSO funding scheme of the FP7 Environment Programme entitled ENV.2011.4.2.3-1 Community Based Management of Environmental Challenges was launched.

The COMBIOSERVE consortium, consisting of ten European and Latin American research organisations and CSOs (Table 1), responded to the call. With almost 2 million Euros of funding, the COMBIOSERVE project was carried out between January 2012 and January 2015. COMBIOSERVE sought to identify the conditions and principles for successful community-based biocultural diversity conservation in the field sites of Southern Bahia, Brazil; Pilon Lajas, Bolivia; and Calakmul, Mexico. Whereas the overarching research questions were the same for these three field sites, the specific research foci and methods were adapted to local conditions (Caruso, Camacho, del

Campo, Roma, & Medinaceli, 2015). In Chinantla, Mexico, research into the methodological aspects of co-enquiry was carried out.

The elaboration of the project proposal was coordinated by two European research institutions and driven by the consortium's research institutions. While CSO partners were involved in all communications, were consulted, and provided their consent on all of the documents prepared, they did not contribute significantly at this stage due to the high workload, the quick pace required, and their relative inexperience with drafting such proposals. Following the approval of the project, consortium partners had 4 months for fine-tuning the project proposal during negotiations of the grant agreement. The negotiation phase was characterised by a more relaxed time frame allowing for improved communications between all actors and more involvement of the CSOs. During this phase, shortcomings of the original project plan were identified and resolved, at least partially.

Table 1. *The Composition of the COMBIOSERVE Consortium*

Institution	Location	Institution Type
<b>EUROPE BASED INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Division of Organic Farming, Department of Sustainable Agricultural Systems, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU)	Vienna, Austria	Research institution
Global Diversity Foundation (GDF)	Canterbury, United Kingdom	Civil society organisation & research institution
The Institute for Science and Technology of the Environment, Universitat Autònoma Barcelona (ICTA- UAB)	Barcelona, Spain	Research institution
Institute for Environmental Studies, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (IVM-VU)	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Research institution
<b>LATIN AMERICA BASED INSTITUTIONS</b>		
Associação Nacional de Ação Indigenista (ANAI)	Salvador de Bahia, Brazil	Civil society organisation
Centro Boliviano para el Desarrollo Socio-Integral (CBIDSI)	San Borja, Bolivia	Civil society organisation & research institution
Consejo Regional Indígena y Popular de Xpujil (CRIPX)	X'pujil, Mexico	Civil society organisation
Instituto de Ecología (INECOL)	Xalapa, Mexico	Research institution
Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS)	Cochabamba, Bolivia	Research institution
Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana (UEFS)	Feira de Santana, Brazil	Research institution

The EC FP7 funding called for collaboration between CSOs and research institutions. However, the COMBIOSERVE consortium extended the scope of this collaboration to include communities in parts of the research project. In each field site, the local research institution, the local CSO, and community members partnered to implement co-inquiry. The European and the non-local Latin American research institutions engaged in field research on punctual and targeted occasions.

The following provides an overview of the co-enquiry relationships between the in-country CSO, the in-country research institution, and rural communities in all four field sites.

### **2.1 Field Site Calakmul, Mexico**

*Civil Society Organisation:* The Consejo Regional Indígena y Popular Xpujil (CRIPX) is a community-based organization. Its board is composed of elected representatives of some of the communities of the Xpujil area, who are therefore accountable directly to community members.

*Research Institution:* The Instituto de Ecología (INECOL) is a public research institute in Mexico, founded in 1974.

The co-enquiry process was launched at the start of the project. CRIPX and INECOL staff had previous experience of working together, but had not worked in a co-enquiry project, although respective project leaders were keen on exploring its potential. The co-enquiry research process was established through the creation of community research teams in two ethnically heterogeneous communities. The teams worked directly with INECOL, CRIPX, and the other research institutions upon their field visits. The institutions are located rather far apart, complicating communication and requiring significant resources for visits. As their representative organization, CRIPX has a close working relationship with the Calakmul communities involved in the research.

### **2.2 Field Site Southern Bahia, Brazil**

*Civil Society Organisation:* The Associação Nacional de Ação Indigenista (ANAI) is a national-level indigenous peoples' advocacy NGO, principally staffed by academics and activists.

*Research Institution:* The Universidade Estadual de Feira de Santana (UEFS) is a public university in Brazil, founded in the year 1976.

From the outset, the project was developed locally as a co-enquiry project between ANAI, UEFS, and two Pataxó communities. The institutions and community members already had experience with the co-enquiry approach. Most of the research took place according to a locally developed co-enquiry framework. The principal scientist on the UEFS project team is an ANAI board member. The institutions are located in nearby cities. Both institutions have worked with the Pataxó villages involved.

Although the partnership between ANAI and UEFS was very strong, communication between ANAI and the rest of the consortium was difficult. ANAI suffered a number of unpredictable setbacks throughout the project period, including loss of its principal donor, multiple changes in field coordinator, and departure of key staff.

### **2.3 Field Site Pilon Lajas, Bolivia**

*Civil Society Organisation & Research Institution:* The Centro Boliviano de Investigación y Desarrollo Socio Integral (CBIDSI) is a national NGO and research institution, created in the year 2004 to develop scientific research and promote projects that can improve the quality of life of indigenous communities, peasants, and urban population.

*Research Institution:* The Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS) is a public university in Bolivia, founded in the year 1832.

CBIDSI has provided continuous support to a variety of Tsimané communities over the years. At the outset of the project, the two selected communities for the COMBIOSERVE project had little experience of participatory research. Throughout the project, a collaborative process was established between CBIDSI and UMSS, and an incipient collaboration was established between them and the communities through the establishment of community research teams. Although they had not collaborated prior to the project, CBIDSI and UMSS teams rapidly developed a close collaboration. The community research teams were engaged and willing to work, in spite of their lack of experience, in co-enquiry research. The two institutions are located far apart from each other, and the communities CBIDSI serves are very remote, meaning communication was never easy throughout project implementation. Moreover, given political turmoil in the original Bolivian COMBIOSERVE field site, the Pilon Lajas communities were invited to participate in the project relatively late, in comparison to the other field sites, meaning that the process of developing collaboration started much later.

### **2.4 Field Site Chinantla, Mexico**

*Civil Society Organisation & Research Institution:* Global Diversity Foundation (GDF) is an international, UK-based NGO that employs a Mexico-based team.

One of the original goals of the project was to initiate a co-enquiry and advocacy approach by further developing an ongoing co-enquiry and community-based conservation process in Chinantla. The field site provided a space for field-testing of co-enquiry approaches to answering the project's overarching research questions. Here, community researchers from three Chinantec communities worked, in close collaboration with GDF and research institutions working in other field sites, to adapt research methods to a co-enquiry approach. GDF has worked with Chinantec communities since 2007. The COMBIOSERVE project thus provided continuity to an already established process of collaborative research with communities on local biodiversity management and conservation.



### **3. Project Implementation**

#### **3.1 Co-enquiry Challenges and Lessons for Research Practice**

This section explores the challenges faced by the COMBIOSEERVE consortium during project implementation and distils lessons learned for research practice (summarised in Table 2) and research policy (summarised in Table 3). The reflections that underpin this section emerged as a result of a systematic internal deliberation among consortium members regarding the obstacles and possibilities for co-enquiry in the COMBIOSEERVE project. The methods employed were in-depth interviews with at least one member of each organisation involved, an online discussion, as well as informal conversations with consortium members.

##### ***3.1.1. Partnerships and Trust***

Over the course of the project, the partnerships established between local research institutions and local CSOs were essential to the success of the co-enquiry research processes. Yet no one partnership is similar to another, given the substantial differences among the different CSOs. Even though they all correspond to the EC's broad definition of a CSO—"non-governmental, not-for-profit, not representing commercial interests and pursuing a common purpose for the public interest" (European Commission, n.d.), they differ widely in their constitution, objectives, and relation to communities. The partnership among the research institution, the CSO team, and the community members took a different form in each setting according to local contexts and institutions.

These individual partnerships were developed contextually, allowing each one to develop and change as needed over the course of the project. However, despite this flexibility, the consortium encountered issues of trust. One of the main stumbling blocks in the COMBIOSEERVE consortium has been the lack of time and resources required to build and maintain trust among consortium actors, including communities. Although a number of consortium participants knew each other before the project started, most actors did not. Furthermore, given their recent histories of being "researched", indigenous communities and their representative organisations are increasingly wary of foreign or unknown researchers entering their communities. This was the case for most COMBIOSEERVE partner communities. In such circumstances, building trust is a challenge from the outset. It was even more elusive as consortium partners were unsure of each other's values and motivations for carrying out the research.

Several factors contributed to the challenge of building and maintaining trust throughout the project, hindering open communication. These included: (a) lack of time for developing mutual understanding of the diverse and occasionally conflictive perspectives on issues such as the role of scientists and academic research in development processes; (b) potential contributions but also limitations of each researcher's scientific discipline; (c) lack of shared definitions of key terms; (d) role of contextual as well as personal histories in generating preconceived notions about each other; and finally, (e) divergent expectations about the degree of trust that was sought between partners.

### **3.1.2. Communication**

Connected to trust issues were communication issues, which are inevitable in a consortium composed of such a diversity of cultures, languages, and institutional set-ups. In COMBIOSERVE, all consortium members made concerted effort throughout the project to improve communication, through making regular Skype calls across time zones, participating in the internal review, and responding rapidly to e-mails. Yet communication remained one of the more complex challenges of the project.

Calakmul and Pilón Lajas faced the challenge of significant distance between the institutions, to which remoteness and an unreliable Internet connection were added in the case of Pilón Lajas. Communication between CSOs and European research institutions were even more challenging: issues like communicating complex ideas in a foreign language (both for CSOs and research institutions), and different attitudes to time-keeping and schedules led to difficulties, resulting in some emerging challenges and frustrations, particularly when European research institution staff planned their field research. In the project's division of labour, CSOs were responsible for helping to mediate between research institutions and the communities. However, in the cases of Southern Bahia and Calakmul, the local research institutions also worked directly, and often continuously, with the community research teams. Although consortium partners used e-mail, phone, and Skype regularly for all project communication, all agreed that face-to-face meetings are necessary and irreplaceable for building trust and relationship.

English was the official language of the COMBIOSERVE consortium. However, a range of institutional languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Catalan, Dutch, English, and German) and indigenous languages (Ch'ol, Tzeltal, Chinanteco, Tsimané, and Patxorã) were involved. Initially, communication was managed using a translation chain running through the indigenous language, Spanish/Portuguese, and English. However, to reduce complexity, misunderstandings and loss of time and information, bilingual communication (English and Spanish) was rapidly established and field workshops were held entirely in Spanish or Portuguese. Most often, the CSOs were left with the burden of translating e-mails and information both into Spanish/Portuguese for themselves, as well as into indigenous languages in the case of CRIPX, whose Board is composed of community representatives some of whom are not fluent in Spanish. In terms of the project outputs, the official line, as expressed by EC project officers, was that all deliverables had to be submitted exclusively in English.

Given the complexity of the project proposal and the very tight time frame for drafting it, it was not feasible to translate all of the e-mail exchanges and the different proposal drafts from English to Spanish or Portuguese. Consequently, although the Latin American CSOs were included in all communication during the preparation and negotiation phase, they were unable to fully follow the large volume of e-mails exchanged, especially given the time pressure. This resulted in some misunderstandings about research processes and methods and the division of roles and responsibilities within the consortium. It also contributed to undermining the development of trust between institutions, and to creating an apparent power imbalance within the consortium as some of the Latin American CSOs concluded they had ended up with little decision-making power.

### **3.1.3. Timing and Budget**

Despite the original agreement of all COMBIOSERVE partners on project time frames, deadlines were frequently the topic of internal discussion or friction. The COMBIOSERVE Project Coordinator and Project Manager were thus often put in the position of having to remind partners frequently about deadlines or develop technical arguments to seek re-negotiation of deadlines with the EC Project Officers.

The budgets of Latin American research institutions and CSOs were significantly smaller than those of the European research institutions and CSOs, as had been agreed upon during the project's planning and negotiation phase. The reasons project partners originally agreed to this difference in budget were: (a) lower salary costs in Latin America and (b) concern among certain research institution partners (both European and Latin American) that allocating higher budgets to institutions with little or no experience with EC-funded projects could place the whole consortium at risk, given the demanding FP7 regulations regarding financial administration and reporting. Consequently, resources set aside for the field sites were allocated both to Latin American and European partners. Moreover, during the course of the project, several budgetary adjustments were made in benefit of Latin American partners. Despite these agreed-to budgetary allocations, there remained dissatisfaction among some Latin American research institutions and CSOs regarding the way in which these allocations were out of sync with the amount of time and effort contributed by Latin American institutions to the research effort. They argued that while they had a smaller share of the overall budget in comparison with European institutions, they carried a much higher fieldwork burden than the latter. Other members of the consortium highlighted that more time was needed prior to and throughout the project to discuss budget-related issues. This involves repeated discussions, because although issues may appear resolved at any given time, the same topics arise iteratively in multiple guises, as the project evolves.

### **3.1.4. Roles**

In the COMBIOSERVE project, diverse actors served diverse roles. The roles were divided among Project Coordinator, who was supported by a Project Manager, Work Package Leaders who were supported by researchers and administrative staff, CSO representatives and staff, community members and (voluntary) members of the Advisory Board. Given the diversity of roles and members, a first challenge was to ensure commitment by all actors to the project's aims, approaches, communications, and to co-enquiry. This required all consortium members to make efforts beyond those required by their specific tasks to participate in the successful development of each work package, and to commit as far as possible to a co-enquiry approach.

A second challenge was to involve Master's and PhD students in the project, especially if they had little knowledge about the project or preparation in the co-enquiry approach, sometimes resulting in friction between the student or their universities, and the communities or CSO. As a consequence, the consortium developed a common procedure for involving students so as to avoid these tensions.

A key role was played by an external Advisory Board composed of experienced researchers in the fields of community development, biocultural diversity conservation, and participatory research. Despite their tight schedules, the consortium's Advisory Board members provided time for helpful feedback—including important feedback on the topic of co-enquiry—by answering targeted questions posed by the consortium. We were fortunate to have excellent advisors, yet, as experts in their field, their time and availability was necessarily limited. Some consortium members felt that early agreements on quantity and quality of the input expected, and on any material (e.g., remuneration) and nonmaterial benefits (e.g., explicit mention in publications or co-authorship on certain topics) might have eased the collaboration of the consortium with the Advisory Board.

### ***3.1.5. Values Underlying Research Perspectives***

Research values were at the heart of disagreements among COMBIOSEERVE consortium members. In Calakmul and Southern Bahia, the research institution and CSO jointly established co-enquiry research processes in direct partnership with the communities from the project's inception. However, in both field sites, once the co-enquiry approach was underway, it emerged that some of the European institution's proposed research tools were incompatible with community expectations with regard to the co-enquiry process. Although these research tools had been agreed upon by research institutions and CSOs (not community members) prior to signing contract with the EC, and were therefore deemed obligatory, the community agreements stated that communities had the right to make changes to the process at any stage of the research.

While some members of the consortium took the view that European research institutions ought to tailor (or if need be, overhaul) their approach to meet community requirements, others believed that doing so may (a) be considered a breach of the EC Grant Agreement, (b) be detrimental to the intellectual integrity of the project, or (c) weaken the research methods and comparability of results between field sites and thus potentially undermine the scientific value of the project. Such debates highlighted the fact that individual understandings of scientific value depend on disciplinary background, institutional expectations, cultural background, and personal perspectives and principles. It became clear that a sound discussion on this and sufficient time for this discussion are essential during the preparatory phase of any such multicultural and multi-disciplinary project.

The ensuing discussion also explored the extent to which consortium members and EC requirements were flexible to changes in research processes. Some members of the consortium argued that there was no room for negotiation: ethical and moral standards required communities to have the ultimate say in anything that happens in their territories, whether they were formally recognised by the EC or not. Others counter-argued that there was no room for flexibility: the consortium would be reneging on its obligations to the EC if it did not comply with the promised research processes in all field sites. For the latter consortium members, CSOs ought to have been alert to the potential issues that would be raised by communities further down the road and made amendments to the agreement while there still was time.

In the event, the impasse was resolved amicably: in one field site a negotiated research approach was developed and in the other the controversial research tools were not applied. However, the previous tense discussion revealed a stumbling block to the EC funding model: the inflexible nature of the Grant Agreement rendered some consortium members cautious of making the changes required by the co-enquiry principle of community-led decision-making.

Overall, the consortium CSOs and some Latin American research institutions fully supported the view that co-enquiry means research that is co-implemented by specific communities and exclusively carried out for the benefit of those communities. Some European research institutions fundamentally believed in the value of independent research. They were very keen to ensure that their research must benefit partner communities while also contributing more broadly to the advancement of knowledge. Although they collaborated directly with the CSOs, they thought that ultimately research must contribute to academic debates. While these perspectives need not be in conflict, the underlying values are different: one places community collaboration and control over research processes as the priority; the other gives priority to research outcomes which have merit beyond the specific sites where those outcomes originated.

### ***3.1.6. Community Empowerment and Project Legacy***

The project demonstrated that taking a co-enquiry approach can be empowering for both CSOs and communities. To varying degrees in each field site, the co-enquiry approach generated a sense of possibility and power among partner communities. In the Southern Bahia field site, the COMBIOSSERVE project served to consolidate indigenous control over research activities taking place on their lands. In the Calakmul and Pilon Lajas field sites, partner communities now expect future projects to take similar participatory approaches and they are less likely to accept the non-participatory approaches of the past. Because of such emerging dynamics, CSOs were concerned about the project's legacy—both tangible and intangible—among partner communities. The launch of the co-enquiry process resulted in high expectations among communities that the local CSOs would continue to work in the same empowering way.

Research collaboration with communities, however, requires a great deal of investment of time and resource on the part of CSOs, as well as support from other institutions. An important concern of the CSOs was that there would be no follow-up or support to continue with COMBIOSSERVE's approach, potentially resulting in a breakdown of trust with the communities they were meant to serve.

Beyond the expectation for an intangible legacy of empowerment, partner communities also expressed their expectation for tangible outcomes of the research to which they have provided their time, energy, and expertise. Expected tangible outcomes include improved livelihoods, political support from project partners, and further projects to help them implement their aspirations for development. Given the time-bound nature of a large-scale research grant, it was impossible to fulfil these expectations; yet continuity is essential in the context of collaboration with CSOs and communities.

### 3.1.7. Local Political, Social, and Environmental Dynamics

Connected to the issue of onerous administration, all CSOs reported difficulties in marrying the EC's strict project deadlines and reporting requirements with unexpected or emergent local political and social dynamics. In all field sites the project duration overlapped with political, social, and even natural turbulences that called upon the local CSOs' time and energy, slowing their ability to keep up with project requirements. Aware of the stringency of EC administrative demands, CSOs worried that they may be penalised for situations over which they have no control.

However, as the COMBIOSERVE experience showed, local instability did not result in penalisation. In the case of the Chinantla field site, for example, the local political turbulence and its consequences for timely project implementation were made explicit in the intermediary report. The EC's technical review of the project commended the consortium for attending to local dynamics as a priority, stating that this was an example of best practice when working with communities.

Table 2. *Co-enquiry Challenges and Lessons for Research Practice*

Co-enquiry Challenges	Lessons for Research Practice
1. Developing research partnerships, given the diversity among civil society organisations	Give time and space for context-specific and flexible partnerships among research institutions, civil society organisations, and communities
2. Building and maintaining trust	Initiate trust-building at the outset of the project (at the proposal stage)
3. Communication across cultural, linguistic, geographic, and institutional barriers	Set aside time and funding for translation of all project communications Valorise local languages in the field sites
4. Diverse standpoints concerning the fairness of budget allocations	Anticipate and enable iterative discussions about budget allocations
5. Ensuring commitment to the project by all permanent and temporary actors	Clarify that each actor contributes to the success of the project and needs to make efforts beyond specific tasks Establish a common procedure for incorporating new staff Provide benefits for all participating actors
6. Diversity of values underlying research perspectives	Set aside time for discussing the values underlying research perspectives at the outset of a project
7. Time-bound nature of large-scale research grants	Acknowledge that the project is only a short intervention in the community's lifespan Include elements for a concrete local project legacy in project planning
8. Local political, social, and environmental dynamics impeding project progress	Acknowledge that research with rural communities is embedded in local contexts that may introduce uncertainties and cause delays or derailments

### 3.2 Co-enquiry Challenges and Implications for Research Policy

This case study shows that when CSOs are invited to collaborate in a research project, the communities these CSOs are accountable to ought to be recognized as full partners and involved in decision-making not only in the research process but during the development of the research proposal. Limiting collaboration to the research institution-CSO dyad is inherently an unstable approach, especially if the aim is to collaborate with CSOs that represent communities or whose work depends on direct partnerships with communities. Also, as explained above, flexibility in the partnership models among research partners should be allowed and supported.

Consortium partners agree that some problems or conflicts would have been obviated had the group had significant lead-up time to plan the project jointly. The lack of time and resources for community consultations and participation of CSOs in the preparation of the project proposal led to some of the project approaches and methods being insufficiently compatible with the kind of community-based collaboration CSOs were expecting. Also, additional time may have helped build trust prior to the project launch, and may have enabled the team to address some of the differences in expectations, values, methods, objectives, and budget that have caused disagreement. This would have required funding support for at least one extended face-to-face meeting prior to submitting the proposal and for multiple field trips on the part of European research institutions.

The English language only requirement expressed by the EC creates a significant limitation for projects in which civil society is fully engaged in the research process. In the case of projects like COMBIOSERVE that take place in Latin America, most community members and CSOs understand Spanish and Portuguese, two official EC languages, and the acceptance of deliverables in these two languages would have eased communication and the project development.

It can be complicated for scientists to marry the need for implementing research that is valued by partner communities while attending to the need to publish and produce knowledge that is valued by funding bodies, academia, and governments. Some of the project's methods, as agreed upon in the grant agreement among the EC, the CSOs and research institutions, were interpreted by community representatives as being top-down. Where this occurred, the local CSO and research institution found themselves facing a difficult choice: either they did not comply with the grant agreement that they had signed, or they breached the community agreement which granted communities right to free, prior, and informed consent. Flexibility in the realization of the grant agreement and the recognition that CSOs and communities require different and more flexible modes of engagement would have allowed the adaptation or renegotiation of earlier agreements. Such adaptations may also become necessary because of local political, social, or environmental dynamics. Also, communities demand for long-time engagements need to be acknowledged.

The two focal points of contact and translation between the project and the EC were the Project Coordinator of COMBIOSERVE and the Project Officer of the EC. Over its 3-

year course, the COMBIOSERVE project was under the control of five different Project Officers in quick succession. The consortium's expectation was to have a close and trusting relationship with the Project Officer and to have the opportunity to discuss crucial developments and questions with him or her. However, most Project Officers never had the time to familiarise themselves with the project and therefore were unable to answer questions, took too long to answer them, or postponed their answers, giving the consortium no time to resolve their issues. The lack of engagement of the Project Officer was particularly problematic for local research institutions and CSOs as they sought to comply with EC's complex requirements as well as community requests.

Simultaneously, the consortium often struggled with the bureaucratic burden of project management. The grant making rules of large-scale funders tend to be strict given the volume of grants made and the need for a systematic procedure for proposal and grant management, including monitoring and accountability of taxpayers' funds. The Latin American CSOs found that they struggled to dedicate the time necessary to the fieldwork they were responsible for, and that their budget was stretched by the additional staff time invested to ensure administrative compliance. As the need for democratising research increases, so does the need for funding processes that can accommodate and encourage CSOs and other members of civil society to participate directly in research collaboration. Also, it is notable that the heavy administrative load of EC funding creates a filter for CSOs: those that do not have an adequate support structure are automatically excluded, even if they might be the most suitable collaborating institution otherwise.

Table 3. *Co-enquiry Challenges and Implications for Research Policy*

Co-enquiry Challenges	Implications for Research Policy
1. Developing research partnerships, given the diversity among civil society organisations	Allow and support a variety of partnership models to develop among research institutions, civil society organisations, and communities
2. Building and maintaining trust	Provide funding support for face-to-face meetings during proposal development and project implementation
3. Communication across cultural, linguistic, geographic, and institutional barriers	Review the English-only policy for project deliverables
4. Diversity of values underlying research perspectives	Allow flexible research management and funding models where research processes and outputs may be adapted to reconsidered values during project implementation
5. Time-bound nature of large-scale research grants	Encourage long-term community engagement after time-bound research collaborations
6. Frequent changes in the funder's project officials	Avoid frequent staff movements to create a supportive arrangement for project monitoring and supervision
7. Meeting complex administrative requirements of the funder	Ensure that administrative requirements are suitable for different types of institutions and their capacities
8. Local political, social, and environmental dynamics impeding project progress	Support consortia in attending to local dynamics even if it is temporarily detrimental to project progress



## 4. Conclusions

There is a growing demand that research be implemented in a more democratic and socially inclusive way through the application of participatory research strategies such as co-enquiry or citizen science (Riesch & Potter, 2013; Silvertown, 2009). However, the requirements of these approaches are different from those of non-participatory approaches. In this article, we have argued the need for a shift in the requirements and conditions of European Commission's research policy and research practices towards supporting the mainstreaming of participatory research approaches such as co-enquiry.

Specifically, based on our case study we conclude that:

- (a) The established values and practices of academia seem largely unfavourable towards alternative forms of research such as co-enquiry.
- (b) The policies and administrative practices of this European Commission funding are unsuitable for adopting participatory forms of enquiry.
- (c) The approach to research funding supports short engagements with communities whereas long-term collaborations are more desirable.

Large-scale funding bodies such as European Commission research programmes are leaders in the evolution of research policy and practice. They have the power and the opportunity to publicly acknowledge the value of partnerships with civil society organisations and communities, actively support co-enquiry, and foment interest and investment into collaborative and alternative forms of research.

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