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Transformational Effects Of The Participatory Design Process: A Synthesis Review For Defining The Essentials

Sarom Mok
Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Ramy Chhun
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Chorvy Vong
Royal University of Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Corresponding Author: moksaromddg@gmail.com

Abstract

Using primarily Amartya Sen's capacity approach and Bryant Myers' conception of transformation, this synthesis explores the transformational impacts of participatory design from a religious and developmental perspective. These concepts are presented here in order to provide a cohesive knowledge of human flourishing that can be used to effectively assess participatory design outcomes like agency, empowerment, identity, and vocation. This synthesis discusses Myers and Sen as complimentary viewpoints rather than as ideas that are parallel. Sen provides a framework based on capabilities for comprehending agency, freedom, and human flourishing, while Myers provides a theological and relational explanation of transformation. It also examines the pertinent literature regarding the transformative effects of participating in the design process. This synthesis first section lays out the theoretical and theological framework required to classify the pertinent material and evaluate its conclusions. Sen's capabilities approach and Myers' transformational development framework are used for this. These frameworks work together to provide an organized theoretical framework for this study. For the purposes of this research, they are then incorporated into a more comprehensive theological framework, resulting in an all-encompassing, practical, and holistic viewpoint. Before the session ends, a visual representation of this comprehensive and interconnected structure is provided. This synthesis identifies possible markers of more profound change. It specifically noted changes in self-control, agency, and self-esteem as such possible markers. These domains are essential components of the self, and changes in them may indicate the formation of an identity.

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BASIC THEORY OF TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Jayakumar Christian, a person's identity is negatively impacted by poverty, and recovering one's identity is a necessary part of transformative growth. Moreover, he contends that disempowerment is inextricably tied to identity deterioration. Feelings of helplessness are intimately related to this degeneration. Finding one's identity is a crucial precondition for transformational development and is inextricably linked to regaining one's power. Christian proposes that reversing the cycle of disempowerment is a faith-based solution to the impoverished people's disempowerment. Christian also highlights the significance of connections in his approach to kingdom-based development, which is noteworthy and predates Myers (1999).

Myers adds the ideas of "restored relationships" and "flourishing vocation" to the previously described framework. He contends that a person's identity and career are similarly tarnished when their self is tarnished. According to Myers (2011), God's restoration of identity and vocation includes the developmental process. Myers highlights the significance of reestablished relationships after outlining the function of identity and vocation in his transformative framework. Thus, transformed relationships as well as altered individuals are the emphasis of transformational development (Myers, 2011, 2015). This is an essential platform for transformation (Sarma, 2020). Myers argues that transformational development starts with god and includes his story of salvation, which profoundly alters human existence on a material, social, psychological, and spiritual level. He highlights that transformation is long-lasting and firmly based on a person's deliberate decisions (2011). According to Myers, empowering individuals to find their own pathways is essential to transformational development. He emphasizes that active involvement is crucial for the repair of damaged identities and holds that the poor bear responsibility for the transformational process. Additionally, he contends that neither imposition nor progress is the only source of change.

According to Myers, the objectives of transformational development include transformed individuals as well as equitable and harmonious relationships. Three interrelated ideas are at the heart of Myers' framework: connections, identity, and mission. For him, relationships—especially those with God, oneself, and one's community—are central to identity and vocation. In fact, Myers contends that the imago Dei is the source of both agency and identity. As part of their vocational rehabilitation, he highlights that an individual symbolizes their existence and deeds (2011).

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Theological insights into the nature of poverty are provided by Myers' paradigm. He emphasizes that a person's humanity is rooted in relationships that promote well-being and suggests that poverty is essentially relational. This concept is based on the Hebrew paradigm, which views alienation as the lowest state and partnerships as the highest good. Thus, poverty differs from both individualistic and materialistic viewpoints since it is intrinsically linked to this highest good (2011).

According to Myers' theory, transformational development cannot address identity without also reestablishing connections, nor can it do so without giving individuals more agency. In fact, the concept of shalom shows how these three elements—identity, vocation, and relationships—are restored in practice, while the theological basis of imago Dei establishes why they must cooperate. When the non-poor "play God" by excluding the poor as participants in their own development, poverty is often made worse. Poverty is a symbol of relational brokenness that marries identity. In the end, Myers maintains that the impoverished themselves must own this kind of change and that it cannot be forced from without.

THE CORE FRAMEWORK OF AMARTYA SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH

Development is essentially a process of extending people's actual liberties (Sen, 1999). He highlights that freedom is a goal of development as well as a method. Thus, real development is predicated on the elimination of major infringements. Sen goes on to say that genuine development can only take place when people have the freedom to choose. Additionally, he supports increasing people's substantive liberties, seeing this expansion as a predictor of change as well as a framework for evaluating change (Sen, 1999).

According to Sen (1999), capacities are the true freedoms that allow people to select the kind of life they value and to mold their identity and behavior in the world. The substantive freedom to attain different combinations of functioning is represented by capabilities. Crucially, a person's experiential world can change as these talents are improved, and internal capacities can also be influenced by the outside world. A reciprocal relationship is demonstrated by this exchange. Functionings refers to the methods of being and doing that an individual truly achieves or encounters. Functioning, which is derived from Aristotle, refers to living and acting in a way that is consistent with one's personal ideals. While capacities are the freedoms to do or be certain things, functionings are what a person really does and is. In the end, selecting oneself can be seen as a functioning.

The interaction between these two ideas is dynamic. Sen (1999) contends that skills and

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functionings are intricately linked and grow in a cascading fashion, with each component continuously influencing and bolstering the others. Well-being is based on functionings, which are interconnected lived states of being and doing. On the other hand, other functions serve a more fundamental purpose. Sen highlights that although the freedom to choose one's level of health is provided by capacities, attaining health is a necessary condition for exercising that freedom. Beyond just providing for urgent necessities, basic functions like eating and physical well-being set the stage for other endeavors like community service and the endurance needed for employment. Sen cautions that when these necessities are lacking, deprivation rarely stays isolated because loss in one area frequently sets off a domino effect that impacts other areas. For this reason, he disagrees with the notion that raising a specific metric, such as income, inevitably improves general well-being. Rather, Sen contends that some fundamental skills should be given extra consideration—not because they are intrinsically better, but rather because they frequently act as entry points for the development and expansion of other skills.

Agency is necessary for a person to realize their potential. Sen (1999) defines agency as a person's ability to act in accordance with their own objectives and ideals rather than those imposed by others. Individuals make choices based on their own standards rather than those of others. Crucially, agency encompasses engagement in broader systems and groups in addition to operating at the individual level. Fundamentally, the idea of agency emphasizes the value of personal autonomy, which is the basis of growth. Expanding capacities is therefore deemed crucial (Sen, 1999). He believes that adopting a freedom-centered approach to development is intrinsically agent-oriented. To put it another way, people may actively shape their own lives and help one another through free, rational, and sustainable action if they are given sufficient opportunity. They are not just passive receivers of development programs. Sen stresses throughout this work that it is crucial to regard people as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries. This includes beneficiaries as well.

According to Sen’s capacity theory, development entails the extension of substantive freedoms through functionings and capacities, both of which are made possible by personal action. These elements function on both a societal and personal level. While functionings are the actual states of being and doing, capabilities generate possibilities for action, and agency gives one the ability to make significant decisions. Sen’s paradigm demonstrates how social progress and individual liberties support one another, with fundamental skills serving as entry points to more extensive human flourishing and group transformation.

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SEN'S CAPABILITY APPROACH AS PERCEIVED BY MYERS

Myers' (2011) critique of Sen (1999) is important because it clarifies the areas in which capacity theory needs theological supplementation, particularly when it comes to addressing identity, vocation, and healed connections as crucial to change. Sen asserts that the ability to live a purposeful life is what constitutes well-being. Despite the fact that his paradigm is not entirely individualistic, he highlights the core and motivating force of this perspective. However, Myers argues that Sen's emphasis on this individualistic approach lacks a vital relational and spiritual component. Myers favors Sen's emphasis on human potential above purely materialistic metrics, but he faults the capability approach for being overly individualistic. Sen highlights the lack of freedoms as essential to understanding poverty, however Myers argues that strained relationships are the main source of poverty.

According to Myers, Sen's view of well-being is strongly related to people's capacities—what they can be and do. These elements, which include safety, community involvement, dignity, and self-respect, are what he refers to as functionings. Sen's capacity approach, according to Myers, states that everyone has the right to these functionings. According to this claim, well-being is the capacity or liberty to decide what to do and who to be. Myers portrays God's plan for people to be co-creators, which is consistent with the biblical story. He contends that establishing settings that support individual freedom of choice is at the core of growth. Sen and Myers both believe that freedom is necessary for progress. Removing the barriers that keep people from acting on their potential is essential to achieving such freedom.

Although Myers acknowledges the similarities between Sen's ideas of agency and freedom and a theological viewpoint, he criticizes Sen's interpretation, calling it "insufficient." He bases his argument on the notion that humans have agency—which includes both the freedom and the need to act—because they were made in God's image. Myers contends that Sen's portrayal of freedom deviates from biblical freedom in this regard: In order to cultivate love for God and others, the Christian idea entails giving up some autonomy. Citing Sen's claim that the primary driver of growth is free and sustainable human agency (Sen 1999; Myers 2011). Myers accepts this capacity approach but feels it needs more thought. He contends that the impoverished must have dignity and a sense of identity rooted in the imago Dei in addition to their capacities. He berates Sen for failing to address the internal effects of lies and broken identities on the impoverished. Moreover, Myers (2011) argues that the capacity approach ignores the need for changed relationships as well as the spiritual aspect of poverty.

According to Myers, recreating community—which is crucial for validating identity and

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worth—as well as improving capabilities are both necessary to restore the dignity of the impoverished. Furthermore, he contends that in order to address unfreedoms, it is necessary to acknowledge the spiritual realities and causes of poverty, as the impoverished are frequently constrained by broken systems and inaccurate beliefs about who they are—problems he connects to sin. From this foundation, Myers argues that freedom must begin with redemption rather than simply with agency. In fact, he argues that true healing and the restoration of relationships with God, others, and oneself—from which genuine shalom can subsequently emerge—cannot be achieved by mere freedom. According to Myers, shalom is a reflection of all facets of life flourishing and the fulfillment of wholesome relationships. As a result, he suggests that the prophets provide a benchmark for evaluating how well society functions, especially in relation to the welfare of widows, orphans, and outsiders.

MYERS' TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SEN' CAPABILITY APPROACH: AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

A comprehensive explanation of transformation, supported by empathy as a mediating virtue and based on the theological idea of imago Dei, is presented in Table 1 through an integrated framework that incorporates Sen's capability approach and Myers' transformational growth. The conceptual underpinnings of this study and its investigation of the transformative impacts that young people encounter during the participatory design process are provided by this visual depiction.

Table 1: Myers' Transformational Development and Sen' Capability Approach: An Integrated Framework

Dimension	Myers – Transformational Development	Sen – Capability Approach	Framing Theology
Identity	Restored identity: the capacity for empathy and identity to influence one's self-concept; the perception of oneself as an important contributor.	Agency and freedom: capacity to pursue valued goals	Imago Dei: made with honor and the capacity for creativity.

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Vocation	Restored vocation: meaningful and influential work.	Valued functions: significant abilities and contributions; empathic viewpoint-taking promotes cooperation and mutual understanding.	Calling: good works as participation in God's mission.
Flourishing	Empowerment: accountability and agency in change; empathy and agency can be co-constitutive components.	Agency as freedom: the capacity to direct one's own life and make decisions.	Using gifts and abilities responsibly is known as stewardship.
Empowerment	Empowerment: accountability and self-determination in change; empathy and self-determination can serve as co-constituents.	The capacity to make decisions and direct one's life is agency as freedom.	Using gifts and abilities responsibly is known as stewardship.
Community Transformation	Relationship restoration: improved connections with people, bolstered by reciprocal empathy as a means of fostering relationships.	Social capital: group creativity and problem-solving.	Community: cooperation, discipleship, and shared ownership.

This paradigm combines theological concepts, Sen's capacity approach, and Myers' idea of transformational growth into a cohesive whole. It draws attention to the connections between these viewpoints' fundamental aspects of identity, vocation, flourishing, empowerment, and community transformation. Sen concentrates on agency, capabilities, and Functionings; Myers on the restoration of identity, vocation, and relationships; and theological framework places these findings within the biblical story of imago Dei, calling, stewardship, shalom, and community.

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Although Sen's capability approach and Myers' transformational development framework do not include empathy as a basic category, the literature on participatory design frequently highlights it as a crucial relational and developmental outcome of participatory processes. Therefore, empathy is viewed in this study as a formative ability that supports deeper relationship healing, identity construction, and agency rather than as a stand-alone aspect of transformation.

Therefore, empathy serves as a mediating virtue within the theoretical framework of this synthesis, a role that is frequently recommended by the literature on participatory design; as such, it provides the underlying substrate that unites these aspects. Empathy and the aspects of identity and agency are seen as co-constitutive components that dynamically strengthen one another rather than being studied separately. This synthesis can more successfully investigate how empathy supports the particular paths of transformation proposed by Myers and Sen by framing it as a practical enabler without necessitating a modification of the frameworks themselves.

Going back to the integrated framework, the synthesis of Myers' and Sen's frameworks demonstrates that building relationships and increasing capacities are necessary for successful transformation. The theological framework highlights how young people, who were made in God's image, are naturally endowed with dignity and the ability to create, which enables them to question established theories and methods of development. Through their own creative vision and activity, young people from the imago Dei can create their own solutions, co-create from the bottom up, transform their reality, and eventually act as catalysts for greater change. This thorough framework, which has theoretical and religious underpinnings, now acts as the conceptual framework for analyzing the synthesis's literature analysis, starting with empowerment in participatory design. This synthesis explores the transformative impacts most commonly associated with participatory design in the literature and outlines empathy as a formative capacity, building on the integrated framework of Sen's capability approach and Myers' transformational development.

The synthesis tends to focus more on some outcomes than others, even though the framework emphasizes several aspects of transformation, including agency, identity, vocation, and healed connections. As a result, while acknowledging areas where the literature is still lacking, such as vocation and faith-informed relational transformation through participatory design processes, this synthesis primarily focuses on empowerment and identity formation as key effects of participatory design. This selected emphasis helps define the research gap that this synthesis seeks to fill while highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of existing studies.

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY DESIGN ON EMPATHY

According to the synthesis's theoretical framework, the core elements are identity, vocation, flourishing, empowerment, and community transformation. The synthesis on participatory design often acknowledges empathy as an important relational and developmental effect of participatory processes, even if it is not categorized as a core category in either Sen's capability approach or Myers' transformational development framework. Thus, a more thorough analysis of empathy is conducted in this section.

The ability to see things from another person's point of view is a common definition of empathy, which is covered in great detail in the literature. More precisely, empathy is the capacity to feel or comprehend what another person is going through from their perspective (Batson, 2009). The German word Einführung, which means "feeling into," is the source of the idea (Zahavi, 2014). People's comprehension of empathy has grown throughout time to encompass both affective and cognitive aspects. While the cognitive component focuses on comprehending another person's mental state, the affective component entails mirroring emotions (Davis, 1983; Zahavi, 2014). Researchers acknowledge empathy as a multifaceted concept that is essential for developing interpersonal and social relationships (Batson, 2009; Calvo et al., 2014). Additionally, empathy is frequently seen as a powerful predictor of favorable outcomes that promote self-awareness (Elliott et al., 2011).

Through intentional actions and communication tools, empathy is incorporated into participatory design (Branco et al., 2017). In fact, it has been demonstrated to result from participatory design (Talgorn & Ullerup, 2023). In order to promote empathy and trust, participatory design techniques are frequently purposefully organized to lead participants toward shared understanding (Talgorn & Ullerup, 2023). Participatory design, for example, was structured to facilitate meaningful connections in research involving dementia patients and their families, which was found to foster empathy among designers and participants (Branco et al., 2017). By projecting their own feelings onto other people, participants report feeling empathy.

According to some research, broader contexts that address power dynamics within the process through embedded empathy may be beneficial for participatory design (Udoewa, 2022). Additionally, research shows that empathy and agency are strongly associated and frequently occur together in carefully planned participatory design sessions (Branco et al., 2017). According to a number of academics, empathy and agency are related and can support one another. But none is thought to be the cause of the other (Talgorn & Ullerup, 2023; Udoewa, 2022; Branco et al., 2017). Furthermore, empathy has been associated with increased levels of trust, cooperation,

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and participation as well as a better understanding of others. However, there is no proof that one of these results leads to the other (Udoewa, 2022; Branco et al., 2017; Talgorn & Ullerup, 2023). Causality is still hard to prove because of the complexity of empathy.

CONCLUSION

The unique effects that participation in the participatory design process has on individuals were examined in this synthesis. The review also looked at how different facets of personality and self are linked to one another and how the process of transformation happens as a domino effect. This literature study used a synthesized theory anchored in religion and based on the work of Sen and Myers to investigate these impacts. This synthesis identifies possible markers of more profound change. The research study specifically noted changes in self-control, agency, and self-esteem as such possible markers. These domains are important facets of the self, according to researchers, and changes in these domains may indicate the formation of an identity (Bandura, 1982; Baumeister et al., 2016; Erikson, 1968). According to Oyserman et al. (2012) and Sedikides and Brewer (2001), these psychological notions may provide insights into how people view their agency, talents, and self-worth. Identity is frequently examined in theological and social contexts in terms of an individual's perception, enactment, and voice within a society (Jenkins, 2008; Volf, 1996). Changes in self-worth, talents, and agency may indicate a transformative shift in identity by linking the psychological, social, and theological (Bandura,1982; Dambula, 2022; Oyserman et al., 2012; Shane et al., 2003).

This context highlights the research gap that this study seeks to fill. It has been demonstrated that participatory design may change people and communities in a variety of ways, including relationships and careers. In fact, Jagtap (2019) comes to the conclusion that the process of participatory design might gain from knowing how marginalized individuals see and understand the intangible effects of their involvement in the process. Therefore, it is still unclear whether marginalized adolescents who participate in participatory design perceive the process as having an impact on their personal identity, which is viewed in terms of agency, relationships, and purpose. The transformation that takes place may be more than just utilitarian if these dimensions are interconnected, transformed via participation, and inherently linked to the imago Dei. The combined impact of these modifications might indicate that participatory design might help restore identity.

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