

EVALUATION OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Can There be a Single Model?

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ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades there has been a shift in thinking towards social development projects from an economically orientated base, that focuses on product, towards a socially orientated base, which stresses the process. This has coincided with the more general shift in attitudes from large-scale development projects based around government control and management, towards more rural-based programmes, that have largely been the initiative of non-government or other local voluntary organisations. The main problem with this shift in thinking is that it has become much more difficult to actually judge the success of these projects, as there has been a move from quantitative objectives towards more qualitative objectives. This essay will examine whether there is a single model that is able to evaluate these objectives in a social development project. It will be shown that due to problems of subjectivity, paucity of written work, and the uniqueness of individual projects, a single model is very difficult to develop.

Key Words: Social Development, Evaluation, Participatory Evaluation, Empowerment, Project Evaluation, Capacity Building.

ÖZ

TOPLUMSAL GELİŞME PROJELERİNİN DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

Son yirmi yıl içinde ekonomik eğilimli kalkınma projelerinden toplumsal süreçlere önem veren toplumsal kalkınma projelerine doğru bir kayma söz konusu olmuştur. Bu kayış daha genel düzeyde geniş çaplı, devlet tarafından kontrol edilip yönlendirilen projelerden küçük çaplı kırsal temelli ve Hükümet Dışı Örgütler'ce başlatılan programlara doğru bir kayma ile eşzamanlı olmuştur. Burda irdelenmek istenen temel sorun, toplumsal kalkınma projelerinin başarısının nasıl ölçülüp yorumlanabileceği sorunudur. Çünkü toplumsal kalkınma projelerinin amaçları niceliksel değil niteliksel değişme biçimindedir. Bu makale toplumsal kalkınma projelerinin kapasite geliştirme, kendine yeterli olabilme gibi niteliksel değişmelerin irdelenmesinde tek bir yöntemsel modelin olup olamayacağını sorgulamakta ve subjektiflik, yeterli sayıda araştırmamanın olmayışı ve sosyal kalkınma projelerinin kendine özgü nitelikleri nedenleriyle her yerde uygulanabilecek tek bir modelin olmayacağını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sosyal Gelişme, Değerlendirme, Katılımcı Değerlendirme, Güçlendirme, Proje Değerlendirme, Kapasite İnşası.

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Increasingly over the past two decades, the dogma of development as economic growth has been faltering in the face of an alternative approach known as human-needs centred development. Pioneered by Seers in the early 1970's, this new development paradigm sees 'the realisation of the potential human personality' along with 'the enhancement of basic human capabilities and freedoms' (Allen & Thomas, 1995:121) as a universally acceptable aim in place of the traditional goal of GNP growth.

The 1980's has witnessed an increasing recognition of the complexities of development interventions. It has been widely recognised that economic development is not sufficient and that social and human development have an important role. Social development has been introduced as either a substitute or a complement of economic growth.

Social development is different from economic development in that the former is concerned with non-material process. Small rural projects have emerged whose objectives can be defined as 'social development'. However, there is little common agreement to date on a precise understanding of this term. What constitutes 'social development' often varies between projects and communities and may undergo changes through time. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s social development involved the planning of social services, in the last decade the goals of social development have shifted towards an increased focus on indigenous capacity building, empowerment and the promotion of participation, the awakening of consciousness and the encouragement of self-reliant strategies. In other words social development projects are concerned with affecting qualitative changes in socio-economic or socio-behavioural attitudes of people and groups. Many of these objectives cannot be captured as quantitative data, for example how would one quantify 'empowerment'. Because many of these aims are intangible, conventional evaluation techniques are inappropriate. We need to be able to evaluate the outcome or impact of social development projects, but this confronts us with a form of development which is less amenable to quantification. How do we evaluate the non-material dimension of development and the process nature of social development activities?

The purpose of this paper is to therefore examine whether or not there can be a single model for evaluating qualitative objectives in social development projects and to discuss the difficulties and complications of attempting to develop such a model. In order to facilitate this examination, the following questions have been raised for analysis. First, in regards to the current literature on evaluation is there an existing model which could be universally applied for evaluating qualitative objectives and if not, what

are the reasons behind its inability to function as one? Following this, what are the general difficulties and complications in attempting to develop such a model? It is this paper's intention to demonstrate that there cannot be a single model for qualitative evaluation, and it would prove to be ineffective due to the practical and conceptual difficulties brought about by the complex differences in projects, participants and evaluators. Furthermore, if such a model were ever to be found, it would be detrimental to the processes of empowerment, capacity building and participation which inherently, social development projects aim to increase.

Social development projects, by their very nature, address issues and undertake activities which are difficult to measure and trace. Gauging such social phenomena as participation, empowerment or capacity building, is littered with difficulties beginning with the establishment of a precise definition of the terms, through to finding valid and practical tools for their measurement. In order to assess the impacts and monitor activities of individual projects, evaluations must collect information on a wide range of themes. While quantitative tools can be used to assess certain elements, other types of information are not conducive to such methods and thus require a qualitative approach. 'Because qualitative and quantitative methods involve differing strengths and weaknesses, they constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive strategies for research.' (Patton, 1990:14). There is however, a great variety in techniques, objectives, strengths and limitations within the 'qualitative school', as current qualitative approaches do not call for a single, identical procedure or application. This paper will examine four general areas in which substantial hurdles to the development of a single qualitative model exist. The type of project, the participants of a project, the evaluator, and the nature of the evaluation, each presents difficulties for prescribing a single method of measurement. It will be suggested that not only is it difficult to establish a single universal model for such endeavours, but attempts at doing so undermine the very advantages of qualitative evaluations.

The first area of difficulty lies in the form and content of a given project. A project has specified objectives, which form the basis of what the evaluation will attempt to observe and record. Even when the evaluation is not formally based on stated objectives (as in some Goal Free approaches), the objectives partly shape the activities which in turn form part of the material under observation. The analysis and interpretation of the data collected will therefore be in terms of these objectives, and the situations observed in the baseline study (Oakley, 1986:97). For example, an evalu-

ation of a project that has as an objective the reduction of barriers to women's entry in new occupations in Bolpur and Llambazar Thanas in West Bengal (1) will necessarily be different in form and structure from that of a project in health development in Caranavi District, Bolivia (2), which had as its central objective 'to strengthen the means of people's participation' (Oakley, 1991: 147). The projects differed in their basic activities, relationships and structures. The income generating scheme, was a new program for a new group of participants, whereas the health project was trying to create a new level of participation within existing services with established functions, members, and organisational structures. As well, each program differed in the amount and type of available resources.

These examples highlight the relationship between the model for evaluation and the nature of the project being evaluated. Since 'social development' is not a single well defined area, but incorporates a wide variety of issues and activities, it is difficult to establish a single model or procedure, which will always be suitable. The nature of the project, resources available, cultural setting, and the type of organisational structures in place, all interact and affect the design of a qualitative evaluation which seeks to trace and understand these very processes. This diversity of questions to be answered and the variations in resources are fundamental reasons why there is yet a 'single best way to proceed' (Berk & Rossi, 1990: 34).

The second area of difficulty is with the participants or users, as they are as active in the evaluation as they are in the project itself. Qualitative data will often come directly from the participants, and there are practical limits to the information one can receive from such techniques as questionnaires, particularly in open-ended questions, which arise from the literacy levels of the interviewees and the differences in their understanding of what the objectives and questions mean (Patton, 1990: 24). The level of seriousness attached by the participants to the evaluation process, 'interview fatigue', and the willingness and interest the participant has in a given project can all affect responses and actions. In addition, if the participant feels threatened in any way by proposing negative responses, they may withhold valuable information. Similarly, if a project is providing resources that the participants value, they may refrain from open criticism in fear of the termination of the project (Berk & Rossi, 1990). Differences in

- 1 Based the article: Mayoux, L.C. (1989) 'Income Generation for Women in India: Problems and Prospects', *Development Policy Review*, vol., 7, no. 1, pp. 5-27.
- 2 Based the case study in: Oakley, P. (1991), *Project with People: The Practice of Participation in Rural Development*, ILO, Geneva, verilmektedir. (Bkz. DPT Türkiye'de Yerleşme Merkezlerinin Kademelenmesi, 1982, c.II).

customs, political affiliations and social frameworks will also limit the options for what, and if, an evaluation can do, and will inevitably alter the range of options in evaluation techniques.

A single model would also fail to take into account the complex realities of participants and their communities. As Chambers (1997: 128) pointed out it has taken the 'development community' a long time to discover the 'creative and analytical abilities' of the local people. If it is the local people who are the participants in social development projects, and if qualitative evaluation strives to be participatory in nature then their 'creative and analytical abilities' should have a significant impact on the evaluation process. The ways in which participants involve themselves will likely vary in terms of the literacy, numeracy, self-evaluation skill and social dynamics which exist in a given community. As stated by Tiongson-Brouwers (in Marsden and Oakley, 1990: 120) 'the process of data-gathering and giving information may become complex when the cultural dimension of the target population is considered'. These cultural complexities will in turn make such processes as determining methodologies inherently complex as well. The aforementioned author provided examples from the Philippines where various problems are often not stated in a direct fashion to decrease the 'negative impact' of the situation (Marsden and Oakley, 1990: 120). This may hold true for other populations, but the degree and extent of it will change from community to community and the extent to which culture can affect evaluation may also be related to the type of topic to which information is required (Ibid.). Hence, the complex realities of the participants should be taken into account if social development projects want to look for ways to empower people and increase their own capacities. As evaluation is part of the whole process, it too must recognise the complexities of the participants and the diversities of their communities, which a single model could never accomplish.

One of the main reasons that it is so hard to find a single model for evaluating the qualitative objectives of a social development project is the fact that it is so context specific. The objectives of many mainstream development projects, which follow neo-classical economic theories, is to increase productivity and growth and assume that this will benefit everyone through the 'trickle down' effect. This ignores contextual issues, questions of inequality, power relations, access to resources and influences of a political and economic nature. Indicators of social development however, must be context specific and not merely plucked from an existing check list. They must evolve as the project evolves. Phenomena can only be un-

derstood within the context in which they are studied. Findings from one context cannot be generalised to another and neither problems nor solutions can be generalised. Qualitative methods permit the evaluator to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness and detail of qualitative enquiry. Because it is so context specific and evaluation itself is part of this context, developing one single model is undesirable. As Patton states:

In contrast to designs that manipulate and measure, the relationship among a few carefully selected and narrowly defined variables, the holistic approach gathers data on the multiple aspects of the setting under studying order to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamic of 'the particular situation or programme. This means, at the time of data collection, each case, event, or setting under study is treated as a unique entity, with its own particular meaning and its own constellation of relationships emerging from and relating to the context within which it exists (Patton, 1990:50).

There are also some difficulties with respect to the evaluator himself/herself. Qualitative evaluations lay particular emphasis on the skills of the evaluator, whether these be in facilitating discussions, participant observation, or interviewing. These skills must be applied during all stages of the evaluation process, and the specific evaluative activities undertaken will be heavily reliant on the tools of the individual possesses. In addition, evaluators' values and the paradigm from which they operate will influence their choice of techniques. '...those persons know (or should know) from which paradigm they operate, and that knowledge has significant consequences for the ways in which those tools are used' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 158). It is the subjective nature of information gathering and analysis that enables the process to provide valuable insights into the workings of a project; however these insights must be obtained in a systematic and effective manner (Alkin, 1990). A qualitative evaluation can leave room for individual evaluator differences without reducing the validity of the information collected, provided that these personal characteristics are acknowledged. Weiss (1988) cautions that individuals do not always know what information they are looking for or need to know. At the same time, once recording of observations has begun certain patterns emerge that may then be sought out at the unconscious neglect of other occurrences (Oakley, 1986). These concerns lie in the nature of qualitative evaluation and the role of the evaluator, and are simultaneously a strength and weakness of the approach.

However, since attempts must be made at adapting the process to minimise distortions, the evaluation model must remain sufficiently flexible.

Within this context there are the additional values and operational paradigms brought by the organisation(s) which is involved in the evaluation. These organisational values are often embedded into project designs and implementation procedures, and must be carefully acknowledged in the evaluation. 'The question of whose values would dominate in an evaluation or, alternatively, how value differences might be negotiated, now emerges as the major problem' (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 34). 'Who initiates' and 'who controls the evaluation are often two of the most important questions involved in the process (Marsden, Oakley and Pratt, 1994). Evaluation is inherently political, as the values and ideologies of those who control it have a significant impact on its outcome. Equally as important as the participants' culture is that of the evaluator for s/he may have quite different perceptions on poverty, employment, income generation, equality and religion from those of the participants (Marsden and Oakley, 1990: 106). These different values and ideologies are often reflected in the process of evaluation no matter how much various methodologies aim to neutralise them.

The intended users of the evaluation, will also affect the choice of methods. Weiss (1990) states that 'every evaluator has those twin responsibilities: To do a technically sound evaluation that is also responsive to the needs of the people who commissioned it.' (Weiss, 1990: 160). Evaluations are conducted for specific initial reasons, and will often be in response to managerial or organisational concerns (Alkin, 1990; Cracknell, 1984). Though it is not the intention of this paper to pursue the debate over the appropriateness of managerial versus client/participant interests, it is important to note that organisational policies for funding and project implementation do influence the evaluation process. Accounting for these processes, though difficult, is necessary.

Social development projects are evaluated for a variety of reasons, each of which requires specific information types, quantities, and processes. We must establish why the evaluation is being conducted, what its purpose is and what questions it aims to answer. Different approaches for example, will be taken depending on whether one is trying to evaluate the activities that were undertaken during a project, or for establishing the project's overall usefulness (Berk & Rossi, 1990). One may wish to assess whether specific goals were achieved or one might simply want to know if anything was achieved. Establishing what information, in what quantities, and in

how much detail can realistically be gathered and remain useful, is a complex procedure. Once an in-depth analysis of processes and relationships begins, where does it end? As Cronbach (1983: 1) expresses 'designing an evaluation investigation is an art. The design must be chosen afresh in each new undertaking, and the choices to be made are almost innumerable.' He further notes that an 'evaluation cannot hope to answer all questions in depth.' (Cronbach, 1983: 7). Sufficient detail must be gathered in order to fully explore the relationships and allow the information to usefully contribute to the analysis of the situation, while the extent to which information types and levels of detail are required will depend on the nature of the evaluation.

Social development objectives examine a variety of relationships and processes that occur in an overlapping fashion. While the project itself will have some effect, a variety of other layers touch the project and the individuals. The participants, organisation, and staff all have relationships and activities that are completely separate, yet may influence situations and response to the project. As well, the project occurs within defining environments; political, economic, and cultural situations at the community, national and international levels. The important note here is that the evaluation model must account for the situations in which the project is occurring, to sort out which effects are a direct result of the project and which are externally induced. At times, a clear line separating the two may not be present; some information can only be observed, some studies require information on a wider range of levels, sensitive issues may need a special design heavily reliant on observation, body language during activities, or third party knowledge. While it is important to maintain a systematic collection and analysis procedure to uphold the integrity of the data, this can only be accomplished if the methods and targeted data collection are feasible in the specific conditions under observation. This can prove particularly difficult to fit into a standard model, or even to fully determine prior to any observation.

The benefits of qualitative approaches include the ability to obtain a great deal of insight into complex issues and interrelated activities, providing an in-depth understanding of the processes occurring in a project. While a single, universal qualitative-model would appear to increase the ease with which evaluations could be designed and compared to one another, the calibre of the information gathered could be seriously impaired. Since the nature of the project, and of the evaluation set the defining environment, procedures to assess these processes must be flexible enough to

encompass the vital characteristic of specific situations. Social development entails an on-going process, which does not have a beginning and an end per se, rather it is the process which carries the greatest importance. Participants and the evaluator establish progress through an interactive strategy, using a multitude of tools, each with a specific purposes and used in particular situations. Patton (1990) outlines six different models that are associated with qualitative approaches (3), he also delineates ten different perspectives based on different academic traditions, which influence how individuals use 'qualitative tools'. Each of these 'methods' has strengths and weaknesses that are more appropriate and feasible in specific situations, in certain cultures, and by individuals with particular skills. Forcing individual projects with distinct attributes into a pre-formulated model, may accomplish little more than disguising complex processes as orderly events, and undermine the very insights acquired through qualitative assessments.

Another reason why it is not plausible to develop a single model for evaluating qualitative objectives in social development projects is the fact that qualitative evaluation is naturalistic. In this sense, the evaluator does not attempt to manipulate the programme or its participants for the purpose of the evaluation. Therefore studies, process as they occur and not on the basis of pre-planned experiments. Naturalistic enquiry does not look for pre determined or expected outcomes, but rather sees, identifies and describes what actually happens as a result of the project. It is also heuristic in that the evaluation approach is subject to continuous redefinition as the project occurs and does not restrict itself to pre formulated questions or lines of enquiry. Ignacio Garaycochea (in Marsden and Oakley, 1990:5) emphasises that social development is a process and evaluation is part of that process. Because continual re-negotiation of objectives is part of that process one cannot set distinct, predetermined objectives, negotiating the objectives is part of the learning process.

Social development is rooted in a theory of reality that denies the possibility of one single model for evaluating its objectives. It is based around the idea of subjectivity and the denial of a single objective reality. Traditional evaluation argues that evaluation is value free because the method used is scientific and science is value free. However, Guba and Lincoln (1989: 21) seriously challenge this assertion. They argue that all findings

3 The six models proposed by Patton are: Goal-free evaluation; Responsive evaluation; Connoisseurship Studies; Illuminative evaluation; Transaction evaluation approaches; and Utilisation-Focused evaluation. See also Guba & Lincoln, 1989, **Fourth Generation Evaluation**, Sage Publications, Newbury Park.

are determined by interaction with the value system the evaluator brings to bear. This over-commitment to science and 'objective reality' leads to an over-dependence on formal quantitative measurement and 'hard data' and the responses are fitted into predetermined categories. This methodology is rooted in the logical-positivism paradigm, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical deductive generalisations. This paradigm itself is value laden and is deeply embedded in the socialisation of adherents and practitioners and that the reason for action is hidden under the unquestioned assumptions of the paradigm. Patton argues that:

Routine ways of thinking and paradigmatic blunders constrain methodological flexibility by locking researchers into unconscious patterns of perception and behaviour that disguise the biased and predetermined nature of their methods 'decisions'..... methods 'decisions' tend to stem from disciplinary prescriptions, concerns about scientific status, old methodological habit and comfort with what the researcher knows best (Patton 1990:38).

Qualitative evaluation on the other hand is rooted in the phenomenological enquiry paradigm which ontologically denies the existence of an objective reality. It asserts that realities are social constructions of the mind and that there exists as many such constructions as there are individuals. This enquiry paradigm uses qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context specific settings. This approach recognises that people with different relations to a project will see reality from a different perspective, evaluation is therefore a process of negotiation between different subjective perceptions of reality. This methodology leads to results produced by the project as a whole, which means that the evaluation of each project is unique and therefore cannot be implemented in a mechanical fashion. Social evaluation recognises that reality is constantly changing and evaluation has to be a process which contributes to and is part of these changes. Evaluation has to capture the process of qualitative change as this change is taking place in its natural context, thus making a single model impossible.

ÖZET

Toplumsal gelişme maddi olmayan süreçlere ağırlık vermesi açısından ekonomik gelişmeden farklıdır. 70 li yıllara kadar uygulanan ve ekonomik gelişmeyi öngören program ve projelerin az gelişmiş ülkelerde özellikle kırsal yoksullara pek bir fayda getirmediği gözlenince son 20 yıl içerisinde insana önem veren bireylerin ve küçük toplulukların sürdürülebilir gelişmesini sağlamak amacıyla toplumsal gelişme projeleri gündeme geldi. Bu projeler boyutları ve amaçları açısından ekonomik gelişme projelerinden farklılıklar göstermektedir. Küçük çaplı olan ve insan unsurunun gelişmesini amaçlayan toplumsal gelişme projelerinin hedefleri çoğunlukla niteliksel değişikliklerdir. En çok ulaşılmak istenen hedefler bireyin ve yerli halkın (indigenous people) kapasitesini geliştirmek, kendi

yaşamlarını yönlendirecek karar ve uygulamalara katılımlarını sağlamak, bilinçlendirmek, kendine yeterli olabilmeyi sağlamak ve bireyleri güç odaklarına karşı güçlendirmek (empowerment) olarak sıralanabilir. Kısacası sosyal gelişme projeleri bireylerin ve grupların sosyo-ekonomik ve sosyo-davranışsal vaziyet alışlarında niteliksel değişiklikler getirmeyi hedeflemektedir. Burada yöntemsel bir sorun ortaya çıkmaktadır: Bu niteliksel değişikliklerin nasıl ölçülüp, yortumlanıp irdeleneceği sorunu. Makalenin amacı sosyal gelişme projelerinin niteliksel amaçlarının irdelenmesinde tek bir yöntemsel modelin kullanılıp kullanılmayacağını tartışmaktır. Bu bağlamda önce mevcut literatür taranıp böyle bir modelin var olup olmadığı soruluyor. Böyle bir modelin yetersizliği ve eksiklikleri neler olabilir sorusu da birinci soruyu tamamlıyor. Üçüncü önemli bir nokta da böylesi bir modelin oluşturulup geliştirilmesinde ortaya çıkacak zorluk ve karmaşıklıklar neler olabilir sorusudur. Böylesi bir modelin oluşturulmasında karşımıza çıkabilecek zorluk ve karmaşıklıklar dört kategoride toplanabilir: 1. Projenin tipine ilişkin sorunlar; 2. Projenin hedeflediği gruplara ilişkin sorunlar; 3. Projeyi değerlendirmeye çalışan araştırmacıya ilişkin sorunlar; 4. Yapılan değerlendirmenin yapısına ilişkin sorunlar. Her projenin kendine özgü amaçları olduğundan toplanacak veriler de o oranda farklılıklar gösterecektir. Amaçlar aynı zamanda kullanılacak değerlendirme modelinin de belirlenmesinde etkili olacaktır. Toplumsal gelişme projelerinin değerlendirmesi hedeflenen kişilerin de değerlendirme sürecine aktif olarak katılmasını (participatory evaluation) öngördüğünden katılımcı değerlendirme yöntemi veri elde etmede anket sorusu ve açık uçlu soru tekniklerinden daha sınırlıdır. Çünkü 'hedef kişiler'in eğitim seviyesi ve sorunları anlama seviyesi elde edilecek verileri sınırlar. Bir diğer sorun da toplumsal gelişme projelerinin içinde buldukları özgül konum tarafından sıkı bir şekilde belirlenmiş olmalarından kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu nitelikten dolayı çok farklı konumlarda geçerli olabilecek bir modelin geliştirilebilmesi güçleşmektedir. Üçüncü sorun değerlendirmeyi yapan araştırmacıya ilişkindir. Değerlendirmecinin çok yönlü ve yetenekli olması gerekir ki 'focus group' tartışmalarını yönlendirmesi, katılımcı gözlem yapması veya mülakat yapması istenen sonuçları verebilsin. Ayrıca araştırmayı ve projeyi finanse eden kurum veya örgütün araştırmadan beklentileri de projenin başarılı olup olmadığı sorusuna aranan yanıtı ve kullanılacak yöntemleri etkileme olasılığı da oldukça yüksek. Kısacası toplumsal gelişme projelerinin hedefleri birbirleriyle sıkı ilintili olan ve birbirleriyle çoğu zaman çakışan süreçleri içermektedir. Dolayısıyla bu süreçleri etkileyen projeye katılanlar, projeyi örgütleyen ve finanse edenler, projede çalışanlar ve projenin hedeflediği kişiler birbirlerinden farklı bir sürü ilişkiler içinde olabilirler ama hepsi de projeyi ve projeye gelen reaksiyonları etkileyebilirler. Özetle toplumsal gelişmeyi değerlendirme modeli objektif tek bir gerçeğin varlığını ontolojik olarak yadsıyan fenomenolojik bir araştırma paradigmasına dayanmaktadır. Bu paradigma çeşitli kişi ve grupların projeye olan ilişkilerinin çok farklı olacağını dolayısıyla projenin başarısının katılımcı bir yöntemle değerlendirilmesinin katılanların subjektif perspektifleri arasındaki bir uzlaşmadan ibaret olduğunu vurgulayan bir yöntem önermektedir.

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