Participatory-Action-Research

Miguel A. Martínez
Dept. of Public Policy
City University of Hong Kong
m.a.martinez@cityu.edu.hk
www.miguelangelmartinez.net
Outline

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• What is PAR?
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Strategy is the art of working with the uncertainty.

Edgar Morin

We are all strategists.

Anthony Wilden
What is not PAR?

• Research *separated* from both Action and Participation

• Good (political) *intentions* plus conventional scientific research

• Organic *intellectualism* for the sake of the party/group/movement/campaign

• A *standard* methodological toolkit
What is PAR?

• Research *interacts continuously and in various forms with* both Action and Participation

• *Methodological agreements* between the participants in order to conduct research and pursue political goals

• Open ground to *know critically* both internal and external organisation’s social realities

• A relativistic toolkit comprised of lessons from the experience which are *tactical and strategically adapted* to every particular context
PAR and Similar Approaches

- Workers’ Survey / Co-Research (Marx, Italian Autonomists)
- Action-Research (Foot Whyte)
- Popular Education (Freire)
- Institutional Socioanalysis (Lourau, Guattari)
- PAR (Fals Borda, Rahman)
- Participatory Rural Appraisal (Chambers)
- Participatory / Socio-Praxis Methodologies (Villasante)
- Activist Research / Militant Research (Graeber)
- Collaborative Maps (Iconoclasistas)
- Guerrilla / Open Source / Participatory Urbanism (Goodman, Forester)
http://www.iconoclasistas.net/
Inventors must to create in order to live because they live in the vicinity of death.

Michel Serres

PAR aims at promoting the empowerment of the people so that they can change the environment to their benefit.

Mohammad A. Rahman
Neutrality vs. Political Involvement?

- Social scientists do not lose nor deny their skills to research.
- Absolute objectivity is substituted by a critical-rational analysis (‘context reflexivity’, ‘strategic invention’).
- Neutrality is replaced by engagement with specific practical goals during the PAR process.
- A basic deal should establish the terms of the mutual collaboration.
- Commitment with the underprivileged, deprived, subordinated and exploited social groups.
Looking for Synergies

- **Sympathy**: knowledge produced may be useful for the social group under research, but researcher is not involved (it’s the case, usually, in participatory observation and advocacy)
- **Empathy**: researcher is involved in the group as a provider of dissent and critical thinking without broader action (organic intellectuals)
- **Synergy**: combines sympathy and empathy with a practical engagement in actions, planning, etc. (reflective practitioners and activist researchers)
Fake PAR

- **Propaganda**: participation of some grassroots activists or citizens, just in minor aspects and without any challenge to surrounding injustices
- **Short-term-ridden**: superficial research of problems without attention to contexts, diversity, conflicts and constraints
- **Institutional governance**: lack of autonomous decisions, subject to external goals, “placation, therapy and manipulation” (Arnstein)
- **Over-activism**: no learning, rational appraisal or profound knowledge production over the process because the predominance of hyper-activism
Methodological Democracy?

• Seek for *optimal horizontality* between (professional) researchers and citizens/activists involved in the PAR process
• A “steering committee” or “constituent assembly” as *sovereign power* over the process
• *Negotiations and agreements* about the crucial aspects of the process
• Division of labour aims the be both *efficient and empowering* of those involved
• Ideal *autonomous self-research* without professional help
M.C. Escher (1963) Möbius Strip II (Red Ants)
Theory-and-Practice

• Continuous *dialectics / zigzag / spiral* between theory and practice, knowledge production and practical applications, learning and action, planning and implementation

• PAR aims to promote social change... although usually only achieves the *empowerment* for social change

• Mandatory recognition and dealing with the *institutional conflicts* that will arise
The only way to escape from a dream is to change from a dream state to waking up.

Paul Watzlawick

Fight fear through creativity.

Tomás R. Villasante
What Methods?

• Qualitative? Quantitative?
• Researcher’s participation, above all?
• Methods should be outlined and decided according to knowledge and political purposes, and also to available resources
• Priorities to qualitative and participatory methods shouldn’t prevent integration and broader approaches
• A participatory feature may be an additional component of any standard method: f.e. deliberative surveys
How to Implement PAR? (I)

• **Basic agreement** about the goals, phases, mechanisms and degrees of actors’ involvement in the PAR process

• Create and plan the work of the **steering / follow-up committee**

• Design action-research **plan** (open to uncertainties and improvisation) and agree with the general assembly

• Start with **learning from the people** and the recent or crucial past actions and/or popular knowledge about the ‘definition of social problems’

• **Collect information** about the context, institutions and social conditions of life of the groups involved, direct or indirectly, in the concerns of the PAR process
How to Implement PAR? (II)

- Determine and research on ‘analysers’ to guide the process: social problems, real practices, conflictive events, “mirrors”, “devices”, etc. with the potential to scale up the reach of the PAR process.
- Plan and develop both practical and communicative actions to test preliminary hypothesis and conclusions, with the collaboration of activists and researches.
- Adopt participatory, integrative, cooperative and empowering techniques while performing actions and analysis.
- Use consultancy and deliberative devices to encourage social involvement, but go beyond them with broader campaigns and mobilisations... all are sources of crucial information to produce knowledge.
How to Implement PAR? (III)

• **Workshops** or the like serve to return, disseminate and debate about the knowledge produced (in the form of reports, documentaries, etc.), but also to produce a new one plus proposals for acting out and strategic thinking.

• Initiate forthcoming data collection according to the previous assessments and **feedback**.

• Above all, priority to “**dialectic**” techniques as sources of information: meetings, talks, demonstrations, sit-ins, e-lists, campaigns, etc.

• The end of each phase is punctuated according to the accomplishment of **strategic and tactical goals**.
OPENED/UP:
A walk through lost, forgotten, vacant, and underused spaces.
Tuesday, November 30th
Meet at Phog Lounge, 5pm
How to Implement PAR? (IV)

1) to transform demand for the process “by including all the persons involved (politicians, technicians and local residents)”

2) to promote “identifications” of the different social groups with their immediate environment (for example, with the “oral tales told by young and old people”)

3) to create regular meeting spaces and new political “institutions” so that plural, consensual decisions can be taken without delegations

4) to “build, together with the population, participative skills and tools, as well as the necessary self-esteem to ensure that they do not stop considering alternative proposals before/with consolidated leaders”

5) to ritualise the main agreements adopted at special meetings (“decisions have to be taken on a joint basis and must be respected by all parties”) (Encina and Rosa 2003)
How to Implement PAR? (V)

1) Sit down, listen, watch and learn from others “not to interview, not to interrupt”
2) Rely on your own personal judgment, “not manuals and rules, fostering flexible and adaptable responses”
3) Unlearn. “Be open to discard beliefs, behaviours and attitudes”
4) “Be optimally unprepared. Enter unknown, participatory situations with a repertoire but without a detailed preset programme”
5) Embrace error. “Be positive about mistakes. Do not bury them.” Learn from them
7) “Hand over the stick, chalk or pen. Facilitate. Initiate participatory processes and then step back, listen and observe”
8) They can do it. “Assume that people can do something until proved otherwise”
9) Ask locals for information and advice, including about us (outsiders)
10) Rule No. 1 Be nice to people. Rule No. 2 Repeat rule No. 1

(Chambers 1997)
How to Implement PAR? (VI)

1) Identify ‘social transducers’ (analysers): social relations networks that foster collective learning acting as ‘devices’ that provokes new situations

2) Instigate creativity and mutual learning among all the participants

3) Immerse yourself emotionally in social situations, listening to the bodies, going out to the streets and launch ‘group dramas’ where to generate trust

4) Try to annoy those in power through (seductive, challenging) ‘reversive strategies’ able to reveal social contradictions and the interstices of legality

5) Favour alliances and negotiations with others in order to unblock undesirable situations

(Villasante 2006)
FIESTA DEL SEMINARIO
HISTORIA DE LAS
OKUPACIONES EN MADRID

26 de marzo 2010 CSOA La Mácula

Exposición Fotográfica: Okupaciones en Madrid
Colectivo Quierescallar

19:00 Pieza didáctica sobre las okupaciones (recitativo dramatizado)
Colectivo Konkret.

Dirigido por César de Vicente Hernando.

20:00 "House Magic: Bureau of Foreign Correspondence".

Presentación de la exposición sobre okupaciones europeas en el "ABC No Rio" de New York, y coloquio con su artífice, Alan W. Moore.

22:00 Fiesta bailonga

sko, funk, 80’, 90’

26 de marzo 2010 CSOA La Mácula

C/ Sebastián el Cano, 14
Metro: Embajadores
Experiences

• PAR with a community development organisation in a decaying historic area of the city of Vigo (Spain) (1993-1996)
• AvR with squatters in Madrid (2008-2011) and Europe with the SqEK (2009-present)
Warnings!

- Researchers shouldn’t be the leaders of the organisation in which they conduct a PAR process.
- Quite the opposite: they should pave the way to be redundant, not necessary for the organisation’s autonomous work.
- Democratic participation should guide the process in a consistent manner between principles and means, but is more an open method and attitude than a sacred or predetermined doctrine.
- Action without Research-Learning, or Participation without Action, are very usual shortcomings of PAR.
- Don’t reproduce hierarchies, exclusions, inequalities, discriminations, institutional powers and experts’ hegemony.
- Always ask: whose needs are satisfied? What fundamental social change has been produced?
References


"Without deviations from the norm, progress is not possible."

~Frank Zappa