

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

PARTICIPATION & KNOWLEDGE

- Knowledge as a basis for decision-making
- When people involved in decision making don't possess adequate knowledge, they are helpless participants in decision making process.

RELIABLE KNOWLEDGE

- The knowledge - incomplete, uncertain and even intentionally distorted
- A tendency of increasing the non-knowledge and ignorance.
- The public at large, including the poor people are not professional producers of knowledge and they cannot identify existing distortions.

What's the solution?

- To involve the poor people (and other groups also) in the very process of knowledge production
- Participatory action research – using a scientific approach to study important social problems together with people experiencing them.
- New knowledge contributing to practical solutions of immediate problems and general knowledge, including theories
- Alliance between professional researchers and people that are not professionals

HOW?

The classical model of PAR has several main elements (or characteristics)

- Ordinary members can generate valid knowledge as partners in a systematic empirical inquiry. “Problem owners” are considered as insiders; researchers – more or less, as outsiders
- Insiders’ own cognitive map or local theory can be as legitimate and as useful in scientific investigation as that of the researcher.
- Since PAR begins with the problematic situation, the traditional theory – practice sequence is reversed. In this way those who define the problems (decide what is problem and what is not) play a key role in the research.

HOW?

- Using the “tacit knowledge”, local knowledge (theory), “non-scientific” knowledge and moral values of people experiencing the problems;
- Problem definition is not limited to the concepts, theories etc. of a particular discipline, but rather is grounded in the participant’s definition of the context.
- PAR generates a vision of how society, or local community, or organization could be improved. It is about change that has positive social value.
- The “Southern” and “Northern” traditions

**Example: “Creating Networks
for Rural Economic
Development in Norway”
(phases)**

The Project Chronology

Date	Project activity	Purpose
Phase I: Business development		
1985 August	First meeting in the steering committee.	Acceptance of a reframed project.
1985 September–December	Extensive <i>interviewing</i> in the three municipalities searching for participants in the developmental process.	Identification of relevant participants and an understanding of the social reality in the municipalities
1986 January–February	Three separate <i>search conferences</i> , one in each of the municipalities of Frøya, Hitra, and Snillfjord.	Identification of task forces committed to solve developmental activities. 90 people involved in this activity.
1986 March	<i>Follow-up meetings</i> in each municipality coordinating the task forces activity.	Coordination of different taskforces activity and supporting the conclusion of the tasks.

The Project Chronology

Phase II: Inter-municipal network building

1986 May

Regional meeting between taskforces in all three municipalities. *Evaluation* of the results.

Regional networks for development in several sectors.

Phase III: Public-private sector cooperation

1986 June–1987 December

Leadership training program. Organized as offsites both supporting personal development and organizational thinking.

Professionalize local leaders and supporting network development across municipalities.

1988 January–December

Search conference in Hitra aiming at creating network between the public sector and private business community.

Increased cooperation in the municipality and the shaping of a new role for the public sector.

1989 January–1990 January

Participants and researchers *writing a report* documenting the developmental activity.

Increase the learning capability through the writing process and to support the political institutions with material for decision support.

Do we (NN) need such instrument?

- Participatory research as a tool for influence and participation (perhaps we don't possess better tool);
- Other possible gains – way for involvement of the poor people;

What we (NN) can do in order to
develop large practical
implementation of the method at
national and European level?

- What are the barriers?
- Proposals for further activities?