Abstracts

Dialogues regarding participatory action research

A meeting for exchange and collective reflection

The 38th *Decisio* collects a significant part of the results of the International Meeting on Participatory Action-Research held in Xalapa, Mexico, from 18 to 20 October 2013. The meeting was attended by about 70 people: students, academics, professionals from organized civil society and people currently working in government institutions, all of them practitioners of PAR. The axes around which the dialogue evolved were 1) the relationship between social actors; 2) the dialogue of knowledge; 3) facilitation and methodology; 4) PAR and academia; 5) effectiveness of PAR. This text is a brief introduction to the sense and content of this journal's current issue.

Participatory action research as a way of doing social science

María Teresa Sirvent y Luis Rigal

In this text the authors expose the vertebral components of participatory action research. They define PAR as social scientific research with empirical basis, carried out by a transforming concern. The purpose of this form of doing science is not only to generate new knowledge, but also to direct knowledge towards the construction of a just society. It has, therefore, a political intention towards social transformation; it seeks to strengthen the capacity of popular sectors to participate effectively in decisions that affect their daily lives. The methodological pillars of PAR are scientific research; the active participation of the subjects in the creation and dissemination of knowledge; and educational praxis, i.e., the link between theory and practice.

Participatory Action Research: imagination and courage

Alfredo Manuel Ghiso

Participatory action research confronts mainstream social science. Some features of PAR are 1) the problematization of theories and methodologies; 2) the critical, historical, not fatalistic reading of reality; 3) it is developed in dialogic environments; 4) it constitutes a collective form of research, during which a "we" that know and know ourself is constructed; 5) in the research process, knowledge becomes a participatory project of transforming intervention; 6) it proposes a new paradigm in which feeling-thinking is fraternal, collaborative, binding and collectively responsible of the impacts that the investigative process generates on the people and the environment; 7) it takes place in solidary and complex times where the uncertain, the risks and the challenges assumed require a look and a strategic time, rather than programmatic time; 8) it constitutes formation processes in which it is learned to investigate and to reflect on the own practice.

Autobiography of a fan of PAR

Joaquín Esteva Peralta

The author reviews, from his experience in environmental issues, the 40 years of participatory action research. He stresses the importance of the relationship of PAR with the environmental paradigm, which was allowed it to broaden the spectrum of social analysis, which was limited to the relationship between the individual, society and state. The author's participation as the founder and current coordinator of the Center for Social and Ecological Studies (CESE) —a nongovernmental organization based in Pátzcuaro, Mexico— has played a fundamental role in the local development of PAR. This organization developed multiple participatory research projects aimed at obtaining diagnoses, formulating programs and various social and environmental assessments. In the words of the author himself, the results from these experiences reveal the great methodological possibilities of linking PAR to environmental paradigm.

Constructing power and knowledge for social transformation

Convergence and divergence among various actors

Gerardo Alatorre Frenk, Helio García Campos y Alejandro Negrete Ramírez

The article retrieves the discussion that took place in the PAR Meeting about the need to act together with various social actors to transform the social reality as well as about the complexity of these relationships. While there may be convergence in speech and in the general intention among various actors, this does not guarantee the possibility of concretizing synergies in practice. In response, those who drive PAR may play an important role, for example, in promoting the creation of spaces for collective reflection and joint ventures. Likewise, they can help document and follow up problems and struggles as well as serve as a bridge between different languages, which come from different agents and experiences.

One of the tensions that must be solved to achieve a more fruitful interaction between different actors is the one that takes place between longer-term or more structural proyects, and those aimed at satisfying specific short-term needs.

Dialogue of knowledge?

Participatory action research goes beyond what we know

Juliana Merçon, Andrés Camou-Guerrero, Cristina Núñez Madrazo y Miguel Ángel Escalona Aguilar

This text addresses the notion of "dialogue of knowledge," built on the basis of practices and reflections from participatory action research, and proposes to move from the dialogue of knowledge to the dialogue of "life experiences". The main ideas put forward are: 1) The recognition of the role played by feelings, beliefs, powers and thoughts associated with various forms of knowledge, as well as the acknowledgement of our lack of knowledge; in this sense, the authors refer to the dialogue of life experiences as a process in which intuition plays an important role. 2) The recognition of inequality, not only of diversity, as a feature of the social and cultural reality; and the commitment to forms of dialogue and participation that contribute to reduce inequality. 3) The need to open ourselves to difference, recognizing that there are different ways of thinking which do not easily translate to our own rationality.

The challenges of the facilitator in PAR processes

Silvia del Amo Rodríguez, Isabel Castillo Cervantes, Teodora Landa Valencia y Cristina Núñez Madrazo

One of the major challenges of the methodology of participatory action research is how to promote dialogue scenarios, critical reflection and knowledge exchange. To build collective knowledge through inquiry and systematization within the PAR process requires three key elements that the facilitator should foster: empathy, harmony and respect. Another key element is confidence, which is established through dialogue. The facilitator must also be aware of his/her genuine interests, on the basis of a "sociology of hope." It is also in his hands strengthen imagination and creativity, from the curiosity of "not-knowing". To overcome the challenges that PAR presents it is required to re-create and share the notion of place/territory, as it is from the local that the processes of collective inquiry become possible, viable and relevant.

Achievements and challenges of participatory action research in academic spaces

Verónica de la Hidalga Ledesma, Marisol del Toro Romo, Tamara Ortiz Ávila y Citlalli López Binnqüist

The article gathers the reflections of thirteen students and scholars from Mexico, Brazil and Spain about how to enhance the processes of participatory action research in academic spaces. The tension between different rhythms and modes of thinking between the university and society is identified as a result of distinct functioning criteria, incentives and assessment. However, although universities are not always the most favorable spaces for processes of transformation, there we can find individuals and groups committed to social change. To strengthen PAR in universities it is proposed: 1) to recognize plurality within the university and establish more horizontal relationships; 2) To promote the decolonization of power, since it is valued only one way to generate knowledge and to do science; 3) To establish the ethical basis of the research work, to determine, among other things, for what and for whom the information is generated.

Commitment and simulation

Personal and political harvest in thirty years of PAR

Rosalinda Hidalgo Ledesma y Marcela Kurlat

The reflections from which this text emerged broached the fact that the term "participation" is often misleading, and rather serves to simulate processes of collective construction of agreements, and to achieve purposes which are distant from the needs of the subjects. The key is in the ethical and political aspects of the intervention, that is to say, in the intention of the PAR processes. A genuine PAR is not the result of applying a standardized method, neither something that is imposed on the subjects. Usually they are not short-term processes. It concludes with the assertion that the current context does not favor the development of PAR and that the scope for action for social transformation is very limited. It is stated that adopting PAR, as a way of operating in social research, implies taking an ethical-political commitment linked to the pursuit of building a more just world.

The participatory action research we want

Co-building paths of thought and action

Juliana Merçon
y Gerardo Alatorre

Given the voracity of an accumulation model that seems to be directing the destiny of mankind towards a cliff, and based on the challenges that this context imposes on participatory action research, the authors synthesize four steps for the co-construction of PAR: 1) Co-learning, based inevitably on participation, provides a complex knowledge of reality, since in it many visions converge; these are processes in which everyone learns from each other. 2) To act in networks made up of all kinds of actors, with similar or different experiences, and from there arrange common agendas and collective actions. 3) The proposed PAR constitutes a transgression to established values, such as the enthronement of science as the only way to generate knowledge, the specialization and bureaucratization of knowledge. 4) PAR encourages the co-invention of ways to learn, communicate, make and transform.

Sharing and dialogue:

Reflections on the Pixquiac

This text makes reference to the experiences of Pathways and Meetings for Autonomous Sustainable Development (SENDAS, A.C.), a civil society organization established in Xalapa, Mexico. It works in communities in the Pixquiac river basin which occupy strategic areas for the functionality of the dams that supply water to the city of Xalapa. It talks about the project of "shared management" of the basin, around the comprehensive management of the forest, the development of productive alternatives, the work for the empowerment of women and the establishment of horizontal interpersonal relationships. It explains the participatory diagnosis that was carried out in the area, as well as the struggle against simulation and generation of relationship styles between actors that include transparency in the use of resources and accountability.

Teaching is the struggle, the struggle is the teaching

Weaving pedagogical in the mountains of Guerrero

The text tells the work experience of the Environmental Studies Group A.C., an organization that, since 1977, accompanies indigenous and peasant communities from the mountains of Guerrero, Mexico, in processes of community organization. They have also advised the University of the Southern Towns, with pedagogical proposals related to agro-ecology and communal management of water. One of its lines of work has been the Meetings for Mother Earth, an educational and communication proposal in which children participate and bridges between older people and the territory are established. The conclusions are presented around the notions of community research, exchange and integration of knowledge, the integral nature in the teaching-learning processes and the encounter between languages and worlds.

Traducción: Idalia López Castañeda