



international peacebuilding
advisory team

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Bernardo Arévalo de Leon
IPAT 2014

INTRODUCTION

- This Power Point presentation was used in the context of the workshop organized with a group of researchers from the Arab Center for Conflict Transformation and Democratization of the MADA Foundation and the Institute for Dialogue of Civilizations of Cairo University on 15-18 January 2014, in 6th October City, Egypt.
- The workshop intended to discuss with this group the use of the research and dialogue participatory approaches Interpeace uses, and their application to issues of youth and peacebuilding, both in general terms and in the precise experience of Interpeace.
- This presentation, developed over the basis of material previously used for training of Interpeace teams, is intended to be used with teams with an academic background.

It discusses

- a. the theoretical distinction between traditional academic research and action research, and
- b. within action research, the methodological differences between Action Research (AR) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies, and
- c. the differences between traditional PAR and Interpeace PAR.

- I. Action Research (AR)
- II. Participatory Action Research (PAR)
- III. Interpeace PAR and tools

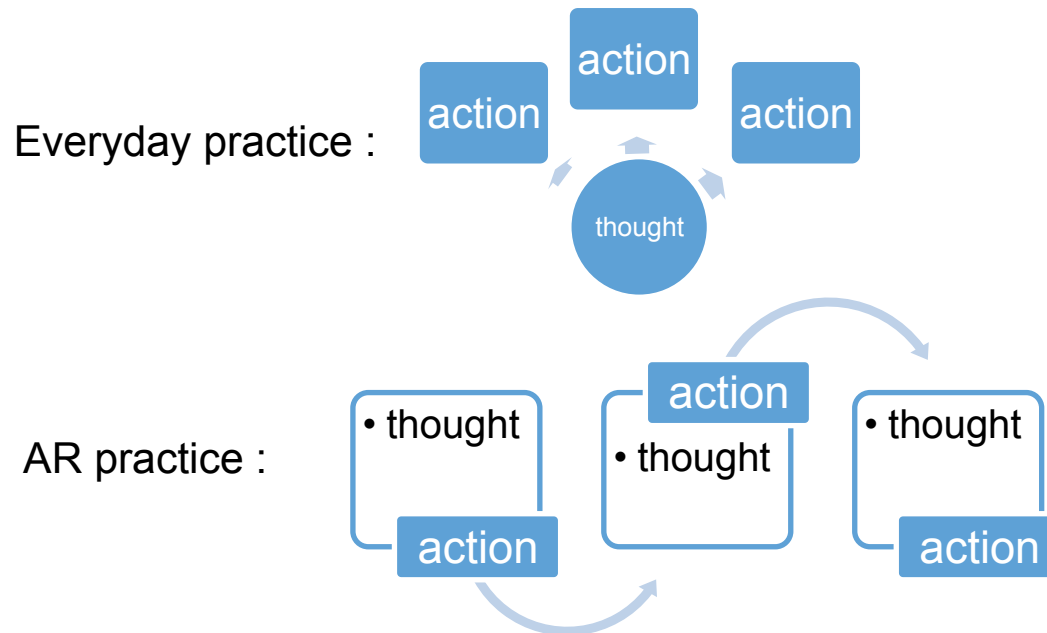
I. ACTION RESEARCH

- AR = R for A
 - Research FOR Action
 - *Rebellion against research as “observing” and “telling”*
 - *Academic vs. Engaged research*
 - *Emphasis in doing*

I. ACTION RESEARCH

What changes in AR action ?

- AR = T + P
 - Theory and Practice interlinked
 - “*reflective practice*”



I. ACTION RESEARCH

What changes in theory?

- “Making Sense” of action and actors
 - Theory = knowledge; understanding
 - Every action has a theory
 - Every actor has a theory

I. ACTION RESEARCH

R4A

- What Research does for Action
 - Elicit assumptions (awareness)
 - Explicit assumptions (theory)
 - Makes assumptions actionable (planning)
 - Makes assumptions actioned (doing)

I. ACTION RESEARCH

Theories for What and for How (1)

- The reflective practice :
 - Content Theories
 - *Understanding stakeholders have on a situation developed through AR*
 - Method Theories
 - *Content understandings lead to process understandings : what needs to be done*

I. ACTION RESEARCH

Theories for What and for How (2)

- AR = Phenomenological Approach
 - Phenomenological perspective
 - *Theories derived from stakeholders*
 - Abstract perspective
 - *Theories derived from science*

I. ACTION RESEARCH

Theories for What and for How (3)

- It is not one or the other
- In AR, primacy of stakeholder perspectives.
 - But other perspectives **MUST** be drawn into the process, only not prematurely so that they do not prevent “grounding” (ownership)

I. ACTION RESEARCH

Theories for What and for How (4)

- Role of the researcher
 - Manage the process
 - *Linking between theory and practice*
 - *Linking between theories*
 - *Abstract and phenomenological*
 - *Content and method*
 - *Theorize and actionize theory*

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

From AR to PAR

- So, when does AR becomes PAR ?
- When the researcher in AR is a collective body
 - Participants become co-researchers
 - AR can be done by individuals researchers

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR : engaged research

“ PAR is a **democratic, participatory process** concerned with developing **practical knowing** in the pursuit of **worthwhile human purposes**, grounded in a **participative worldview...**

It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in **participation** with others, in the pursuit of **practical solutions** to issues of pressing concern to people... ”

Reason and Brabdry

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR : NOT A DISCIPLINE, AN APPROACH

- (P)AR for social research
 - John Duwey, Kurt Lewin, Sol Tax
 - Began in the 40's
- PAR for social revolution
 - Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals-Borda, Budd Hall
 - Strong in 60-70's
- (P)AR for organizational change
 - Torbert, Reason, Argyris, Shon
 - 90's – ongoing

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

A subjectivist perspective on social sciences (1)

- (P)AR challenges positivist science
 - Positivism = credibility of knowledge depends on its value- free character
- (P)AR = value-free objectivity is impossible !
 - Knowledge is a social construction.
 - Reality is a continuous process with individuals that are subjects of their own history and of the social context they depend on.
 - Social Science is not Natural Science.

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

A subjectivist perspective on social sciences (2)

- (P)AR on the researcher :
 - Researcher is embedded in values systems that presuppose forms of human interaction
 - No “value-free” knowledge generation

 - Therefore :
 - *Assume your values*
 - *Explicit your intentions*
 - *Commit to change*

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

(P)AR : doing good

- The purpose of social science is the improvement of social practice

“ Human systems can be understood and changed if one involves the members of the system in the inquiry process itself. ”

Coghlan

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Implications

- (P)AR respects and values people's knowledge and understanding
 - *Narrows / dilutes the gap between researcher and researched :*
 - *Active / passive; information/knowledge; subject/object; etc.*
- PAR understands and values the transforming power of collective knowledge
 - *Superior to the sum of its parts*

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR : Doing Well

- (P)AR more able to provide **valid** results because
 - *Expert knowledge and local knowledge are combined*
 - +
 - *Interpretation of results and design of actions in the hands of the Stakeholders*

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR : the test of action

- Conventional research does not passes the test of action,
 - For conventional research, the test is about objectivity, distance, controls. A good theory does not imply change.
- But no good theory, no good PAR,
 - For (P)AR, the test is relevance, transformation and validity

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Good theory in (P)AR

- “Empowering clients to make practical and sustainable changes means **co-creating a shared knowledge of the causal conditions** of their social world and its attendant difficulties.”

Friedman and Rogers

- Causal Theories **uncover false beliefs and uncover the source** of those beliefs.

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

PAR = Empowerment

The task of (P)AR is not **to describe** the world as it is, but **to realize its visions** of what the world can become.

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

6 features of good PAR theory

- Number 1: Sensitive to the inherently meaningful nature of social reality, and in particular, the meaning-making nature of participants.
 - Phenomenological nature of reality
- Number 2: Going beyond categorizing events to connecting participants to hitherto unrecognized aspects of their reasoning, behavior and environment, and the systematic interaction of the three.
 - Revealing causal interplay

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

6 features of good PAR theory

- Number 3: Uses concepts that were not in the original description given by participants, or perhaps, not even in their vocabularies.
 - Allows re-conceptualization of reality
- Number 4: Provides a powerful set of causal concepts that enable participants to re-interpret their surface perceptions.
 - Allows re-assessment of self

II. PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

6 features of good PAR theory

- Number 5: Provides tools for helping to discover when they are mistaken (*discomfortability*).
 - Allows critical comparison/testing of perspectives
- Number 6: Puts causal responsibility in participants' own hands.
 - Increases the scope for action

III. PAR FOR PEACE

Origins

- Origins : PAR for revolutionary change (60's – 70's).
 - Latin America, North America

The critique : Conventional social research as an extractive industry

The proposal : Social research as a tool for empowering communities for social change

III. PAR FOR PEACE

The challenge : post conflict reconstruction

- International community as a conventional researcher :
 - Brings the knowledge and understanding, with the locals conceived as informants
 - Assumes its own objectivity and impossibility of local actors to transcend their own subjectivity
 - IC the active designer and implementer of solutions, and local actors passive receivers
- Problem : foreign = unsustainable

III. PAR FOR PEACE

The proposal

- Matthias Stieffel
 - PAR for empowerment
 - IC as a facilitator of internal reflection and action processes
 - Local actors become researchers, designers and implementers

III. PAR FOR PEACE

Adapting PAR

- Problems :
 - PAR can enhance contradictions by mobilizing sectors of the population against others
 - Traditional PAR works at the micro-social (communities, villages)

III. PAR FOR PEACE

Key differences

PAR	WSP (Interpeace) PAR
Micro	Macro
Mobilizing against (enhancing contradiction)	Mobilizing for (building consensus)
Exclusive	Inclusive

III. PAR FOR PEACE

Interpeace PAR : an approach, not a methodology

- PAR is an approach : more than a methodology and not just a strategy.
 - As a strategy, it guides the practitioner into meaningful action
 - As a method, it provides the tools necessary to achieve the results that enable action

III. PAR FOR PEACE

- PAR as a strategy uses PAR as a method in different ways, but is not limited to it.
 - Conventional research
 - Public opinion research
 - Political strategies
 - Etc.

- But all the methods in the strategy should add-up to a societal PAR :
 - New understandings,
 - Proactive attitudes,
 - Concrete solutions.

III. PAR FOR PEACE

PAR as a strategy

- Creating a collective, societal process of inclusive reflection aimed at practical solutions to outstanding obstacles for “peace”.
 - *Peace as a process : not what, but how.*
 - Societal-level reflection that can transform a society’s own understanding of its challenges and empowers it to transform them, peacefully
- 4 fundamental elements
 - A leading Team
 - An inclusive, neutral space
 - A research plan
 - A political strategy

III. PAR FOR PEACE

PAR as a method (1)

- Facilitating processes of inclusive reflection in specific (key, critical) social groups and at specific moments, to foster the development of new, convergent interpretation of realities and challenges, and of consensual proposals of how to overcome them.
 - Strengthening actors for positive change

III. PAR FOR PEACE

PAR as a method (2)

- Participatory research groups :
 - Collective stakeholder analysis / decision-making groups of different level :
 - *National Groups*
 - *Steering Committees*
 - *Technical Working Groups*
 - *Focus Groups*
 - *Participatory Polling*
 - *Participatory Video*

III. PAR FOR PEACE

PAR as a method (3)

- Research team that understands PAR
 - Facilitators of knowledge creation by the groups
 - Managers of the research process
 - “Translators” of results
 - *Into academics*
 - *Into public information language*
 - Remember :
 - *Not every researcher can adapt to PAR (Traduttore / Traddittore)*

ipat

international peacebuilding
advisory team

IPAT is supported by
the Governments of France, the Netherlands and Sweden.