

## **Ideology and Political Economy in Inquiry: Participatory Research\***

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The spread of applied behavioural science requires adaptation to new circumstances and audiences, and applications can generate new insights. This paper examines the tradition of applied behavioural science inquiry—"participatory research".

The authors have worked together as applied behavioural scientists in each other's countries (The United States and India), applying common conceptual equipment to diverse cultural, political, and economic settings. We have used both action research and participatory research approaches to inquiry (e.g. Brown and Tandon, 1978; Tandon and Brown, 1981) and this paper focuses on the ideological, political, and economic aspects of this approach.

This article is organised into several sections. The first section defines and describes examples of the participatory research traditions. The second section considers the impacts of values and ideologies and inquiry and compares the ideological and value commitments of the tradition. The third section considers the political economy of inquiry and suggests political and economic factors that shape participatory research activities. The fourth section describes phases of inquiry and differences between traditions related to differences in ideology and political economy. The last section covers the diffusion of participatory research.

### **Participatory Research**

The participatory research tradition emerged from work with oppressed peoples in the Third World. Variants have been developed in many

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settings, often independently. Paolo Freire and his colleagues in Latin America, for example, developed widely influential concepts for adult education among the urban and rural poor. Freire's dialogue approach to adult education engages individuals in critical analysis and organized action to improve their situations (Freire, 1970, 1974, 1978). In these dialogues, educators and "students" move toward a critical consciousness of the forces of oppression and the possibilities for liberation.

Similar principles of inquiry have been developed in Africa and Asia (Hall, 1981), but the lack of communication channels or contact among researchers has delayed recognition of their common themes. An international network of participatory researchers was formed in 1978 under the sponsorship of the International Council for Adult Education, and the Secretary General of the organization has summarized the characteristics of participatory research as follows:

Participatory research is an integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work, and action ... Some of the characteristics of the process include:

- The problem originates in the community or workplace itself.
- The ultimate goal ... is fundamental structural transformation and the improvement of the lives of those involved.
- The workplace or community (is involved) in the control of the entire process
- The awareness in the people of their own abilities and resources (is strengthened) and mobilizing or organizing (is supported).
- The term "researcher" can refer to both the community or workplace persons involved as well as those with specialized training.
- (Outside researchers) as committed participants and learners in a process that leads to militancy rather than detachment. (Hall, 1981, 7-8)

Participatory research has increased dramatically in the last decade. The editor of a recent special issue on participatory research concluded,

No single issue of a journal nor any collection of papers can do justice to the richness and diversity of the debate nor give an adequate overview of what is going on. (Gayfer, 1981)

Much participatory research has been undertaken in developing countries, where problems of adult education and social oppression are particularly acute. But occasional projects have been undertaken in developed nations. The participatory research project described below is an American example, so comparisons to the "sorearm" project will not be confused by national difference.

Gaventa and Horton (1981) describe participatory research on land ownership patterns by citizen groups in six states in the Appalachian region. A Regional Land Ownership Task Force of local citizen groups and Highlander Research and Education Centre staff proposed a study of land ownership patterns to the Federal Regional Commission. The Task Force hoped to gather previously unavailable information about land ownership that would enable local groups to influence regional policies and the activities of absentee landlords. They hoped that the study would provide a model for research adapted to local needs, train local people in research skills, develop a network of groups committed to using the information generated, and mobilize a larger constituency to influence local, state, and regional decision makers.

The political implications of the project made fund raising difficult. The Regional Commission created special requirements for the proposed project and postponed funding until the Task Force threatened to drop the project and "go public with our criticism of the Commission" (Gaventa and Horton, 1981, p 32).

Once funded, the Task Force held workshops in which researchers and citizen group representatives designed the research, prepared to collect data, and considered land reform strategies. Survey data on land ownership were collected in 80 counties, and case studies based on interviews were developed in 19 counties in six states. State and regional reports and case studies were written during the next year. At the same time, Task Force members worked with local groups to plan action to influence local and regional decision making.

The study documented in "overwhelming" detail local citizen expectations about land ownership: ownership is highly concentrated in few owners; absentees (particularly corporations) hold land and mineral resources; mineral rights are greatly underassessed for property tax purposes. The funding agency delayed dissemination of the reports and refused to issue the case studies (labelled "unscientific") and the state overview reports (labelled "too subjective"). The Task Force independently disseminated its findings to the news media and

local citizens' groups. Subsequently, a number of projects evolved to use or expand the study's findings.

The authors concluded that the project succeeded in its information-gathering goals and provided a model of a participatory research project. The workshops offered useful training for participants, and citizen groups had begun to pass on their research skills to groups in neighbouring countries as yet unstudied. The project created networks for further action and educated participants about taxation inequities.

The mobilization impacts were most obvious in areas that were already concerned about land ownership and land-use decisions.

### **Values and Ideologies in Inquiry**

Values have been defined as preferences for courses of action and outcomes; relevant values shape choices among perceived alternative actions (Beyer, 1981). Ideologies are sets of beliefs that explain the world, bind together their adherents, and suggest desirable activities and outcomes (Beyer, 1, 1981; Brown and Brown, 1983). Values and ideologies of particular relevance to research are drawn from political training and experience as well as from the large cultures in which researchers have lived. Values and ideologies are not always recognized as such by their adherents: If individuals know nothing of alternative perspectives, they will likely assume that "all reasonable people" have similar commitments.

Although value- and ideology-free observation and analysis may be possible in social sciences, they are virtually impossible—particularly if those sciences purport to provide guidance to solving social problems (Diesing, 1982). The values researchers hold and the ideological perspectives that guide them exert powerful influences on choices they make in the course of inquiry.

Participatory researchers emphasize the value of useful knowledge and dismiss the abstractions and irrelevancies of more traditional social science (e.g., Hall, Gillette and Tandon, 1982). Gaventa and Horton (1981) and their colleagues focused on the implications of knowledge about land-ownership patterns for influencing policy-making rather than on their theoretical implications. Participatory researchers also place high value on developmental changes. They particularly emphasize research implications that enable oppressed groups to improve their lives. Recurring value themes in participa-

tory research include equitable distribution of resources, empowering oppressed groups, increasing self-reliance, and transforming social structures into more equitable societies (Freire, 1970; Hall, 1981; Fernandes and Tandon, 1981). Gaventa and Horton (1981) sought land ownership data to counteract the corporate dominant of Appalachia.

Participatory researchers are often adult educators and community organizers and they tend to analyze problems in terms of community and social structures. They draw on the intellectual traditions of sociology, political science, and economics as well as on individual and group theory. Gaventa and Horton (1981) focused on regional patterns of ownership and control, choosing as critical variables political and economic forces rather than individuals and groups. Participatory researchers have also been influenced by the cultural contexts of work with poor people in the Third World, and so conceive of problems in terms of resource inequities, dependence, and oppression. In Appalachia, for example, absentee landowners held many resources and yet paid little in taxes for local use. Participatory researchers conceive of the world in terms of conflict theories of society that emphasize fundamental differences of interest among social groups and the dynamics of oppression and change (Dahrandorf, 1959). Gaventa and Horton (1981) sought to expand awareness and to mobilize citizens to challenge the concentration of power and land in the Appalachian region. The ideology of participatory researchers emphasized large-scale structural forces, conflicts of interest, inequalities, and changes that reduce oppression.

Participatory research shares many values. Participatory research values useful knowledge, and rejects the irrelevance of more traditional conceptions of social science research. Participatory researchers emphasize the conservative social implications of overemphasis on social science rigour (e.g., Freire, 1970; Fals Borda, Note 1). Participatory research traditions seek knowledge that will have an immediate impact on social systems.

Participatory research also emphasizes the importance of developmental change as a consequence of inquiry. Participatory researchers accord great importance to social change and see most traditional research as actively supporting the status quo (e.g., Mblinyi, Vuorela, Kassam and Masisi, 1982; Hall, Gillette and Tandon, 1982). It promotes developmental change as an important outcome of inquiry.

Table 1 summarizes the values and ideologies in participatory research.

Table 1: Values and Ideologies in Participatory Research

Participatory Research	
Values	Useful Knowledge (e.g. land ownership) Development Change (e.g., more absentee taxes)
Ideology	Social Analysis (e.g. economic dominance) Conflict Social Theory (e.g., absentee owners profit at citizens' expense) Equity/self-reliance/oppression problems are central

### **The Political Economy of Inquiry**

Political economists study the interaction of political factors (e.g., distribution of authority and power) and economic factors (e.g., allocations and uses of resources) that affect decision making (Uphoff and Ilchman, 1972; Benson, 1975). Political economists ask questions like the following:

1. What actors have interests in the decision?
2. What authority and resources are relevant to the decision?
3. How will decisions affect actor interests and distributions of authority and resources?

Answers to these questions reveal patterns of influence and interaction that shape decisions. The political economy of inquiry influences decisions made in at least three critical sets of choices in the process of social science inquiry: (a) the definition of problems, (b) the collection and analysis of data, and (c) the utilization of results.

### **The Definition of Problems**

Definitions of research problems fundamentally shape and constrain results of inquiry. Problem definitions influence the data collected, the results apprehended, the solutions proposed, and the responsibilities assigned for the problem itself. Ryan (1976) argues that social science often "blames the victim" in initial problem definitions, and Lukes (1974) has pointed out that the agenda control by dominant groups can turn problems into "non-issues" that never become part of the public choice process. Researchers define problems in traditional social science research on conceptual and methodological grounds, or they are defined by government and corporate interests with investment in problem solutions. Problem definition in the participa-

tory research traditions is influenced by traditions' commitment to "real" problems, for a variety of interest groups may be affected by research results.

Participatory researchers are explicit about client contributions to problem definitions: "the problem originates in the community or work place itself" (Hall, 1981, p. 7). Their immediate clients are defined as "a wide range of exploited or oppressed groups" (Hall, 1981, p. 7). They also start with the assumption that oppression is a central problem. This perspective has at least three implications: (1) participatory research clients will define problems differently from dominant groups, (2) authority and resources will be controlled largely by other interest groups, and (3) dominant interest groups can be expected to resist or attack problem definitions that threaten their positions.

Oppressed groups often recognize problems, even when system authorities do not see any difficulties. The Appalachian land ownership research project (Gaventa and Horton, 1981), for example, attacked a problem perceived by the researchers and the alliance of citizen groups, but not by the Regional Commission. The Commission controlled the resources and the authority to support the study, but preferred to define land settlement rather than land ownership as the research problem. The alliance and the researchers had to threaten public exposure to get the Commission to accept their definition. Problem definition in this project initiated adversarial interactions between actors with potentially conflicting interests.

The way researchers define problems differentiates them from other groups interested in research outcomes and creates the political and economic contexts of inquiry. Participatory researchers generally ally themselves with oppressed groups and opponents of established authorities and so find resources and authoritative support set up against them.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The choices of methods, the types of data, and data collection and analysis procedures are also influenced by interested actors and the distribution of authority and resources. Dominant social science research traditions emphasize data-collection and analysis methodologies, such as experiments and surveys, that require specially trained researchers and complex experimental or data-processing installa-

tions (Diesing, 1971). These methodologies allow researchers to control data even when other actors finance the research. But researchers' control may prove counterproductive for research intended to influence non-researchers. One study of social policy research found conceptual and methodological rigour to be negatively related to impact on social policy making (van de Vall and Bolas, 1977), perhaps because policy makers did not consider the findings relevant.

Participatory research explicitly requires client participation "in the control of the entire process" and defines all participants as "researchers" (Hall, 1981, pp. 7-8). But not all interested actors can be participants: solidarity with oppressed groups often makes participatory researchers adversaries of dominant groups. Participatory researchers use collaborative data collection and analysis strategies with participants, much like action researchers. They develop "education for critical consciousness" (Freire, 1974) and methods of "collective analysis" (Barndt, 1981). But, in addition of this, they seek information from unwilling sources, who use control over vital information to oppress their clients. The participatory research tradition uses "militant observers" (Darcy de Oliverira and Darcy de Oliverira, 1975), investigative and advocacy research (Laue, 1978), and "conflict methodologies" of various kind (Lehmann and Young, 1975) to extract information from un-cooperative adversaries.

Gaventa and Horton's (1981) study mobilized community groups in a data collection process that both educated and empowered participants, but posed a potential threat to absentee and corporate landholders. Since the Regional Commission resisted the initial proposal, questioned the "unscientific" methods used to construct the case studies, and delayed and eventually suppressed publication of some results, Gaventa and Horton saw that it protected established interests more than it supported the research. Participatory research data collection and analysis necessarily uses client resources, since funds to support research staff are seldom available.

Data collection and analysis decisions reflect political economies of the tradition. Participatory researchers emphasize collaboration and consciousness raising to mobilize and educate oppressed groups and to build close links to those clients. But they also seek information from and about groups with oppressed interests, and so employ adversarial data collection and analysis as well.



### Use of Results

Access to or control over findings, decisions about dissemination, and choices of how to link results to implementation are important issues for researchers. The political economy perspective directs attention to actors interested in result utilization, distributions of authority and resources among them, and costs and benefits of utilization decisions.

When pragmatic consequences of research are not obvious, interested actors may be limited to other researchers or funding agencies concerned with basic problems. Participatory research, however, explicitly seeks pragmatic results and so may involve many interests in utilization decisions. For example, contract research supported by government agencies or corporations may involve many interested actors.

Participatory research explicitly calls for improving the lot of oppressed groups, and participatory researchers seek research outcomes that will change the status quo. So at least three sets of actors have interests in research outcomes: the researchers, their clients, and their opponents. Opponents often monopolize formal authority and resources; researchers have training and expertise; client groups have information, energy, and time. Participatory researchers join their fates with oppressed clients. The Appalachian land ownership study reflects researcher-citizen integration even in its authorship: Gaventa works for Highlander Research and Education Centre, and Horton works for the Appalachian Alliance.

Participatory research explicitly calls for improving the lot of oppressed groups, and participatory researchers seek research outcomes that is often inimical to the interests of other groups. Gaventa and Horton's (1981) project demonstrated that land ownership is concentrated in a few absentee landholders—a fact already recognized by poor residents but not by government policy makers. The project also sought to create mobilized regional constituencies. The researchers expected new data and new actors to strengthen the representation of poor people in negotiations with such established interests as major landowners and the Regional Commission.

Participatory researchers explicitly joins one set of actors in a social system fragmented by conflicting interests. That choice is expensive, for their opponents often have more access to authority and resources. Participatory research seeks "fundamental transforma-

tion" of societies, and the price may well be conflict with existing authorities and resource holders.

Table 2 summarizes some characteristics of the political economies within which participatory research tradition is embedded. Those political economies encourage choices that produce very different research analysis and problem solutions.

The political economy of participatory research, allies researchers with oppressed clients in opposition to existing authorities and resource holders.

Table 2: Political Economics of Participatory Research

Participatory Research	
Actors	Researchers Client Groups Established Authorities Third Party Funders
Resources and Authority	Researchers Provide: - Research Expertise - Political Awareness Client Group Provides: - Information - Energy - Insights Established Authorities Provide: - Sanctioned power - Funds and rewards Third-party Funders Provide: - Funds - Protection
Impact on Phases	
1. Problem Definition	- Controlled by client groups - Benefits provided to client group - Resources received from clients or extracted from system.
2. Data Collection and Analysis	- Collaborative with clients - Adversarial with authorities - Interaction to educate and mobilize client groups.
3. Uses of Results	- Client consensus on goals of intervention - Negotiation to improve client situation

### The Diffusion of Participatory Research Traditions

Some investigators argue that political economies largely determine values and ideologies and so should bear the brunt of analysis (e.g. Benson, 1975). Others suggest that ideologies and values shape recognition of political and economic factors and that understanding the latter is impossible without analysis of the former (e.g., Starbuck, 1982; Weick, 1979). We will not resolve that controversy here; instead, we argue that ideology and political economy interact, so that either—or both—potentially influences research. Ideology and political economy frequently reinforce one another in inquiry.

The political economy and the ideology of participatory research are also mutually consistent. Concern with societal-level analysis encourages attention to political and economic analysis and an awareness of many interested actors. Conflict assumptions prepare researchers to extract information from reluctant opponents as well as to cooperate with oppressed groups. Educating and mobilizing oppressed groups to solve their own problems is consistent with beliefs in self-reliance and in the redistribution of resources. Participatory researchers run into trouble when their ideological assumptions and political economic expectations are not met.

Participatory research has developed from social-change efforts in Third World Countries, in which poverty, conflict, and oppression are commonplace. Power and resources are often highly concentrated in Third World countries, and as poor people come into more contact with the outside world, they are more likely to challenge the legitimacy of those concentrations. When the legitimacy of present arrangements is questioned, the state may be set for participatory research. Gaventa and Horton (1981) found that prior arousal and organization made county groups more ready to undertake the land ownership research and more able to use their findings effectively.

Oppressed groups are not always ready to join such projects, for they risk much and often know more than their would-be helpers do about the costs of failure (e.g., Huizer, 1978). Client-group commitment is crucial in participatory research, for resources for research and action must come largely from these groups. Gaventa and Horton (1981) managed to get funds from the Regional Commission, but the actual data collection relied heavily on volunteer willingness to record and analyze data.

Participatory research projects need more than client tolerance; they require active commitment of time and energy.

Participatory researchers themselves often run substantial risks, for challenged authorities may attack their institutional bases, their professional standing, or even their physical safety. Participatory researchers are more motivated by commitments to social change and social justice than by the hope of professional and institutional rewards, for the resources and authority of established institutions are often set up against the interests of their clients. Gaventa and Horton (1981), based in a small research and education centre and in the citizens' group alliance, respectively, were much less politically and economically secure than the large landowners they challenged.

### Reference Notes

1. Fals Borda, O.: 'Science and the common people'; paper presented at the International Forum on Participatory Research, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1980.

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