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International Participatory Research Network

The International Participatory Research Network (IPRN) was responsible for the creation and dissemination of the early theories and practices of the concept of participatory research. Participatory research is a term that was first articulated in Tanzania in the early 1970s to describe a variety of community-based approaches to the creation of knowledge by community based researchers influenced by the philosophy of Julius Nyerere, the practices of Marja Liisa Swantz (1975) and the political epistemologies of Paulo Freire (1971). Participatory research combines the three activities of social investigation, education and action in an interrelated process. Participatory research is a concept that originated in the majority world.

The IPRN, associated with the International Council for Adult Education, was begun in 1976. Budd Hall was the founding Coordinator of the International Participatory Research Network from 1977-1980. From 1980-1992, Rajesh Tandon of PRIA (Society for Participatory Research in Asia) led the network and helped to extend and deepen the ideas. The IPRN was an active global network into the early 1990s, when the decision was made that the concepts and values were widely known and did not need the kind of promotion required in the early days.

Founding of the Network

The idea for a network arose from the response to the publication of the special issue of Convergence on the subject (1975). The adult education community and related community development and activists bought out all the copies of the journal. It was clear that many people in the majority world and people working with or for marginalized persons in the rich countries were actively engaged in research projects which were very different from the standards of the day in most of the universities of the world.

The next impetus came from the First World Assembly of the International Council for Adult Education in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1976. A recommendation was made to the world adult education community that, "adult educators should be given the opportunity to learn about

and share their experiences in participatory research" (Hall and Kidd, 1978). Edward Jackson, an activist adult educator from Canada was a participant at the Dar es Salaam conference and he, dian marino and Deborah Barndt helped found the Toronto group which ultimately gave birth to the IPRN.

The 1977 international conference on participatory action research organised by Orlando Fals Borda, a Columbian sociologist, and a group of Latin American and other activist-intellectuals was further inspiration. Participatory research arose in part from a re-examination of the role of intellectuals in the struggle for social justice. There were debates were between those who felt that it was the role of intellectuals to lead the social and political movements on behalf of the people and those who said that it was time to build democratic struggle from the ideas of the poor and excluded themselves. Participatory research emerged as a process of politically engaged co-construction of knowledge.

Upon Hall's return from the Cartagena conference and a visit to Francisco Vio Grossi, a Chilean sociologist in exile in Venezuela, in 1977, the Toronto Participatory Research Group organized an event where the decision to start the IPRN was made. Among the most important political principles of the network was the insistence that each node or networking group working in the various parts of the world would be autonomous and self-directing. They would each be committed to building an international network but the Toronto group would not be in charge. The initial principles were:

> 1. PR involves a whole range of powerless groups of people--exploited, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginal.
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> 2. It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
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> 3. The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analysed and solved by the community.
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> 4. The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.
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> 5. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them

for self-reliant development.

6. It is a more scientific method or research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.

> 7. The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e. a militant rather than a detached observer. (Hall, 1984:5)

In 1978, Franciso Vio Grossi hosted a meeting of the IPRN at Simon Rodrigues University in Venezuela. Rajesh Tandon joined the group and five nodes in the network were created: North America; Asia -Rajesh Tandon,; Africa- Yusuf Kassam,; Europe - Jan de Vries,; Latin America- Francisco Vio Grossi. The IPRN organized a series of meetings around the world and published many reports and books to increase awareness of ideas, to deepen understanding of the work, to build support for others who were trying such work and to show people in various locations that these ideas had world resonance and relevance (Tandon, 2005). The IPRN consistently honoured the fact that the majority world had been the intellectual source for these exciting new ways of working and continued to inspire us. While the IPRN is no longer a formal network, the ideas and values behind it can be seen in the emergence of the Global Alliance for Community-Based Research (GACER) in 2008.

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