

# Clippings from Cartagena ....

From the 31st May to the 5th of June, over one thousand people representing 41 different nationalities convened in Cartagena, Columbia for a historically unparalleled: World Congress on Participatory Action Research.

The choice of Cartagena, a city tucked away on the northern coast of Columbia in South America, was not incidental. It was in Cartagena, twenty years ago, that the first symposium on PAR was held. The number of participants attending the symposium was 56 !

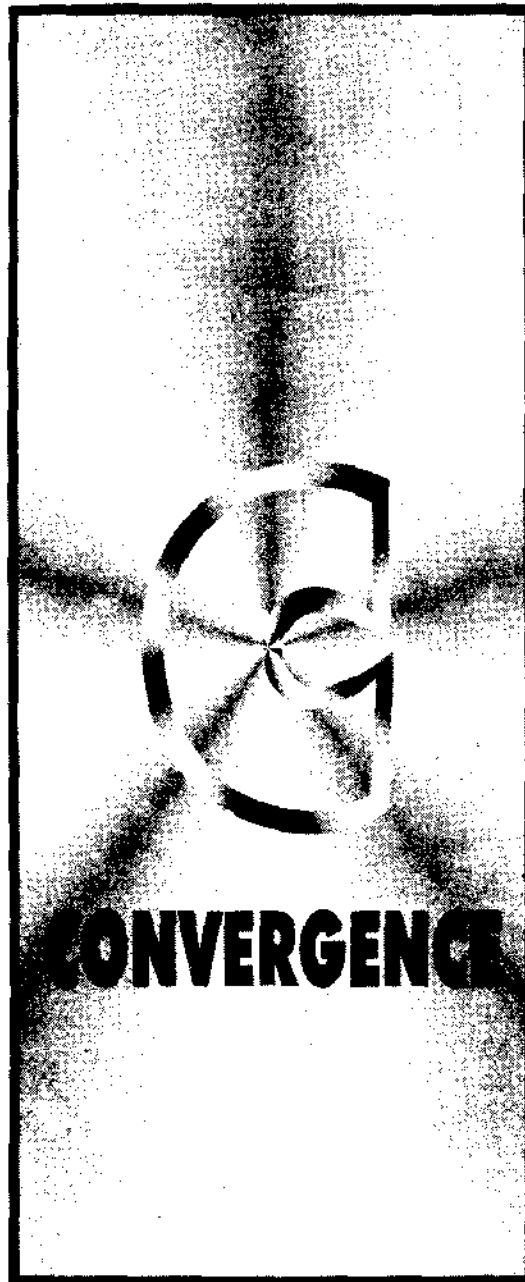
## Why this Congress ? Why "Convergence"?

Since 1977, PAR has been used in a variety of different situations and in different parts of the world. Related approaches like 'action-research' or 'action-learning' have also been developed and used in the voluntary sector, in industries, in governments and in other organisations; and new initiatives in these domains keep emerging

It is this spread of participatory action and research approaches that fuelled interest in a world congress. The term 'convergence' since, has come to symbolise talking across divides of knowledge, space and time. It has been accepted as a slogan to induce a combined participatory world-view and stimulate participatory initiatives in years to come.

One attempt at 'counting' different participatory action and research approaches arrived at the conclusion that there are 36 distinct forms present today! Some of those discussed during the Congress included:

- ◆ Critical Systems Thinking;
- ◆ Action Research;
- ◆ Naturalistic (Constructive) Inquiry;
- ◆ Co-operative Inquiry;
- ◆ Participatory Rural Appraisal;
- ◆ Participatory Action Research;
- ◆ Systems Analysis and
- ◆ Hermeneutics



*The Congress logo*

*"This is urgent for our collective survival. Hence the opportunity to convene all those concerned again in Cartagena, to take stock of the present situations after decades of searching and hoping, in order to converse, to look ahead jointly, and to act in concourse".*

*— Conference Bulletin No. 1*

## The Congress Agenda included :

- Working Groups on three broad themes
- Plenary presentations and panel discussions

Also, several informal exchanges and encounters, where participants had the opportunity to meet with pioneers or in smaller groups.

A glimpse of rural life in Columbia during a field visit to Arroyogrande was also part of the Congress agenda.

*Day 1... Conversation with Wallerstein*

*Day 2... Conversation with Rajesh Tandon :  
"On the Struggle for Knowledge: A Personal Journey"*

*Day 3... Conversation with Max Neef : "On Human Economics"*

*Day 4... Conversation with Robert Chambers :  
"On Whose Reality Counts ? Converging on Frontiers for Innovation and Change"*

*— from the Conference Calendar*

## Working Group Themes

### Construction of Democratic Societies and Cultures : Theory and Practice

Democracy, State and Politics  
Regions, globalisation and economic integration  
Social and Cultural Movements  
Justice and Conflict Resolution  
Postmodernity and Rethinking Development  
Ethics and Politics

### Creation, Transmission and Utilisation of Knowledge

Popular and Adult Education  
Systems Theory and Social Emancipation

### In tribute to past pioneers . . . .

Participants honoured a two minute silence in memory of Paulo Friere and his immense contributions to the world of participatory-action research

Presentation were also made in recognition of the contributions of other pioneers : G. De Silva (from Sri Lanka), Andrew Pearse (United Kingdom), Myles Horton (United States).

## At the start of the Congress .....

### Key note presentations

- ◆ Orlando Fals Borda, Coordinator of the Congress and pioneer in PAR
- ◆ Ernesto Samper Pizano, President of Columbia
- ◆ Francine Fournier, UNESCO
- ◆ Gabriel Garcia Marquez, author, philosopher and Nobel Prize winner

### Also on the first day.....

- ◆ Gustavo de Roux spoke on "Exhortation for Peace"
- ◆ Immanuel Wallerstein spoke on "Space and Time as the Basis for Knowledge"

Summaries of these three working groups and papers presented in the sub-group on **Construction of Knowledge Systems** will be in the PRIA library shortly

Intercultural Learning, Integration and Social Service

Art, literature and Science: Creativity and Convergences

Impact of Technology and Media

Construction of Knowledge Systems

System Building for Socio-economic, Industrial and Ecological Administration

Democratic Use of Land, biodiversity and Natura' Resources

Contemporary Critical Trends in Capitalism

Against Poverty and Hunger: Humanization of Economics

Participation of (Micro) Entrepreneurial Management

Problems of Complex Industrial Organisations

## Panel Discussions during the Congress

### Panel on Convergence and Divergence :

The panel was a forum for pioneers from different schools of PAR to share what brought them to their approaches, their perceptions of convergence and divergence and the future of PAR. Some of the themes emerging from the discussion were that:

- ◆ successful PAR is about being able to understand the world as a whole and rooting both theory and practice in social reality
- ◆ despite different roots, those working towards a participatory world-view have participated in similar struggles, particularly the struggle to move from individual to institutional and societal change
- ◆ more than convergence in thought, different schools need to share their logic of action

#### *panelists*

Robert Chambers (UK), Robert Flood (UK), Davyyd Greenwood (USA), Morten Levin (Norway), Yvonna Lincoln (USA), Robin McTaggart (Australia), Peter Reason (UK), Maruja Salas (Peru), Timmi Tillman (Germany), Michael Schratz (Austria), Rajesh Tandon (India)

#### As a mark of solidarity.....

A march was organised in memory of two Columbian youth who had been victims of a crime wave in the city. Congress participants joined the march as a mark of solidarity against violence and aggression in society.

### Panel on the History of Participatory Research Endeavours :

Initiated by the International Network on Participatory Research, this panel brought together some of the first global leaders of PAR. The theme : "what can we learn from our history?" What the Congress participants did learn was:

- ◆ that the history of PR is a *ōlivingō* history, experts and students alike are challenging, reconstructing and revivatising knowledge and tools and this is what makes PAR special!
- ◆ that while we need to address issues of scaling-up and macro-level change, we must maintain our rootedness in micro, local contexts
- ◆ in 1977, PAR was viewed as a radical approach, today this is not always the case. As support for our work increases we should be careful that the legitimacy 'we' enjoy does not lead us to compromise on the legitimacy of the people we seek to represent

#### *panelists*

Dave Brown (USA), Budd Hall (Canada), Francisco Vio Grossi, Ted Jackson (Canada), Patricia MacGuire (USA), Peter Park (USA), Ramesh Singh (Nepal), Marja Liisa Swantz (Tanzania/Finland), John Gaventa (UK), Robin McTaggart (Australia), Orlando Fals Borda (Columbia)

Other panels .....Roundtable with Leaders of Popular Thought and Action

## Priority issues for the future

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- ◆ Using research as a tool to improve people's lives
  - ◆ Bridging the gap between different forms of knowledge: popular knowledge, academic knowledge, traditional wisdom etc.
  - ◆ Resisting commodification of PAR by communicating not just the "rhetoric" or "methods", but also the experiences which make these meaningful.
  - ◆ Moving beyond interventions at the individual or interpersonal level to those which change the institutions and societies we work within.
  - ◆ Expanding the dialogue on participatory approaches to include many more civil society actors and coalitions.
  - ◆ Setting up structures which enable us to communicate with "the other side": the conventional universities, the elitist corporations, bureaucratic governments etc.
  - ◆ Revitalising and sustaining the networks and relationships which support participatory action and research.
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### Closing reflections.....

"Thirty decades ago, people were sure that history on their side, almost arrogant about it. Today I sense a humility in learning from history, which is most encouraging. Thirty years ago people were looking for solutions from states. Today I find people using terms like 'local' and 'network'. Thirty years ago the emphasis was on everyone being the same. Today I sense a celebration of difference as though it is a virtue"

– Immanuel Wallerstein

"Some arenas for action : One, to find, create and extend relationships outside ourselves. Two, to think systematically about the concept of mentoring and possibly an organisational adoption process Three, to think sensitively about what "authentic" PAR is and how we need to keep the debate on authenticity alive"

– Yvonna Lincoln

"What did we gain at this congress? What made it special? Good lessons as well as warnings from pioneers, political leaders and activists; an overriding concern with the 'practical'; and a strong sense of personal commitment and ethics"

– Maria-Liisa Swartz

### In celebration of convergence....

Through the duration of the Congress, participants noted their ideas, questions and plans for the future on flip charts, on the last day these were joined together to form what must be the longest text on participatory action research. What better way to record the inspiration the conference provided to those present!