

Methodology in research: looking at social movements

Federico Venturini
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Aim of this presentation:

explore some research methods to be applied
with social movement, grassroots urban initiatives,
etc.

Structure:

Introduction to my work

Our aims

Social Ecology research tradition

Participatory Action Research method

Examples from the field

Conclusions

3rd year PhD researcher at the School of
Geography, University of Leeds – UK

*Cities and urban social movements: a Social
Ecology approach*

I spend 9 months in Rio de Janeiro as part of my
research, following the recent uprising

Our aim: change this world with a sustainable,
equitable, just, cooperative one

Core concepts: autonomy, voluntary association,
self-organization, direct democracy, mutual aid

Research as a way of:

1. understanding what is going on in A. the current capitalistic system and B. the contemporary struggles

2. elaborating A. new analyses and B. new forms of resistance

Social Ecology is “the best modern anarchist articulation and the most compelling theoretical approach to social reconstruction” (Hern 1997: 15-16)

“The goal of research is not the interpretation of world, but the organization of transformation”
(Conti 2005: no page)

"But if anarchism is an ethics of practice, it means nothing to say you are an anarchist unless you are doing something." (Graeber 2009: 106)

Common problems working with social movements:

- researchers have their agenda and timing
- often extract data and run away
- content far away from necessity of the

movement

- poor dissemination
- poor ethics
- suspiciousness from social movements

The Social Ecology tradition...

Brian Tokar on Green political groups (1992) and
more recently on Climate Justice movement
(2010)

Methods: descriptive/participant observation

Daniel Chodorkoff: *Un milagro de Loisaida: alternative technology and grassroots efforts for neighborhood reconstruction on New York's Lower East Side* (Chodorkoff, 1980). Explored neighbourhood grassroots group that are involved in Alternative Technologies projects, in NY.

Methods: “largely descriptive” (iii) ethnographic participant observation (similar to PAR)

Matt Hern: *Common Ground in a Liquid City: Essays in Defense of an Urban Future*(Hern 2010). The city of Vancouver is compared with other cities (Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Montreal, Fort Good Hope, Las Vegas, Portland, New York City, Diyarbakir and Kaunakakai).
Methods: ethnographic journey

Making space: Radical democracy in the megalopolis. An investigation into social ecology and the creation of participatory, self-designing and self-reliant neighbourhoods within major urban entities (Hern 1997).

Methods: descriptive and speculative

Chaia Heller:

Food, Farms & Solidarity (2013) (book from her PhD thesis (2005)) on the struggle of the Confédération Paysanne (France farmers union) against genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Methods: ethnography and interviews

Biehl (2011, 2012) and Eiglad (2012) explore the experience of libertarian municipalism in the Kurdistan part controlled by Turkey.

Methods: descriptive

Eryilmaz PhD thesis (2011) in sociology, *Social Ecology Challenges Environmental Participation: HES Opposition Cases in Turkey.*

Methods: interviews and classification table

“an analytical tool” (84) that aims to be “a tool to analyse environmental activities according to social ecology” (1)

Problems:

- Libertarian Municipalism is THE solution
- narrowing too much the analyses, loss of details

So... which way?

Participant Observation: be involved as an activist with his/her research agenda in the movement

Participant Action Research: be involved as an activist in the movement and develop a research within the movement

Some characteristics of PAR

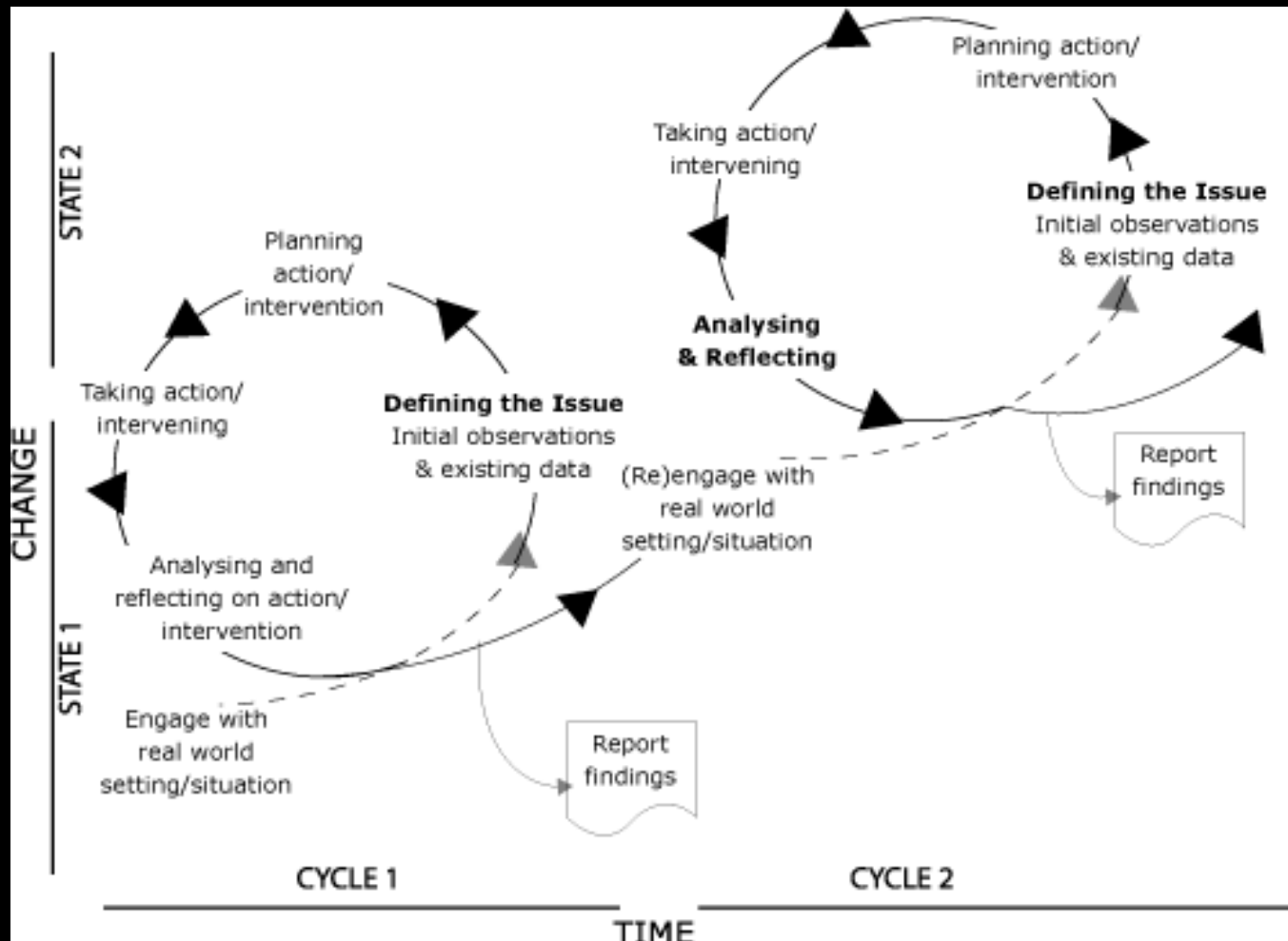
1. The problem for research must be generated from a recognised community need.
2. The community members to be affected by the outcomes of research must be involved in the study process.
3. A team work approach amongst all involved in the research process is essential to effective outcomes.
- 4. The research results must be in the form of recommendations for action or social Change.

(Quixley 2010: 1)

1. Participatory
2. Defined by a need for action
3. Useful and meaningful
4. Reflexive about the creation of meaning
5. Flexible and iterative

(Animating Democracy 2013: 1-2)

PAR involves four different stages that reiterate continuously, like a spiral: planning; action; observation; reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988)



http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/edmag/files/ed_magazine/SOLT_Feature_diagram2_2.gif

Problems/difficulties:

- being accepted as a (activist -) researcher
- necessity of knowledge of the field
- time
- commitment

“If you have come to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” (Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s)

Eduardo Galeano: “I don’t believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people.” (Barsamian 2003 2003)

“Anarchists are open to, allies for, and in critical solidarity with - and attempt to learn from - all sorts of grassroots movements around the world. They are, more than ever, practicing forms of self-organization on micro, continental, and global levels.” (Milstein 2010: 77)

Some personal experiences...

Frente Independente Popular (Popular Independent Front):
front of different revolutionary organizations (from anarchists
to maoists)

My experience: fully accepted because I acted as an activist

Book: 1. history of FIP 2. internal organization 3. reflection on
key topics

Why a book?

1. useful for all the movement
2. useful to the FIP for self reflection
3. I can use it as a source in my research

Grupo Popular “Pesquisa em Ação” (Popular Group “Research in Action”): grassroots research group, founded by activist-researchers, “knowledge from the movement to the movement”

Initiatives: blog, help to my book, participation in a funding project, public debate on transport

Problems:

you have to follow closely all the process

time constraints

motivate people

Suggestions by Chatterton, P., Hodgkinson, S., Pickerill, J. (2010):

1. In and against the neo-liberal university
2. Recognise the emancipatory potential of education, research and publications
3. Create a global knowledge commons
4. Be aware of our own action research footprint
5. Organise ourselves into collective action networks
6. Be the change we want to see
7. Make collective strategic interventions which are accountable and relevant to social movements

Why a PAR?

It allows a deeper knowledge

It is meaningful for social change

It is based on solidarity

It is a prefigurative practice

It is *fun*!

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