

Bridging Community and University: Research Tools for Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability



A workshop series organized by
Academic and Community Cooperation for Environmental
Sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION

Working towards environmental sustainability and social justice requires the effort, skills, actions and collaboration of many sectors of society. Research can be a useful tool for facilitating environmental and social change. Researchers and community groups, however, do not often work in collaboration with each other. Community groups or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) frequently do not have enough resources to dedicate to the research they need. On the other hand, academic institutions have much to contribute, but conventional research practices can be problematic for facilitating the needed exchange of knowledge. Participatory research provides tools for overcoming many of these problems by actively encouraging the mutual engagement between researchers and people from the communities they work with in seeking and implementing solutions.

Academic and Community Cooperation for Environmental Sustainability (ACCES) is a working group of the Quebec Public Interest Research Group at McGill (QPIRG-McGill). ACCES, together with the Research Internship Coordinator of QPIRG-McGill, developed a series of participatory workshops on how we can build stronger partnerships between the university and community groups. In the workshops, we explored ways to make academic research more relevant and accessible to community groups, as well as how students can make their research more effective for social change. We learned together some ways universities can offer benefits to community groups and what professors and students need to know in order to form meaningful partnerships.

Participants to the workshops came from various university departments and organizations, contributing their knowledge and enthusiasm. Many presenters travelled from far to share their experiences. The workshops were made possible all through the efforts of volunteers. Gisela Frias and Beatriz Oliver coordinated the workshop series, supported by Brian Sarwer-Foner who facilitated in several of the workshops and by Margarita Hurtado, a popular educator from Mexico who designed many activities and even joined us in Workshop IV. Camellia Ibrahim contributed throughout the series in planning and in essential logistical support. Eric Chaurrette made the artwork used in the workshop activities. Amanda Sheady was a key person in the creation of the series. Thank you to everyone for all your hard work!

This document is a summary of the series. It contains descriptions of the main activities, a synthesis of the information presented and discussed, and most importantly, the views of participants about what should be done to facilitate participatory and action research, and make possible partnerships between the university and community groups. Section 2 is a brief overview of the main observations and proposals that came out of the workshops. Section 3 describes the methodology of popular education used. Section 4 describes the activities for each workshop and the key ideas that emerged.

2. OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

Information on issues in participatory research was presented and discussed at each of the four workshops. Many creative and useful ideas emerged through popular education activities. At the final workshop, we reviewed the results of the past three and added more ideas. Here, in point form, is a summary of what participants, presenters, and organizers feel is important to work towards.

Vision

- ❑ Research that is relevant to and based on identifying needs in communities we work in.
- ❑ Collaboration of academic researchers in community-initiated research.
- ❑ Partnerships between the university and community organizations.
- ❑ Research that moves beyond researcher-subject divide (participatory research).
- ❑ Feedback mechanisms, ongoing open participation, and continuity of research with communities.
- ❑ Research results made accessible and communicated to non-university settings. Communication and dissemination of research in alternative forms (e.g. not just producing theses).
- ❑ Accountability and recognition of researchers' responsibilities.
- ❑ Variety of methods, including participatory and action research.
- ❑ Academic and financial flexibility to consider the "cycling" process of research (e.g. preparation of research proposal after consultation, and return trips to present research and hear feedback).
- ❑ Network of students and professors who support participatory methods.
- ❑ Undergraduate education on issues of power in research and alternative methods of research and communication.

Proposals for action

- ❑ Create a network of students and professors (through a listserv and the QPIRG-ACCES website) to distribute the results of the workshop and spread information to link students with research projects.
- ❑ Link up these efforts with other similar projects to join strengths, such as: the QPIRG Internship Program; research courses at McGill School of Environment and other departments; and environmental and social justice organizations interested in working with universities.
- ❑ Hold meeting to develop an action plan to "lobby" for support within the university, and work towards university-community partnerships similar to the "Sustainable Toronto" project.
- ❑ Hold more workshops within the university to further educate about participatory methods and the need for increased university-community partnerships.
- ❑ Investigate the feasibility of developing new undergraduate courses on power in research and alternative methods of research (participatory and action research) and communication.

3. WORKSHOP APPROACH: POPULAR EDUCATION

The workshops were based on popular education both as a tool for collective learning as well as to demonstrate methods useful in participatory research. In popular education we learn together through analysis and sharing experiences, ideally enriching future action. Popular education goes hand in hand with participatory research – it shares the same philosophy and many methods.

Popular education:

- Is based on experiences of participants and sharing of different types of knowledge.
- Promotes critical analysis through group discussion.
- Combines theory and practice.
- Promotes learning that is participatory and collective.
- Uses creative and cultural educational tools.
- Activities allow greater learning through different senses.
- Is intended to lead to collective action.



Most of the activities included discussion, reflection, and writing so that we could document our views. This allowed for the perspectives of people who were not present in all the workshops to be carried forward, while facilitating the inclusion of newcomers. Each workshop built on the previous ones, so that the visions elaborated together were brought forward to each new encounter. The primary focus was the encouragement of partnerships between the university and community groups, and greater institutional support for research that directly contributes to social justice and environmental sustainability.

4. WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES AND KEY POINTS ARISING FROM PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

i. Introduction to Participatory and Applied Research (Workshop I)

The main objective of the first workshop was to provide participants with a forum to discuss fundamental research-related issues as well as assisting in the development of a vision that entails research as a tool for social change. Activities included the exploration of essential questions in research ethics as well as issues of objectivity and partiality. A variety of research approaches were discussed as a means of introducing participatory, action and applied research.

Throughout the activities we constructed a vision of:

- 1) How do we gauge academic research in whether or not it supports actions for positive social change?; and
- 2) What new directions do we want university research to take in order to achieve this?

- **Introductory activity: “Baile de los gafetes”**

We started by getting to know each other through a fun and interactive activity. The design of this activity had in mind to create a relaxed atmosphere among participants so that everyone could feel comfortable sharing their ideas. This was particularly important since there were participants from different institutions who did not know each other. Also, hierarchies due to age, gender and status can act as barriers. An introductory activity helps create a non-threatening atmosphere and allows for better appreciation of each other’s backgrounds and interests.

In this activity, participants were given a small piece of paper (the size of a nametag) with the following questions:

- What department or organization are you from?*
- What are your research interests?*
- What is a “non-human” animal you identify with?*

Participants were asked to answer the questions by writing directly on the tag (they were asked not to write their name). Once everyone had filled out a tag we then stood in a circle and while music (salsa!) was playing we passed the cards around. When the music stopped every participant had someone else’s tag. Each participant was asked to read the information on the tag he/she had and we all tried to identify who the tag belonged to. Once we found out who this person was, he or she was asked to tell us what motivated them to participate in the workshop.

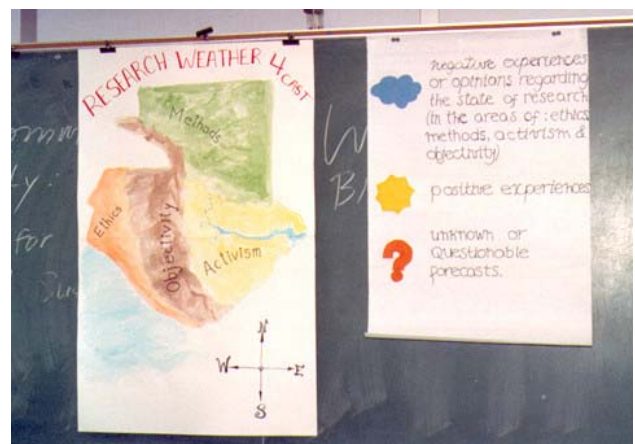
- **Activity on the state of university research: “Research weather forecast”**

We constructed a vision of how the participants assess the state of academic research by doing a “weather forecast”. A map had been prepared with four different regions representing different areas of research. The areas within the map included: Ethics, Methods, Activism and Objectivity. The participants were given cut-outs in the shape of weather symbols on which to write ideas and comments, as follows:

Clouds: Negative experiences or opinions regarding the state of research in a particular area

Suns: Positive experiences

Question signs: Unknown or questionable forecasts



Picture of the Research Weather 4-cast!

Some thought-provoking questions to help initiate the analysis included:

Are researchers responsible to the communities they work with?

Who has access to information?

Are there power relations in research?

Do methods support community action for social change?

Can research be objective?

Are there impediments to using academic research for activism?

The participants had some time to write their opinions on the cards and were asked to pin their clouds, suns, and question marks directly on the map (comments related to ethics were pinned on the “ethics region” of the map, etc.).

Key points arising from participants

Positive experiences or opinions regarding the state of research:

- ❑ Participatory methods are giving good results.
- ❑ It is important to recognize the relevance of research and accountability to communities.
- ❑ There is a growing recognition of the importance of community involvement in research.
- ❑ Civil society institutions are working more with participatory approaches.
- ❑ Ethics review boards pre-requisites are important.

Negative experiences or opinions regarding the state of research:

- ❑ Participatory methods are giving good results.
- ❑ There are negative aspects concerning the following questions: Who benefits from research? Who is doing research? What are researchers giving back? Who identifies research needs (problem of “parachute” research)? Are documents enough for dissemination?
- ❑ There needs to be flexibility in research planning.
- ❑ Results need to be shared. Communication is important.
- ❑ The costs of participatory research are high (e.g. limited funding and time for ongoing contact with communities).
- ❑ There are some vested interests that are not supportive of participatory research.
- ❑ Hierarchy and patriarchy.
- ❑ Qualitative research does not necessarily mean participatory nor is it necessarily directed towards improving living conditions.
- ❑ There is a lack of value given to qualitative research and to people’s experiences.
- ❑ An activist agenda imposed on a community is a problem
- ❑ *Questions:* Is there any certainty in “objectivity”?



A third activity during the first workshop was presentations. These were purposely scheduled close to the end of the workshop, in order to give participants a chance to share their own opinions and experiences first.

- **Presentation: “A Spectrum of Research Methodologies”**

Beatriz Oliver, PhD candidate, Department of Anthropology, McGill University.

This was a brief outline of a range of research methodologies, the varying extent of participatory methods, uses for social change and questions of objectivity. See appendix A for summary of presentation notes.

- **Presentation: “Methodology of Participatory Action Research”** Brian Sarwer-Foner, PhD candidate, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University.

The presentation covered the methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR), including its history, philosophy, and fields in which it is commonly used. See appendix B for a summary of presentation notes.

- **Collective vision exercise: “Sea of change”**

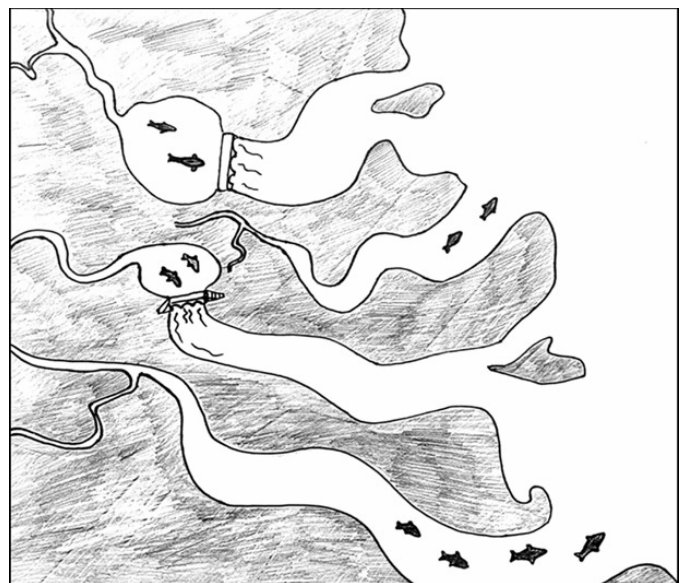
This activity was adapted from a popular education exercise called “Sea of change”. Our objective was to develop a collective vision of the directions we want university research to take. Participants sat in small groups and were given a sheet depicting a watershed leading to an ocean, with rivers and dams along the way. They were asked to identify the following by writing directly on the corresponding symbol or area.

Ocean: Vision of what we want university research to accomplish.

Salmon in rivers: What will help us get to the ocean/vision

Damns: Obstacles we may face.

Each small group then presented back to the plenary.



Key points arising from participants

Vision of what we want university research to accomplish

- ❑ Collaboration in community-initiated research.
- ❑ Research that is relevant and based on identifying needs in the communities we work in.
- ❑ Recognition of the importance of community groups needs for research.
- ❑ Partnerships between the university and community organizers.
- ❑ Multidisciplinary research which includes a variety of approaches and methods, qualitative and quantitative, as well as alternative methods.
- ❑ Research that moves beyond the researcher-subject divide, towards the view that research can also be done by non-academics.
- ❑ Communication and dissemination are important aspects of research projects.
- ❑ Research that is made accessible and communicated to non-university settings in non-academic language (local terms). This will also help inspire community-initiated research.
- ❑ “Sustainability” of research, so that the uses of research continue to be of benefit after a project finishes.
- ❑ Accountability so that researchers recognize responsibilities to the communities they work in.

What will help us get to the vision

- ❑ Academic flexibility in research process to allow for consultation in the preparation of research proposal. Supervisors should also be aware of this need.
- ❑ Researchers need to work towards reconciling “academic” and community worldviews, since “academic” questions may not be relevant to the people in the community.
- ❑ We need to link community needs with research.
- ❑ We need to identify barriers impeding the return of research results to subjects.
- ❑ Communication of results in local terms and in alternative forms.
- ❑ We need to create networks of students and professors who support participatory methods.
- ❑ Incentives (financial and academic) for feedback to communities (e.g. return trips, etc.).
- ❑ There needs to be a change in funding grants to consider “cycling” process of research.

Obstacles we may face

- ❑ The researcher-subject divide.
- ❑ Academia is still in the “Ivory Tower” and needs to change methods of communication (e.g. not just producing theses).
- ❑ There is a void in the curriculum and need for new courses (for example, at undergraduate level) on issues of power in research and alternative methods of research and communication.
- ❑ There are incentives and disincentives to do certain kinds of research.
- ❑ Time and funding constraints are a problem.

• **Evaluation: “Go-around”**

As a final activity we did an evaluation of the workshop. Taking each a turn, participants gave some of their views of the workshop activities and discussions. See appendix D for evaluation summaries.

ii. Participatory Research Methods (Workshop II)

In the second workshop we explored the links between the vision that each of us has for what we want our research to accomplish and the methods to help us achieve it. Presenters gave case studies in the use of participatory research methods.

- **Introductory activity: "Twenty questions"**

People were asked to say their name and answer a question from cards that had been previously prepared. The questions varied from serious to funny ones.

- **Activity to link research goals with methods: "Stepping-stones"**

Each participant received a drawing with the picture of a person carrying a suitcase walking on stepping-stones towards a lake. Each of these elements symbolizes processes in research development, as follows:

Lake: Vision of what we hope our research will accomplish.

Suitcase: Research topic, interests or questions.

Stones: Research methods we have used or intend to use (for example: surveys, interviews, statistical analysis, documentary review, participant observation, social mapping, etc.).



Participants were asked to identify different methods that they have used or wish to use and to fill in the stones, adding to the drawing. Once complete, participants shared their drawings and discussed them in small groups. A representative from each group exposed some of the main issues to the plenary. We identified different methods and shared experiences. A central question was:

Do you feel that the research methods are leading you closer to meeting your vision?

Key points arising from participants

Participants chose to discuss issues generally rather than in terms of metaphorical tools of the exercise.

- ❑ We should think of the "Stepping-stones" as a process working in reverse as well: First to have a vision, then think of how to get there. It is difficult to distinguish methods from research topic and vision because we need to ask what are the opportunities for change? Action is needed to achieve the vision.
- ❑ A range of different methods can be used as part of more participatory research approaches and one of the most important things is good methods of communication. In

other words, participatory methods can be combined with “conventional” methods (such as interviews or surveys), for example, in a popular education project.

- ❑ Working collectively is important.
- ❑ Identification of community needs and terms used should be done within the context of the research project.
- ❑ What groups in a community are most adversely affected? We cannot simplify “community” as a united whole. We also need to think of power relations.
- ❑ There is a problem of what academia expects. For example, a thesis is a paper document and it is not the only option nor what is most relevant for communication.

The rest of the workshop was dedicated to examples of participatory research methods.

- **Presentation: PAR project with environmental organizations in Canada.** Brian Sarwer-Foner, PhD candidate, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University.

The presentation focused on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project carried out by Brian for his MSc thesis. The aim of the project was to tap the knowledge and wisdom of experienced environmentalists across Canada towards a collective assessment of environmental NGO strategies for protecting biodiversity. Successful strategies as well as barriers and ways of overcoming them were discussed. Brian also outlined the methods used and how the participatory process unfolded.

- **Presentation: A participatory research method producing a picture book or *Fotonovela*.** Gisela Frias, PhD candidate, Department of Geography, McGill University.

Gisela’s presentation, accompanied by a photographic slide show, described the process of creating a *fotonovela* or picture book through participatory research with a women’s cooperative in Huitzilac, Morelos, Mexico. The picture book documented the women’s experience in their micro-enterprise producing mushrooms and other goods, gastronomic recipes and personal testimonies on the importance of participating in the group, “Las Golondrinas”.

- **Presentation: Participatory research in a waste management project.** Eric Chaurette, Quebec Labrador Foundation ([www.qlf.org](http://www qlf.org)).

The presentation described the use of participatory research in a waste management project in two communities on the Quebec Lower North Shore. Community members carried out surveys and other background research in order to assess the range of needs in order to create a recycling program. While most had little or no prior research experience, the resultant highly successful creation of the local municipal recycling program was based in large part on the commitment of the project participants.

Due to delays we were not able to have a long group discussion after the presentations.

- **Evaluation: Body outline**

For the evaluation of this workshop participants were asked to write their views on an outline of a body with symbols to describe how people felt, ideas, feelings and ideas for action. See appendix D for evaluation summaries.

Heart: What I felt
Mind: What I thought
Hands: What I will do
Foot (in bucket): What I did not like

iii. Making Research Accessible: Issues of Dissemination (Workshop III)

It is with the hope that research findings will be useful in meeting social and environmental challenges that many researchers delve into their work. Once knowledge has been created, however, how can this information be made accessible to a wider community outside the university? This workshop explored different avenues for the dissemination of research findings and included presentations on partnerships between researchers and community groups, with a focus on the different dissemination methods used.

- **Introduction activity: “The proverb game”**

Each person received a card with half of a proverb on it and was asked to find the person with the other half of their proverb. Once the two people completed the proverb, they got to know each other and later introduced their partner to the larger group.

- **Participatory activity on dissemination**

The purpose of this activity was to learn from each other's experiences about what we think about dissemination and useful methods to communicate research results. A hand-out with the following questions was distributed:

How is the process of dissemination meaningful to you and for your work?
What is communication?
What means have you used, or heard of, to communicate research results?
Which means of communication do you feel are best for making research accessible to those you want to reach?
What are obstacles for the dissemination of research?

Participants brainstormed in small groups, after which a representative from each group presented a few key points from their group to the plenary.

Key points arising from participants

Dissemination

How is the process of dissemination meaningful to you and for your work?

- Continuity of research process with community.
- Local use and ownership.
- Meaningful when used by relevant users.
- Feedback mechanisms.

What is communication?

- Interactive process where participants are involved.

- ❑ Sharing ideas, respecting other people's worldviews.
- ❑ Two-way information feedback processes. Allows for action-oriented research.
- ❑ Not effective when weighed-down in academic language
- ❑ Dealing with issues of class, race, gender, etc.
- ❑ Involves use of relevant technology for communication.

What means have you used, or heard of, to communicate research results? &

Which means of communication do you feel are best for making research accessible to those you want to reach?

- ❑ Workshops, community presentations, meetings, working sessions, group discussions, conferences. Can be as basic as presenting research and asking for opinions. Workshops and conferences can be very effective for bringing different sectors together.
- ❑ Photos of research process.
- ❑ Calendars (visual with textual information).
- ❑ Audiovisual: Good for language barriers. Video can say more than words. An example was given of a video on sexual harassment which is being used in schools to address the issue.
- ❑ Internet: Allows quick, broad communication but there are access problems. Websites not accessible to all, but often for community workers.
- ❑ Database setup (local uses of internet).
- ❑ Theatre, drama, puppet shows.
- ❑ "Direct Approach" to illustrate problem. An example was given of a presentation with a microscope to show disease to children.
- ❑ Journals, articles.

What are obstacles for the dissemination of research?

- ❑ Lack of resources, funding. Who gets the resources?
- ❑ Language and interpretation differences.
- ❑ Relevance.
- ❑ Accessibility.
- ❑ Lack of skills.
- ❑ Prohibitive or unsupportive donor agendas.

- **Presentation: Communications methods.** Brian Sarwer-Foner, PhD candidate, Department of Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University.

Brian outlined issues, theories and practical methods associated with communication within a research process and the dissemination of results. See appendix C for presentation slides.

- **Film showing: Video used in participatory research on bird conservation in Mexico.** Leonardo Cabrera, PhD candidate, Department of Geography, McGill University.

Leonardo showed a video documenting his research (which involved participatory methods) on the conservation of a bird species in Morelos, Mexico. The video was also used as a tool to communicate findings, integrate local perspectives and promote support for conservation.

- **Presentation: Student research for activism, “Exporting Irresponsibility: Canada’s Export Development Corporation and the Damming of Chile’s Biobio River”.** Armando Navarrete, Mapuche Nation Support Committee in Montreal, with Reid Allaway and Jeff Wilson, undergraduate students from McGill University.

The presentation concerned the benefits of student research in support of the Mapuche-Pehuenche People in their struggle against the injustices of the damming of the Bio-Bio River in Chile. The research was used not only in Chile but also in Canada to raise awareness of the issue and, in particular, of the Canadian link through funding by the Export Development Corporation. To see the report on the web, go to: http://www.soc.uu.se/~jorge/mapuint/Wilson_Allaway0103.html

- **Presentation: “Community-Based Research Communication Strategies”.** Professor Thom Meredith, Department of Geography, McGill University.

Professor Meredith spoke about his experiences with community-based research. He distinguished this type of research from others by there being a strong motivation for making change in society. We should think of the best way of reaching people, considering the content, form, and their willingness to hear. Thom emphasized the need to be open and flexible in a partnership process; to do otherwise is to risk eroding the partnership. However, being open in a research process is sometimes in conflict with the “rewards” in academia.

iv. Building University-Community Partnerships (Workshop IV)

This final workshop was meant to provide a forum for students, community groups and professors to build bridges of collaboration. Present relationships between universities and community groups were discussed and the workshop provided a space to share ideas on how to strengthen partnerships and ideas for future action. The workshop included presentations by partners of the “Sustainable Toronto” project, as well as the facilitation of Margarita Hurtado, a popular educator of the Grupo de Educación Para el Medio Ambiente, from Morelos, Mexico.

- **Introductory activity**

After a review of the past three workshops, participants were asked to give their impressions. To encourage the participation of everyone we threw participants a ball. We asked them to share their impressions and to then throw the ball to someone they recognized from a previous workshop who could add to the review. Participants then were asked to go into pairs of two, get to know each other and then meet another “pair” and introduce their partners. Finally, one person from each newly formed group of four presented each person to the plenary. This made for some creative presentations!

- **Presentation: “Sustainable Toronto: An Example of University Community Collaboration on Research and Action”.**

Alison Collins and Beth Savans presented their experiences with the project “Sustainable Toronto”. This is a consortium between the universities of York and Toronto, the City of Toronto, and environmental non-governmental organizations such as the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP), the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), and others. For more information on projects, please visit www.sustainabletoronto.ca. Alison Collins is with the York Centre for Applied Sustainability, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University.

She is Project Director for the “Toolkit for Governance” project. Dr. Beth Savans is Director of Environmental Programs at Innis College, University of Toronto.

- **Discussion on “Sustainable Toronto”.**

After lunch we discussed what we learned from the presentation on “Sustainable Toronto” and how this experience could help us here. The group, along with presenters Alison Collins and Beth Savans, further discussed the partnership experience of “Sustainable Toronto”. People had many questions about how such a partnership was set up and how it works. It was clear there is great interest in seeing something similar created at McGill University, with community groups in Montreal and elsewhere. We identified steps towards this, first beginning with the creation of a summary document of the results of these workshops, to be used to generate support for such initiatives in departments and in the Faculty of Graduate Studies. As well, it is crucial to create a network to organize this “lobbying” effort as well as to communicate opportunities for collaboration between researchers and students with community groups. It was suggested that the list of participants to the ACCES workshops could be used to first create this network (e.g. email-based). The presenters and participants offered their support in different aspects.

Key points arising from participants

What have we learned?

- ❑ Great example of community-university partnerships.
- ❑ Linkages and alliances reflect important model.
- ❑ Illustrates how it is possible to work with different and diverse groups.
- ❑ Engaging different ethnic and cultural groups is important.
- ❑ Program and courses offered mean we can see actual changes in the university.
- ❑ Can see possibility of doing same at McGill University.
- ❑ Sequence: assess needs, set up infrastructure, then project can take off.
- ❑ Can take small steps at this moment, for example, create a network of students and professors to spread information to link students with research projects (for example, with Oxfam).
- ❑ Are there communication mechanisms already set up we can use?
- ❑ QPIRG Internship program already established to link students with community groups to do research. Needs more university support. Will move to less projects but better coordinated and planned so mutually beneficial.
- ❑ Course at School of Environment at McGill called “Environmental Research”, in which students required to do projects with environmental organizations. Course has need for new projects and network can be of benefit.
- ❑ Education Department at McGill has course “Justice and Social Action” with other potential for collaboration.

Proposals for action

- ❑ Network based on workshops.
- ❑ Send summary and information on projects out on listserv.
- ❑ Link in with existing organizations.
- ❑ “Sustainable Montreal”?
- ❑ Can do small steps first:
- ❑ Start with report from this meeting, circulate, get feedback and distribute.
- ❑ One page summary email with website link.

- ❑ Hold another meeting to develop action plan.
- ❑ Find out where can find support in university (for example, seek meetings with professors, department chairs, deans).
- **Activity to identify needs and resources available for creating university-community partnerships: “Garden of Needs and Resources”**

This activity was intended to identify the needs and resources we have access to in order to move forward with our vision of improving collaboration between the university and community groups. Based on group discussion, we identified needs on cut-outs in the shape of corncobs, and resources on cut-outs in the shape of watering cans. These were placed on a poster depicting a garden (reproduced below). This activity was inspired from a workshop by popular educators of the Catalyst Centre.

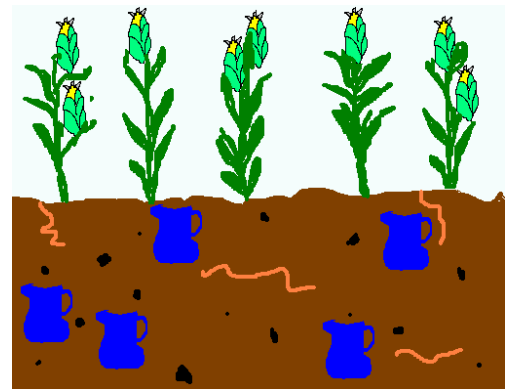
Corn: Identification of needs

Watering cans: Resources from university and community groups

Key points arising from participants

Needs

- ❑ Research based on community needs.
- ❑ Deeper connection between researchers and community.
- ❑ Professors who are interested in this.
- ❑ Community coordinators.
- ❑ Government funding and university links.
- ❑ Create or change courses, programs, research-assistantships.
- ❑ Research which is continuous, based on interactive processes and action.
- ❑ Short term and long term projects.
- ❑ Environmental community network (“Sustainable Montreal”).
- ❑ Promote North-South interchange concerning educational strategies and experiences.
- ❑ Research on municipal composting.
- ❑ GIS research on forest and community issues in Mapuche territory, to see impacts of companies.
- ❑ Improve quality of life in communities.
- ❑ Engender trust between stakeholders through good decision-making processes.



Resources from university and community groups (what we can contribute)

- ❑ Action.
- ❑ Participatory methods.
- ❑ Participatory action research opportunities.
- ❑ Link through networks: Sustainable Toronto; between faculties; QPIRG and student groups.
- ❑ Environmental community organizations.
- ❑ Create research endeavours to identify problems within a community with view that researchers should work *with* a community, not *for*.
- ❑ Identify research coordinators (people with trust and leadership skills).
- ❑ Share experiences of collaboration.

- ❑ Emphasize an interactive research approach valuing traditional knowledge, ethnic differences.
 - ❑ Reflective policy-making.
 - ❑ Make communication courses available.
 - ❑ Create network based on ACCES and workshops (e.g. listserv)
 - ❑ Widely distribute summary of workshop results.
 - ❑ Web pages.
- **Activity: “La Caminata” The walk**

Margarita Hurtado led us through an activity based on walking around the room at different speeds and styles. Each participant was asked to walk around the room following their own rhythm. Some walked fast, others slow. We asked them to find someone who they felt was walking at their speed and to walk together. We then discussed the parallels with the difficulties and benefits of working in participatory research and in partnership projects between universities and community groups. During this exercise it became clear that people have different styles and speed of walking, but also of working! This is important to consider when engaging in participatory research and collaborative work.

- **Evaluation: “Caritas” Little faces”**

People were asked to line up behind three different people holding three different masks – one happy, one unhappy, and one indifferent – in response to various questions:

What did you think about the workshop in general?

The presentations?

Lunch?

The garden of needs?

Methodology?

Did it allow for your participation?

About the caminata?

About this evaluation?

Anything you would like to add?

See appendix D for evaluation summaries.

Appendix A: Notes from presentation: “A Spectrum of Research Methodologies” by Beatriz Oliver

Private research

- Limited access to public.
- May have public benefit, but motivated by commercial interests.
- Examples: R&D by pharmaceutical companies; Marketing research.

Academic

- Increases body of knowledge in a field or fields.

Applied research

- Intended to have a direct impact in some capacity.
- Examples: Ecological study of wolf populations in park; Research by scientists for an anti-nuclear coalition.

Advocacy

- Work that will benefit the client.
- Based on ethic that research should be motivated by appeals for truth and justice for those who have been marginalized.
- Example: Anthropological research on land tenure for First Nations land claim.

Participatory methodologies

- Incorporates methods that are participatory.
- May or may not be based on local people instigating the research and owning the results.
- Example: Participatory or Rapid Rural Appraisal.

Participatory Action Research

- Research is carried out by members of a community or social group.
- Process of research is as important as results.
- Intended to directly contribute to community organizing and action.
- Ideally in PAR, a community sets the problem, does the research and controls the results. Outside researchers with specialized training are involved, by building local capacity for analysis and action in a process where they are committed participants rather than detached observers.
- Example: Dene Cultural Institute studies of traditional law, medicine and ecology.

Observations...

- Any of these approaches can result in either sound or unsound research, in accordance with the validity of the methods employed and the accuracy of reporting strived for. Many of the more participatory and advocacy research methodologies have been critiqued for lacking objectivity, for having an “agenda”. This critique implies that other research is necessarily objective and lacks ideological underpinnings. By clearly stating research goals, we can achieve a greater though still relative objectivity.
- For some subjects, it is not possible to do participatory type research. For others, the subject matter strongly suggests it.
- There are good examples of the combination of methods. For example, university research linked with popular education which identifies local needs for research and provides forums for communication.

Appendix B: Excerpts of slides from presentation: “Methodology of Participatory Action Research” by Brian Sarwer-Foner

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Research – actively involved involves subjects of research in the design, implementation and analysis of the inquiry process.

+

Action Research – research which sets out to bring about change resulting from the act of engaging in the inquiry process

=

PAR – research which actively involves the subjects in a collaborative inquiry process which has the ultimate goal of creating positive social change resulting from the process and its findings.

Implications:

- Applicable to investigating social phenomena where subjects' voices not traditionally heard and/or where subjects possess knowledge, opinions, and experience that are important for accurate and complete data gathering and analysis.
- Applicable to situations where change is deemed necessary.
- Removal of barriers, created in the name of "objectivity", between researcher and subjects.
- Qualitative data collection done through spiraling cycles of interviews and reflection.

Key Differences Between Traditional Science and PAR

Rigor vs. Relevance

Replicability vs. Responsiveness

Contrasting Traditional (positivist) Science and Participatory Action Research

Quantitative vs. Qualitative

Strict Objectivity vs. Objective Subjectivity

General Applicability vs. Uniqueness

Researcher Distance vs. Closeness to Subject

Social Control vs. Local Self Determination

Impartial Advice vs. Solidarity and Action

Advantages and Disadvantages of PAR when Compared to Traditional Science

Advantage of PAR:

Disadvantage of PAR:

To Overcome Problem:

Responsive to change
Socio-relevant info.
Qualitative info.
Includes subjective info.
Researcher takes stand

Fuzzy initial results
Not as rigorous
Very hard to quantify
Not as objective
Scientific credibility?

Spiraling research cycles
Reflection between cycles
Qualitative analysis
Validity testing of results
Defensible justifications

Related Approaches and Synonyms of PAR

Action Research, Participatory Research, Collaborative Research, Collaborative Inquiry, Cooperative Inquiry, Participative Inquiry, Human Inquiry, Action Inquiry, Action Science, New Paradigm Research, Experiential Research, Transformational Research

Brief History of PAR

Researcher:	Year:	Country:	Discipline:
Kurt Lewin	1946	USA	Sociology, Minority Issues
Tavistock Institute	1947	Britain	Interdisciplinary
	50's – 60's		Four Streams of Development
Robert Rappaport	1970	Britain	Tavistock Group
William Whyte	70's – 90's	USA	Agriculture, Sociology, Industry
Peter Reason	80's – 90's	Britain	Management, New Paradigm Research
John Rowan	80's – 90's	Britain	Transformational Research

John Heron	80's – 90's	Britain	Altered States of Conscience
Patricia Maguire	80's – 90's	USA	Education, Women, Battered Families

Traditional Fields that Employ PAR

Social Sciences & Humanities (Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy), Psychology (Psychoanalysis), Systems Analysis, Management (Organizational Development), Education, Informational Sciences (Library Sciences), Labour Studies, Minority Studies and Issues, Women's Studies, Feminist Issues, Indigenous Peoples' Issues.

Fields Beginning to Embrace PAR

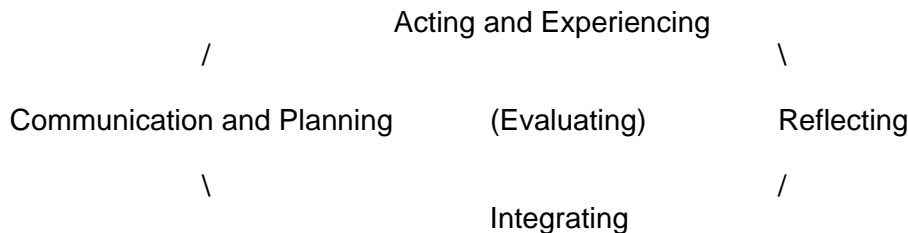
Environmental Sciences

Agriculture – dealing with farmers.

Conservation Biology - Can't ignore social issues, therefore can't ignore social players, thus need to involve them as active participants (i.e. fisherfolk, foresters, indigenous and local people who live in the areas under crisis and/or investigation).

The cognitive/action or work/being cycle of new paradigm researchers

Acting and Experiencing (data gathering, fieldwork activities undertaken while suspending most other concerns) — Reflecting (removal from the experiential situation, analysis of the previous experience, without additional source of input, formulation of grounded insights) — Integrating (combining reflections with ideas and theories developed elsewhere, sifting, recombining, testing one set against the other, developing new ideas) — Communication and Planning (creating closure on what has been learned, posing new questions, receiving feedback on closure, setting new goals) — Evaluating (evaluating the entire cycle in terms of its help in the development of the person, the problem, and the method) — Acting and Experiencing...



Justification

Because PAR is still considered to be very much an “alternative” form of research, and is not an usual part of the repertoire in main-stream science, it is important to justify its use.

“It is not simply possible to tag co-operative inquiry or participatory action research onto a world-view that is primarily forged in a positivist or modernist perspective, with its deep rooted assumptions about the separation of knower from what is known; this would result in an untenable situation, with methodologies which demand a collaborative ethos and practice resting on assumptions that demand separation.”

Peter Reason, 1994

Appendix C: Excerpts of slides from presentation: “Dissemination / Communication” by Brian Sarwer-Foner

Communication Dualisms (Dualities)

- system of symbols and messages vs. human communications
- top-down (one-way flow) vs. participatory (multi-direction flow)
- reactive vs. proactive

At Conference Presentations...

- “we need more communication and education”
- applies to any field (trans-disciplinary)
- akin to environmental domain in this way
- link between communication and education
- how to do so needs to be study of own – not just tag-ons at end of presentations

Communication Strategies

- e.g. for sustainable development: “*SustainABILITY*” Program
- goals for social change
- social marketing vs. advertising
- audience analysis
- multi-media approach
- popular education

Alternative Ideas

- ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES and POPULAR EDUCATION
- ecosystem approach
- “holons”
- “meme” theory

Types of Media

- spoken word (inter-human)
- written word
- print
- radio
- television
- internet (new media / e-media)

E-Media

- e-mail
- list-serves
- newsgroups
- WWW
- Effective Communication

Clarity

- geared at intended target audience
- packaging of information
- less is better (visually and written)
- try not to use jargon

- balance between being formal and casual
- humour – keeps people awake...

Barriers to Effective EcoCommunication

- time!!!
- limited public perception
- ignorance, including within some disciplines
- biases
- misconceptions
- lack of supportive environment

Communication Instruments

- one pagers
- introductory letters
- executive summaries
- press releases
- send by e-mail and/or fax
- essays and articles (newspaper)
- pamphlets and flyers
- alternative media
- popular theatre

Communicating Results

- presentations
- handouts
- workshops
- written reports
- faxes of one pagers or executive summaries
- e-mails and postings to list-serves
- web pages – start with executive summary – links to more depth
- always give contact information

Appendix D: Comments from the evaluations

Workshop I

- More focus on information would be good.
- The PAR presentation by Brian was enjoyed.
- There was a good mix of information and participation.
- We actually did PAR in this workshop!

Workshop II

Head: What I thought

- Results not as important as process.
- Acting for people who are marginalized, who don't have a voice.
- Interesting experience. Great folks!

Heart: What I felt

- ❑ Positive results from the research show empowerment, not necessarily of “the masses” but starting with very small groups.
- ❑ Very exciting and provocative. Inspiration!

Hands: What I will do

- ❑ Brian - please make handouts from your transparencies, thank you!
- ❑ I was considering doing research with teachers, but I think now my research will steer towards the marginalized students.

Feet: What I did not like

- ❑ Spend less time with review and introduction to allow more time for the “meat” of the presentation.

Workshop IV

What did you think about the workshop in general?

- ❑ Everyone but one person in 😊 line.
- ❑ People learned from each other rather than being lectured at.
- ❑ Constructive and interactive
- ❑ Positive initiative that people came here and participated from outside
- ❑ 😊 Wonders if there will be any consequences and follow-up from this last workshop. Something needs to progress from this. Keeping communication is very important.

The presentations?

- ❑ Most 😊, but one 😐
- ❑ Good things happening at universities.
- ❑ Open presentation that also explained the constraints and troubles faced.
- ❑ Negative aspect – saw much about university ideas in the presentation, but lack of community group opinions represented here.

Lunch?

- ❑ Most 😊, but one 😐: lunch did not cater well to vegan eaters.

The caminata?

- ❑ Interesting dynamic exercise.
- ❑ Room a bit small so could not go at your own pace.

Anything you would like to add?

- ❑ Thank you Margarita, for the opportunity to express my appreciation to the folks who got us all together to talk and learn.
- ❑ It is so refreshing and inspiring to be with people with the same concerns. Many thanks!