11.237 Participatory Action Research (PAR) Methods
Spring 2020

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00 to 6:30 PM in 9-451

Prerequisite: Permission of the instructors
Units: 3-0-3

INSTRUCTORS

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STELLAR SITE
https://learning-modules.mit.edu/class/index.html?uuid=/course/11/sp20/11.237

First class will meet on Tuesday, February 4, 2020 and the course will run for 7 weeks.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course introduces students to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is an approach to research and inquiry that enables communities to examine and address consequential societal problems. In bringing together community researchers and academics to investigate a consequential social problem and determine what ought to be done, PAR seeks to transform existing unequal power relationships between marginalized groups and those traditionally considered "expert" researchers. This seven-week module builds on Participatory Action Research (PAR) 1. This module seeks to deepen our exploration of knowledge co-production with communities, focusing on: co-designing and co-conducting research with community partners at various stages of the research process; actual cases in which PAR-like methods have been used with greater or lesser success; and interaction with community members, organizations, and individuals who have been involved in PAR collaborations. As part of this course, students will be expected to produce a PAR research proposal together with a community partner. (Students may take PAR 1 and PAR 2 in any order.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class meetings: The class will meet for 1.5 hours every Tuesday and Thursday from 5:00 to 6:30 PM from February 5th through March 21nd. Students are expected to attend all class sessions and participate actively in class discussions and activities.

Reading Assignments: Readings will be available on Stellar. <u>Please check the Stellar site and email communications from the teaching team on a regular basis; additional readings may be posted as the semester progresses</u>.

Assignments & Expectations: The teaching team and the MIT Community Innovator's Lab are involved in building a body of knowledge about PAR as a core democratic capacity and a critical practice in efforts for building economic democracy and self-determination. Through active engagement in class discussions and through quality written assignments/presentations, we expect students to play a role in helping to explore and build this body of knowledge. Over the course of the semester students will be expected to produce the following:

1. **Journal:** Students will be required to journal on a weekly basis, responding to questions posed by the teaching team. The journaling will include reflections on the evolution of their project with the community partner they are working with. Part of the journaling will take place at the beginning of each session.

2. **PAR Proposal:** Students will work in teams to co-produce a PAR research proposal with a <u>community partner</u>, oriented toward addressing a consequential question in the partner's work. While it is not possible to actually carry out PAR within a 6-week time frame, the purpose of this assignment is to think through the <u>design of a PAR process</u> and apply that to the specific context and questions of a community partner. We expect students to draw on class readings and discussions, any of their own experiences with participatory research or planning, background materials on the partner's work, as well as co-production sessions with the partner to craft a proposal that responds to the specific needs, priorities, and interests of the partner.

   ● <u>Draft Due</u>: Student teams and community partners will agree on a date to submit a draft proposal for the partner to review. The draft should be submitted to both the partner and the teaching team.
   ● <u>Final Presentation</u>: March 17. Student teams will present the PAR proposals they developed with community partners. The presentation should include an overview of the proposal's content, reflections on the co-production process, and references to the PAR theory and cases we discuss in class.
   ● <u>Final Due</u>**:** March 31 (two weeks after the last class session).

   Further directions for each of these assignments will be given in class.

Grading:

Active participation:	25%
Journaling:	10%
PAR Proposal (draft & final):	45%
Final Presentation:	20%

Office Hours: The teaching team will offer weekly office hours to meet students individually or in groups. Office hours are also available by appointment. Please sign up for a time slot on this link: http://dusp.mit.edu/oh or reach out via email to schedule a time. When signing up for Dayna's office hours, please confirm her availability with Jill Kronberg (kronberg@mit.edu).

- ● Dayna: Wednesdays from 11h to 12h
- ● Katrin: Thursdays from 4h to 5h
- ● Antonio: Mondays from 1h to 3h
- ● Mario: Tuesdays from 1h to 3h

Disabilities: If you have a documented disability or any other problem you think may affect your ability to perform in class, please see one of the instructors early in the semester so that arrangements may be made to accommodate you.

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism and cheating are both academic crimes. Never (1) turn in an assignment that you did not write yourself, (2) turn in an assignment for this class that you previously turned in for another class, or (3) cheat on an exam. If you do so, it may result in a failing grade for the class, and possibly even suspension from MIT. Please see Dayna Cunningham if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism. Anyone caught cheating will be reported in line with recognized university procedures.

Final Exam: There will be no final exam.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
This year, students will be working with three community partners in the Boston Area and one inNew York City.

1. **City of Boston - Housing Innovation Lab**
   Contact: **Taylor Cain**
   Project title: **Sacred Spaces -- Civic Spaces**

   Description: Boston is home to many churches who own underutilized parcels or buildings in need of repair. These churches are often located along transit rich corridors and within communities who are interested in opportunities for increased economic development and affordable housing. In many cases, churches in Boston also play a civic role by bringing residents together and providing opportunities for meaningful engagement and interaction. The Housing iLab is interested in exploring how activating underutilized church owned land could align with some of the city's goals for inclusive growth and housing affordability.

   Potential Research Questions: How should the city think about working with churches with underutilized land? Could these spaces help goals to promote wealth building in communities of color while also supporting their current stewards? How could churches and their surrounding communities work together to create a shared vision for underutilized land? And more broadly, what resources or tools do church congregations need to reimagine their space?

2. **Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra**
   Contact: **Robert Jordon**
   Project title: **Crescendo Overview**

   Description: Crescendo Music Education (CME) encompasses the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra's efforts to directly impact Boston Area schools and youth-development organizations. CME employs approximately 15+ Teaching Artists who collectively teach 50+ hours per week in 10+ schools throughout the Greater Boston Area. These programs empower conservatory-trained musicians to gain valuable professional experience while providing critical support to school students and faculty. CME in-school services are ongoing throughout the school year and break down into three basic areas: (1) mentorship and 1-on-1 instruction, (2) small group coachings, and (3) large ensemble and classroom support. CME programs also include a variety of accessible community performances, online learning opportunities, and events for students with special needs.

   Potential Research Questions: What are the essential factors in selecting a school partner? What is a simple, clearly defined process for measuring student growth that we can use to convey CME's impact more broadly? Considering music is magic and creativity is an intellectual mystery, how can we define a set of measures that will convey the impact of high quality music instruction in a way that is statistically reliable?

3. **Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time Initiative**
   Contact: **Mercedes Soto**

   Description: The mission of the Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time Initiative is to organize, catalyze and support the youth serving community in Cambridge for the shared purpose of increasing equity, access and innovation and sustaining the highest quality out of school time opportunities and experiences for all children, youth and families. The Agenda for Children provides professional development training, convenes and facilitates peer learning exchanges in monthly Communities of Practice and an annual Out of School Time Symposium, and also provides Quality Improvement Systems (QIS) Coaching for about 25 out-of-school time coalition member organizations. We use the APT (Assessment of Program Practices Tool) developed by the National Institute for Out-of-School Time and coaches engage team members at all levels in program observations, debriefs, goal setting, action planning, and a second set of program observations. Many organizations have been involved in QIS coaching for several years.

   Potential Research Questions: How do we measure the impact of quality coaching on programs over time? We have collected an inordinate amount of qualitative data and quantitative from the process for many organizations over multiple years, and we have not had the capacity to evaluate the impact on the overall quality and accessibility of the programs. In addition to collecting, APT Data, and tracking goals, and action plans, coaches write narrative reports. We would like to develop some strategies to help program leaders and also the AFCOST better measure growth in program quality overtime so that we can continue to refine our practices. What are the determining factors for continuous quality improvement and sustaining quality standards over time?

4. **[Wellness Empowerment Brooklyn](#)**
    Contact Person: **Gretchen Susi**

    Description: Brooklyn is the most populous borough in New York City and large enough to be the third most populous city in the United States. Though world-famous for arts, cultural institutions, business, tech, and nightlife, many neighborhoods suffer from negative Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). Concentrated poverty, poor housing conditions, low educational attainment, inadequate access to jobs, and limited access to healthy food, drive large disparities in social and economic well-being between poor, marginalized black and brown communities in neighborhoods like Brownsville and East New York, and affluent, whiter neighborhoods. Borne from a coalition between the campaign to save Interfaith Medical Center, Central Brooklyn's only hospital, and Governor Cuomo's DSRIP, a NY Medicaid investment and reform plan, community leaders, activists, and healthcare professionals formed the Coalition to Transform Interfaith. They wanted to reimagine ways hospitals, health systems, and residents could learn from each other in order to maximize their collective strength and control vital levers of power. Advised by MIT's Philip Thompson III, the coalition decided to conduct PAR projects as a mechanism for strategic action. The first, completed in 2016 in Brownsville and East New York, received a positive reception from residents and elected officials, and led to annual projects in different Brooklyn neighborhoods. Known today as Wellness Empowerment for Brooklyn (WEB), the outcomes of each project shape the Coalition's work. Counting more than 150 youth researchers trained, 3,500 surveys conducted, hundreds of interviews and focus groups, and 90 recommendations, the WEB PARs influenced New York State initiatives like Vital Brooklyn, a multi-billion dollar investment to improve SDOH in Central Brooklyn, and spurred the creation of a nonprofit organization dedicated to implementing their recommendations.

    Potential Research Questions: How can grassroots coalitions craft effective messages for policy action? What common goals and experiences help sustain broad yet powerful coalitions across a range of stakeholders? What are creative ways hospitals and health systems can play regenerative roles in their surrounding communities? What types of co-creative techniques translate from movement-building into stabilized institutional bodies? Besides counting the number of people affected and production targets, how can the success of a project within a community, the "reception from residents" be measured and communicated for fruitful outcomes?

Syllabus

CLASS 1. Tuesday, February 4:

DEFINITION OF PAR AND OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

What is Participatory Action Research, and what is its relationship to democracy & social justice? What are the methods that we can consider in a PAR process? Overview of syllabus, partners, and course expectations.

Required Readings
- Greenwood & Levin (2007), Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change, 2nd edition. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks. *Chapters 4 & 5* (pp. 55-88).
- PAR Lexicons produced by students during the Fall 2019 class.

CLASS 2. Thursday, February 6:

PAR THEORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

For students who have not taken the first semester Theory course, or students who want a quick refresher, this session reprises the key theoretical pillars of PAR. Can a field grounded in social action be a legitimate science? What is knowledge and how is it created? What is the relationship between knowledge, power, agency and democracy? We will also introduce students to a series of basic facilitation techniques that can be helpful for their engagement with community partners.

Required Readings
- Freire, P. (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Chapter 2.
- Appadurai, A. (2006) "The Right to Research," *Globalization, Societies and Education*, 4(2): 167-177.
- Scharmer, O. (2018) Excerpt on the Four levels of listening. In *The Essentials of Theory U.*, pages 25-28 & 93-96

CLASS 3. Tuesday, February 11

WORKING SESSION 1 & GUEST PARTNERS

Guest Partners (TBC)
- Taylor Cain, City of Boston.
- Bob Jordon, Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra.
- Mercedes Soto, Agenda for Children Out-of-School Time Initiative.
- Gretchen Susi, Wellness Empowerment Brooklyn..

Required Readings
- Familiarizing yourself with the four community partners.
- Specific background readings TBD.

CLASS 4. Thursday, February 13:
METHODS 1: THE CO-PRODUCTION PROCESS

What does co-producing knowledge between community and academic researchers entail in practice? What needs to be in place to enable genuine co-production of knowledge? How do PAR researchers address and engage issues of power, perceived legitimacy, and difference? Who brings what type of knowledge and expertise to a PAR process? What are the roles of the co-researchers engaged in a PAR process? How do we engage identity and positionality? What considerations, challenges, and potentials does an activist approach to research raise for PAR practitioners?

Required Reading
- Greenwood, D. & Levin, M. (2007) "Social Science Research Techniques, Work Forms, and Research Strategies in Action Research." In *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2ⁿᵈ edition (pp. 89-101). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks.

Case Study
- Ayala, J. (2009) "Split Scenes, Converging Visions: The Ethical Terrains Where PAR and Borderlands Scholarship Meet," *Urban Review,* 41: 66-84.

Optional Readings
- Corburn, J. (2007) "Community Knowledge in Environmental Health Science: Co-Producing Policy Expertise," in *Environmental Science & Policy*, 10(2), pp. 150-161
- Pulido, L. "FAQ: Frequently (un)Asked Questioned about Being a Scholar Activist," in: Charles Hale, ed., (2008) *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship,* pp. 341-365. University of California Press: Berkeley.

CLASS 5. Thursday, February 20:
METHODS 2: MIXED METHODS (QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE)

PAR involves and requires disciplined inquiry. How are qualitative and quantitative methods used in the co-production process? How do PAR practitioners determine methods appropriate to the specific context they are working in? In PAR, how do academic and community researchers make sense of their findings collectively and collaboratively?

Required Reading
- Manijeh Badiee, S. & Creswell, J. (2012) "Designing community-based mixed methods research". In Qualitative Strategies for Ethnocultural Research. Ed.: D. K. Nagata, L. Kohn-Wood, and L. A. Suzuki. American Psychological Association.

Case Study
- Feilzer, M. Y. (2009). "Doing Mixed Methods Research Pragmatically: Implications for the Rediscovery of Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm." In *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), (pp. 6-16)

CLASS 6. Tuesday, February 25:
THE PAR PRACTITIONER

What does PAR look like in practice? How are practitioners co-leading and facilitating long-term Participatory Action Research processes with their community partners? We will hear from two PAR practitioners based in Brooklyn, NYC, how they are dealing with a multi-year and multi-stakeholder PAR process around healthcare issues.

Guest Speakers
- Gretchen Susi, Program Director, MIT CoLab's Wellness Empowerment Brooklyn
- Bruce Richard, Co-chair, Coalition to Transform Interfaith

Required Readings
- TBD

CLASS 7. Thursday, February 27:
METHODS 3: NARRATIVES

As some of the most basic forms of human communication, storytelling and narrative are powerful tools for communicating and making sense of reality, as well as advancing struggles for social justice. How can we harvest knowledge from storytelling and what challenges arise in relation to interpretation and meaning-making?

Required Reading

Landman, T. (2012) "Phronesis and Narrative Analysis" in Flyvberg et al. Eds., *Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis* (pp. 27-47). Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.

Case Study

James, D. (2000) "Listening in the Cold: The Practice of Oral History in an Argentine Meatpacking   Community." In *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (pp. 120-142). Duke University Press: Durham.

Optional Reading

Sandercock, L. (2003). "Out of the Closet: The Importance of Stories and Storytelling in Planning Practice", in Planning Practice, Planning Theory & Practice, 4:1, 11-28.

CLASS 8. Tuesday, March 3:
METHODS 4: OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING
What can a research orientation that recognizes epistemological diversity open up in terms of production of knowledge and the ability of communities to take action on consequential problems? What methods allow PAR practitioners to engage these "other ways of knowing" that have been historically marginalized by the academy and excluded from the research enterprise? In this class, our guest speaker will do a hands-on experiment with this methodology. The optional readings provide an intellectual resource for students seeking to better understand, or argue in defense of, this approach in their work, but are not critically necessary to participate in the activities of the class.

Guest Speakers
- [Kelvy Bird](#), Core Team, Presencing Institute

Required Readings
- TBD

Optional Readings
- Abram, D. (1996) "The Forgetting and Remembering of the Air." In *The Spell of the Sensuous*. (pp. 225 - 260)
- de Sousa Santos, B. "Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge,." In *Another Knowledge is Possible*: Beyond Northern Epistemologies. Verso: London.

CLASS 9. Thursday, March 5:
METHODS 3: SOCIAL TECHNOLOGIES
This class will look at the "knowing - doing gap": why do we collectively create results that nobody individually wants. Social Technologies address this gap. They provide methods, tools and techniques that allow us to overcome this gap.

Required Reading
- Scharmer, O, & Kaeufer, K. (2015) "Awareness-Based Action Research: Catching Social Reality Creation in Flight," in Hilary Bradbury, Ed., *Sage Handbook of Action Research, Third Edition* (pp. 198-209). Sage Publications: London.
- Pomeroy, E. & Scharmer, O. (2019) "[Social Field Resonance: How to Research Deep Structures of the Social System](#)" (blog post)

Case Study
- Bergeron, J. [Hungry for Words — The Power of Communication](#). Presencing Institute.

CLASS 10. Tuesday, March 10:
METHODS 5: ETHICS & ACCOUNTABILITY
What ethical dilemmas arise in research and the practice of PAR? What is the role of the Institutional Review Board and what tensions/differences exist between IRB protocols and the agreements and practices developed with community partners? How do PAR practitioners deal with differences in power and incentives? What practices and mechanisms do academic PAR researchers use to stay accountable to community researchers?

Required Reading
- Tuck, E. & Guishard, M. "Uncollapsing Ethics: Racialized Sciencism, Settler Coloniality, and an Ethical Framework for Decolonial Participatory Action Research," in: Tricia M. Kress et al., eds., (2013) *Challenging Status Quo Retrenchment: New Directions in Critical Research*, Information Age Publishing Inc.

Case Study
- Tang, S. (2008) "Community-Centered Research as Knowledge/Capacity Building in Immigrant and Refugee Communities." In Charles Hale, Ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship,* pp. 237-264. University of California Press: Berkeley.

Optional Reading
- Gordon, E., Racin, L. & D'Ignazio, C. "A Community Approach to Research Partnerships" **&** "Memorandum of Understanding for Mutually Beneficial Research," Engagement Lab @ Emerson College.
- Fine, M (2018) *Just Research in Contentious Times*. Teachers College Press:New York & London.

CLASS 11. Tuesday, March 10:
Working Session

CLASS 12. Tuesday, March 17 (longer session - 5 to 7:30 pm!)
FINAL PRESENTATIONS

Required Readings
- Presentation Slides (to be shared by groups beforehand)