



Participatory Rural Appraisal: A 21st Century Reappraisal, A Case Study of Participatory Development Practices in Waste Management: The WasteLess kNOw PLASTICS Educational Programme

Faith Toran 2018
The American University of Paris

Acknowledgments

The first note of appreciation should go to The Margaret Gada Slosberg Charitable Foundation for their commitment to social justice and their financial support. The successful completion of this study would not have been possible without you. A second note of thanks goes to the Auroville Community and WasteLess team, who allowed me to live and be in community with them during the last 6 months in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India. A final thanks goes to The American University of Paris staff and community that have been valuable sources of knowledge and support throughout this study

This experience has stimulated me to reflect, even more critically than I intended to on many issues in this study. Not only did this experience provide valuable sources of knowledge and wisdom both at an academic and personal level, it was one of the greatest experiences of my Graduate studies.

The Slosberg grant allowed me to travel to Auroville, Tamil Nadu India for 6 months and be in community with the WasteLess team as an Education and Communication Coordinator. I experienced what it means to be “in community”. In community I describe as a place where human unity and peace are within every daily process of life. It was a place of human development for me both academically and spiritually.



Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India 2018

Being in community with the WasteLess team was a phenomenal learning and research experience. WasteLess is an educational research organization focused on sustainable waste management based in Auroville. The organisation is dedicated to ‘participatory’ approaches that help to change the harmful habits that affect the way we make, dispose of and think about waste. Targeting the future generation with fun and engaging educational activities, WasteLess aims to bring about behavioural change and instill positive habits early on in a child’s life.



The WasteLess Family: Mimansha, Jasper, Rhibu, Chandrah, Mukta, Maya and Me 2018

As an Education and Communication Coordinator, as a part of the WasteLess team for the last 6 months, I engaged in an impact study on the effectiveness of participatory frameworks for environmental game based educational programmes in rural India and worked on various communication initiatives to scale the work of WasteLess. I was able to teach students and engage with the community to bring about positive change in waste management. This was particularly evident with the kNOw PLASTICS programme where I started to teach members in my residential area who would then approach me for advice on safer or unsafe plastics and how to identify ways to reduce plastic pollution through their everyday habits. Being in community was a phenomenal experience which led to a phenomenal research experience. My thesis Participatory Rural Appraisal: A 21st Century Reappraisal: A Case Study of Participatory Development Practices in Waste Management: The kNOw PLASTICS Educational Programme was conducted during my 6 months as a part of the WasteLess team to assess and provide recommendations for the expansion of the WasteLess's "participatory" frameworks in their waste management projects.

This thesis focused on a contemporary reappraisal of the participatory turn in development practices - particularly, the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) method popularized in the 90s. The objective of this thesis explored the emergence of PRA, examined how it has been conceived theoretically in development literature, and inventoried its many field methods and practices. This thesis analyzed and examine PRA at a micro level focusing on individual and educational communities, but also taking into consideration that development and change can also take place at the macro level (national governments and global institutions). The thesis inventoried the development of the best practices of PRA to explore the possibilities of expanding effective development communication methods. After examining the literature of the historical development of PRA, the thesis presented field research undertaken in Tamil Nadu, India, specifically a waste management educational programme designed around “participatory methods for social justice.” The case study portion of the thesis focused on the operative and declared PRA frameworks within the NGO ‘WasteLess” and, in particular, their participatory framework of development communications within the kNOw PLASTICS Educational programme in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, India. Five approaches were used and analyzed: Participatory Rural Appraisal as a development communications method, participant observation, discourse analysis, thematic analysis and in-depth interviews to analyze PRA as applied to the WasteLess kNOw PLASTICS educational programme.

Based on my research findings and in efforts to address the challenges of the participatory paradigm of having theoretical merit but lacks support in practical theory (T. Tufte) and to engage the WasteLess team in a wider scope of ‘participatory’ communication, I conducted a PRA session. Conducting a PRA session yielded a model of participatory communication that proved to be an

enjoyable, creative method for the students to generate their own knowledge about waste. It also serves as practical data for the participatory paradigm. The four PRA methods (transect walk, transect diagram, mapping, and analysis ranking) generated local knowledge, local analysis of waste, and local expression of actions they wish to take in regard to the waste problems they themselves identified. It also allowed for me as a facilitator to learn from them, experience the power of listening and the changing of roles.

Photo of the Participatory Rural Appraisal Process

PRA Waste Transect walk with students 02/04/2018
Kuilipalayam, Tamil Nadu, India



PRA Waste Transect Diagram and Mapping 02/04/2018
Kuilipalayam, Tamil Nadu, India



PRA Waste Analysis Ranking 02/04/2018
Kuilipalayam, Tamil Nadu, India



Photo Credit: Faith Toran and Venue

Overall PRA proved to be a viable method for generating local knowledge, an enjoyable and inspiring process for both the facilitator and students/local analysts. PRA was a process that only took 1.5 hours for four methods and required a team of three and was feasible (as the only supplied purchased were macaroni's and paper.) PRA is known for using local materials, so this could have taken place with local materials found in the village and have not cost anything. This example provided the WasteLess team with a methodology that is both in line with the organisations goals and objectives of waste management and social justice.