

Participatory Action Research in Andalusia
Linking science and day-to-day life. Role of public policies.

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Author's Background

Authors are Agronomists and historian. Eva Torremocha and María Ramos have work experience with farmers organisations. Gloria Guzmán and Manuel González de Molina are researchers. All of them have been previously involved in the Andalusian government (Spain), employing PAR methodologies to apply public policies from an agroecological perspective.

Summary

Andalusia is the main organic farming region in Spain that has the highest surface certified organic. For four years the regional government ran an agroecological program strongly linked to stakeholders thanks to Participatory Action Research methodology. Some examples are described and analysed at two different scales (local and regional) and with different purposes: defining in a participatory way a local organic action plan and defining an alternative certification scheme better suited to farmer's and consumer's demands. Achievements and long term results are analysed.

Background

Andalusia holds 54% of the certified organic Spanish area, and 30% of the total amount of operators (MAGRAMA, 2013). From 2004 up to 2007, the regional government implemented, through the Organic Action Plans (Plan Andaluz de Agricultura Ecológica) specific public policies for research and knowledge transfer based on Participatory Action Research methodology (CAP, 2007). This article aims to focus on this methodology potential as a means to enhance stakeholders and civil society participation and engagement in the knowledge transfer activities.

References are not necessary but can be done in following way (Lastname 2001, Lastname and Lastname 2002). If a reference has more than two authors, please use following citation: Lastname et al. 2003.

Main chapter

Participatory Action Research (PAR) includes the process beneficiaries in the process itself, as main actors. It enhances competences acquisition and organisation among engaged groups. It's a versatile tool that can be employed for each of the contexts and steps of the food supply chain. It is based on a specific stakeholders' demand. They are the ones that define the research topic regarding their needs, and during the whole process, they remain at the centre of it. At the beginning, together with researchers and facilitators, they draw the idealistic situation they wish to achieve, as well as the steps to reach it. In each of those, they will take an active part, bringing their empiric knowledge associated to the analysed context.

Mobilizing the PAR core group and the established networking connexions with others local networks or associations, facilitates the integration of social, ecological, economic and cultural local resources to the research and development processes.

The employed methodology is divided into five consecutive steps and uses techniques such as the interview, participative observation, MESMIS (Masera *et al.*, 1999), discussions' groups, sociograms and other Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (Chambers, 1992, Geilfus, 1997) or Participatory Research (FPR) techniques (Farrington y Martín, 1987). PAR culminates with a final evaluation and adjustment that closes the process.

PAR application examples supported by public policies in Andalusia

Sectorial Plan of la Vega de Granada.

PAR has been implemented by CIFAED5 researchers. The region La Vega has a high agricultural potential thanks to its plate and fertile soils, and the availability of water for irrigation, but very few farmers. Because of its proximity to the city, urban growth is its main destruction cause.

PAR focussed in designing the agroecological transition process for the region. It was collected in the Plan of la Vega (2008-2010), that has been adopted by professional and civil local organizations related to the organic sector. Its implementation was mainly ensured by the signing organizations and CIFAED. It received government financing for 2 years.

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Achievements identified during the evaluation phase are listed in Table 1.

The Andalusian Participatory Guarantee System (PGS)

The PGS PAR has been run within the public policies framework of the regional government. It is based on the demand of 2 organic farmers groups from mountainous areas (Jaén, Málaga) that expressed their concerns about the certification system. The goal was to build an alternative system, better adapted to their socioeconomic context. In order to diversify scales of implementation and groups profiles, so to ensure a better replicability of the generated system, a municipality (Castril, Granada) with experience in PAR methodologies, was integrated into the process. Farmers, consumers and local organizations were engaged during the whole process. The first working phase was limited to autonomous and local work so to count with three different proposals while the second was collective. During this last one, the three territories groups networked to reach a consensual system. It was implemented, evaluated and adjusted. As a result of this PAR experience, the Andalusian PGS was created as well as others benefits listed in table 1.

Table 1: PAR methodology achievements

	Vega de Granada Plan	Andalusian PGS
Short food supply chains development	Creation of 1 association for direct sales to consumers, restaurants	Creation of a cooperative for organic food distribution, organic market places establishment in rural areas. Job creation
Organic agriculture promotion:	Organic area multiplied by 4.65 and operators' number by 3.6.	Three women converted into farmers (12% of the Group)
Solution of farming concerns	Regional impact in fruticulture.	Strategy for diversifying olive tree monoculture in Jaén
Local resources use	Increased use of the local organic matter and local varieties in horticulture	Traditional variety seeds exchanges
Social impact	Networking between local associations	Mutual support among farmers
Institutional impact	High and positive among institutions related to rural development. Definition of their own strategies for promoting organic farming	Not anymore support from institutions.

Core Messages and Conclusions

PAR methodology is efficient to generate innovative tools and processes that bring improvement proposals to a specific situation based upon the real context that demands them. This approach facilitates the stakeholders' participation along the whole food supply chain, and it allows them to have their ideas and knowledge taken into account as the basis for social innovation processes. It also fosters connexion to others networks that converge towards a same working framework.

But a stable financing is necessary in order to meet the optimum potential of this tool that requires 4 years time period for its correct application. That entails that a solid and favourable institutional frame is needed. That's why Political Agroecology plays a key role in spreading such an innovative methodology that integrates stakeholders and that develops knowledge exchange as source of improvement solutions for the food supply chain.

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