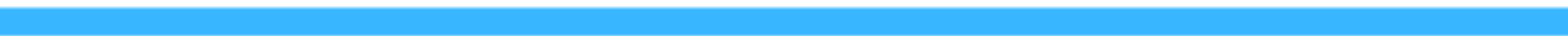# PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN PARTIBRIDGES' PROJECT

Partibridges

What are we talking about, why and how?

Why are we using this methodology with young people? What are we looking for?

Participatory Action Research involves various methods and foundations. Therefore, the aim of this document is to help you understand the methodology we are looking for in Partibridges.

From the outset, we affirm/claim the necessity to engage a Participative and critical stance in our method (Iversen et al. 2004), **to enable visibility and legitimization for minority or disqualified audiences in public decision-making processes and spaces**.

From a heuristic point of view, Participatory Action Research (PAR) seeks to **narrow the gap between academic conceptualization and the perception of stakeholders** who do not necessarily identify themselves with the productions about them.

Partibridges aims to put participation of young people at the centre of our concerns, more specifically frameworks and modes of recognition imposed by adults. PAR is ideologically alligned with the project's commitments because it supports a reflective stance which **questions power imbalances between participants in an effort to coproduce knowledge togethe**r.

In that sense, Partibridges is part of an approach that aims to **co-design a situation and build a system that promotes shared knowledge and change**.

However, we know from previous experience that it is important to clarify methodological aspects of PAR before implementation, to try to limit the possible effects of instrumentalization and reproduction of inequalities by those in greater positions of power.

Thus, this document will address the following points :

1 **Theoretical framework clarifying the term PAR**

2 **Its contributions and objectives**

3 **The position and role of researchers and participants**

4 **Methodology**

5 **Vigilance points**

6 **Examples illustrating the different approaches**

1. TERMINOLOGY

Co-production, co-design in research, action research, collaborative research, participatory research, collaborative action research... these various meanings make it difficult to choose one which alligns the will of the Partibridges project. Thus, a small terminology point is necessary ...

Participatory research is a partnership between academic and civil society members with the objective of producing knowledge that is useful for researchers as well as for participants.

Co-construction, or **co-design** of the research project, is therefore a key principle of participatory research. It involves people developing concepts or things together that respond to societal or community concerns (Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2018). In other words, we are talking here about "involved research" in which field actors and researchers co-construct the project and the production of knowledge and not about research by academics, "applied" to field actors.

Action research or collaborative research can then be considered as sub-parts of participatory research, which differ in some respects but have commonalities regarding the main principles.

Action research aims to change and improve professional practices, starting from a problem usually identified by professionals. This notion of action research is sometimes followed by the term "participatory", in order to give more weight to participation in itself than to the change induced and not to fall into the instrumentalization of this type of research by institutions (Morvan, 2013).

Collaborative research, on the other hand, aims to clarify one knowledge related to a professional practice and to link the academic community with the professional one. Thus, in a collaborative research environment, partners "will not attempt to identify what should be changed; rather, it is the in-depth understanding of the object of mutual concern that mobilizes them. " (Morrissette, 2013)

Therefore we propose not to decide between the term "collaborative research" or "participatory action research", because it is up to the participants to decide to start from a problem they want to solve, a practice they want to explain, a cause they want to defend or something else. In that sense, we will keep the concept of **Participatory Action Research (PAR)** as covering both.

2. HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT

Several thinkers have helped shape the philosophy of the PAR including :

John Dewey, American philosopher, in reference to the themes of pedagogy and education in an attempt to make science listen to practice, so that practice can guide science.

Kurt Lewin, an American psycho-sociologist, by linking research and social change with disadvantaged groups in the USA in the 1940s. According to him, description and observation alone is not enough to understand social reality. This understanding necessarily requires its modification and therefore action. His vision then lays the foundations for social experimentation" (Jouisson-Laffite, 2009; Lewin 1952)
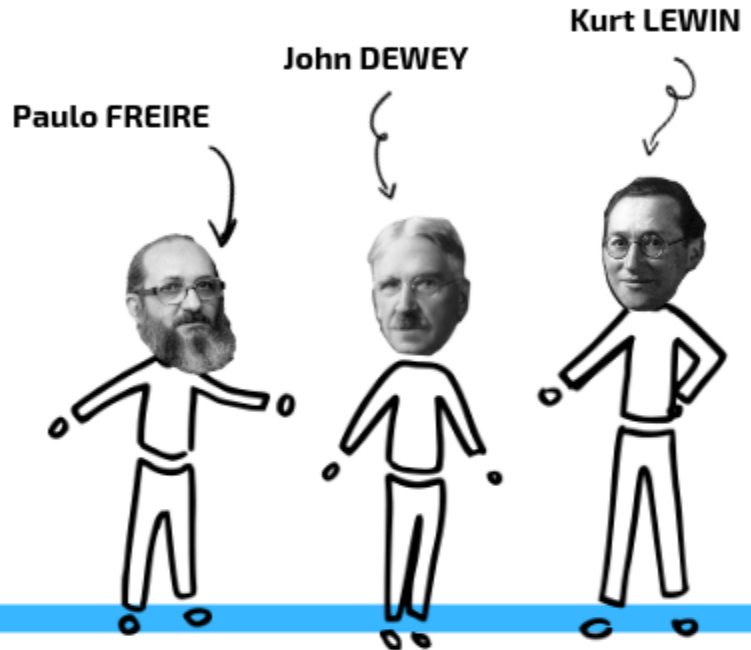
Paolo Freire, Brazilian pedagogue, particularly around the notion of popular education and research as a committed practice of solidarity and support.
Freire and Faundez (1989) present human life as an incessant questioning that exposes it to permanent risks, at the source of ruptures. They advocate the use of the question as one of the basic approaches to understanding the educational act, because **questioning is a creative process capable of stimulating the implementation of means to respond to existential problems**. This pedagogical perspective contrasts with what Freire (1974) described as banking pedagogy, the answer, and any form of top-down transmission of knowledge. The trainer is responsible for designing and implementing the most favourable conditions for a process of production of this knowledge by the learners. More precisely, the pedagogy of the question is based on a few premises:

- all human beings without exception can learn, because this is the hallmark of their incompleteness (Freire, 2006);

- all human beings without exception know something, and that something is valuable;

- the subject is responsible for building knowledge and giving it new meaning;

- a human subject learns when the educator sets out a life project (an existential situation) in which knowledge acquires meaning;

- Questioning calls for both an existential dimension (it interacts with life), a methodological dimension (it poses a problem and requires the search for knowledge) and a political dimension (it is a democratic act that establishes dialogue and stimulates a process of critical reflection.)

Freire then starts from what he calls a **problem-situation**, i.e. an identified situation that becomes the object of a dialogue and is therefore problematized (induces a questioning). This problem must then be posed in such a way as to highlight both that it results from a difficulty (its negative side) and that it prompts the project (the positive side). What is at the heart of a situation-problem is therefore the process by which the subject produces the problem or, in other words, the meaning attributed to the situation by the subject learning through his or her ability to pose and construct the problem.

The methodological approach focuses on addressing situations that concern groups and individuals. The hypothesis supported by the PAR is that young people have relevant, unknown and very rich knowledge on topics that affect them. Indeed, as Hadfield and Haw (2001) suggest, we may think that young people are in the best position to talk about being young or to identify what directly concerns them.

Therefore, we can question the relation between knowledge from the field, sometimes called « secular » or « profane » and knowledge that is considered as more traditional, academic. **What is a relevant knowledge? And who knows best?** PAR promotes the idea that all knowledge is equally important and can even be complementary. It seems important to involve people who have a deeper knowledge of this process within **collective research in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of the subject through co-production of the knowledge** (Ostrom, 1996).

The co-construction process of research allows us to enter into a reflexive process, to **question oneself and one's own projects and thus realize one's own capacities to trigger and control action** (Bednarz and Desgagné, 2005).

3. BENEFIT

& G◉ALS

Through the co-production of research, communities can help to improve research results and find workable solutions to their problems or questions (Wakeford and Sanchez Rodriguez, 2018). The research project can then have an impact, be a **conduit of social transformation or change**, at scale.

For example, a group of young boys excluded from their schools wanted get involved in a PAR project to express their point of view on their exclusion. Through better mutual understanding they wanted to try to change the way the school manages this type of profile in the future (Example 1).

Finally, the Partibridges project is based on a logic of **transferability**, portability. The aim is to be able to communicate and disseminate the results of these 4 participatory research projects, via the web documentary and methodological guide, which can be used alone or in relation with the results from production 1.
In PartiBridges, the transfer, dissemination tool will be a web doc that explains the process, the initial principles and the lived experience of doing a PAR project. A separate guide will be produced by the coordinators explaining the style, format and technical aspects of the web documentaries, this will be made available in the Autumn.

THE POSITION AND ROLE OF RESEARCHERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Teacher-researcher

Co-researcher, coach, mediator, facilitator, the researcher's position is rather that of a resource person who encourages reflection and discussion. His expertise lies more in the methodology than in the content (Morrissette 2013). However, in the transfer of knowledge, researchers must take care not to give a too restricted framework to co-researchers, which would limit their expression.

The position given to professionals and young people, both in the construction of research, in its implementation and in the production of the resulting knowledge, is important.

In PAR, a **symmetrical relationship between all the participants**, called co-researchers and who may even be co-supervisors, is expected (Bonny, 2015). The position of the co-researcher does not imply that they perform the same tasks rather it follows the logic of co-construction, based on the idea that everyone can participate in different ways. People can also be involved at different times, at different stages of the project (Zamenopoulos and Alexiou, 2018).

Youth worker

Co-researchers, they also have field expertise and related questions. They can be a less formal interlocutor for young co-researchers and facilitate contact at the beginning of the project. However, they are not supervisors but resource and support contacts. This is the case, for example, in the German research team with young people from child protection : educators are also co-researchers and listen to young researchers even in informal moments (Example 2).

Young people

Co-researchers, they have questions, convictions, feelings to express and therefore hold important knowledge. They are on an equal footing with other co-investigators, regardless of profession or age.

Relational dimension : Interpersonal Link, trust, security

The implementation of a PAR project is based on **human relationships**, which allow dialogue and production of cross disciplinary knowledge.
During the action research with a team of social workers as well as with a group of insecure young people, time was taken to introduce themselves, during which everyone gave a small part of their personal history to build the relationship of trust and avoid the position of "interviewer-interviewed" (Example n°3).

Mutual understanding, respect and sensitivity for everyone's needs are key considerations that make this type of project possible. This suggests that we should take time to reflect about how to facilitate group work and communication to enable these to be key features of the PAR projects. Furthermore, in aiming to improve practice, it is necessary to be mindful of how questions may be interpreted as the following example shows.
In a project which aimed to improve a teacher's pedagogy in mathematics, the researcher asked many questions oriented towards the teacher's professional practices, but the teacher admitted that this implied the researcher was being critical. This left them feeling insecure about their choices and knowledge. A discussion among the teacher and researcher identified this problem and allowed the research to continue thus showing the importance of cultivating an honest, open relationship where indivdiuals reflect upon positions of power that they may occupy (Example 4).

5. AGILE, FLEXIBLE METHODOLOGY

The PAR approach requires **agility** in project planning and methods used. Indeed, it is during the implementation, and in response to the different views of participants and the first results that shape the research process. Therefore, **it is not expected that the methods used are set from the outset**.

By recognizing the plurality of knowledge, we also promote the **importance of recognising multiple points of view**. The diversity of points of views, opinions and positions of co-researchers must therefore be taken into account, so that they can be expressed and expanded throughout the process (Desgagné, 1997).
Nevertheless, it is important to identify the **context** of these points of view (contextualized reality, rooted in a specific place at a given time) but also the **social representations** that influence each of our opinions. We need to understand and integrate them in order to take a step back in the construction of knowledge.
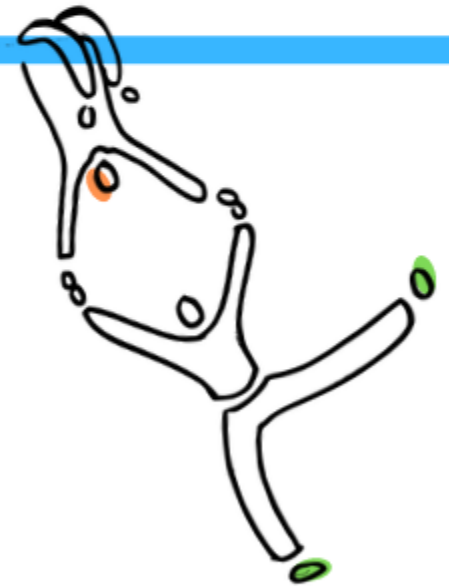
Then, moments of collective reflection play an essential role in the collection of points of view, which must be able to be expressed and extended throughout the process.

The evolutionary nature of the methodology is made possible by **constant feedback,** a **process of reflexivity** and back and forth. Thus, the idea to keep in mind is a "cyclical process of action, observation, readjustment, analysis" (Rinaudo and Roditi, Interview with Nadine Berdnarz, 2015).
Co-researchers are therefore experimenting the research process but also the methods used, whether for internal communication within the group or for data collection.
Writing, and more specifically the text, is the traditional source of information in the research process, but it is not necessarily everyone's favorite mode of expression! Beyond the written word, "beyond-text", other methods can allow reflection and restitution in a project (Beebeejaun et al, 2014). **Visual methods, artistic practices, are often used to capture and report things in a sensitive way** (As in example n°5!).
The idea therefore is to **experiment, to remain agile, to be able to question everything and evolve, change, rebound**.

6. WATCH POINTS

If PAR allows the emergence of new knowledge, it is important to always keep in mind the purpose of the research and who benefits from it. It is important to be careful that there is **no manipulation of the project for production purposes**, instrumentalization of the research (by researchers, institutions...). Therefore when defining the research topic, it is essential to start **from the interest of young people or in short, what already exists**. Here we mean the existing context, the existing knowledge, resulting from practice but also existing desires. It is not a question of stimulating a new idea but rather providing an opportunity for something to be worked with in a different way. In this sense, decisions must be supported by researchers and taken by participants.

But then who are the participants of a PAR? Should we look for diversity at all costs? It depends on the very purpose of the research, the only criterion being that people have an interest in it. If the topic requires great rigour on a specific matter, the desire to be inclusive should not prevent the inclusion of profiles of people with specific skills (Lushey and Monroe, 2014). These skills can come from their education, experience and life paths.

The research can then start from different types of topics, different desires:

- the desire to make a difference to young people from child welfare backgrounds, who wish to engage in a dialogue with the management of these institutions in order to improve the support and management of similar cases in the future (Example 1)

- reflect on major concepts such as identity and share perceptions of key issues (Example 2 and 5)

- to get involved in an activist cause, such as feminist action (Example n°6)

One pitfall to avoid is to impose a group a topic that does not correspond to members concerns or interests. The group may be artificial but it must be formed by the desire to question itself on a subject, which may also be proposed to them by some of the people concerned. For example, the impetus may come from professionals who demonstrate a desire to reflect on a topic and who mobilise young people accordingly, ie social workers (Example 3).

Finally, it is necessary to **take care of the personal interests of the participants** during and even after the project. Young people's participation in research is not always in their interest and can have negative consequences when results are published. The researcher must keep this in mind and try to make sure at the end of the research, that results will be ethically used. From the beginning of the project, the objectives must therefore be clear to allow participants to give their free and informed consent (Smith, 1990). Anonymity and confidentiality are also to be agreed with the participants. In the case of producing the web documentary, steps need to be taken to either obsecure the identity of participants or ensure that participants consent to be visible and hence not anoymised. Similarly, participants may wish to named as a co-researcher rather than having a pseudonym but again this has implications for identification and the expectations of ethical frameworks that partners must adhere to. We will discuss these ethical considerations and decide an approach at the November meeting in Rennes.

7. SOME EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1 - PAR TO CHANGE A SCHOOL'S APPROACH TOWARD STUDENTS AT RISK OF EXCLUSION

Mark Hadfield & Kaye Haw (2001) 'Voice', young people and action research, Educational Action Research, 9:3, 485-502, DOI: 10.1080/09650790100200165

A group of fourteen young boys who were excluded from their school (or who stopped going on their own) conducted action research, in partnership with a university team, to change the school's approach toward students who have a profile at risk of exclusion. Their final production was made in the form of a video.

EXAMPLE 2 - TWO PARs ALLOWING YOUNG PEOPLE TO SHARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILD PROTECTION PATHWAYS

Robin, Pierrine, Marie-Pierre Mackiewicz, et Timo Ackermann. 2017. « Des adolescents et jeunes allemands et français confiés à la protection de l'enfance font des recherches sur leur monde ». Sociétés et jeunesses en difficulté. Revue pluridisciplinaire de recherche (18).

Two participatory survey systems "with peers" were implemented in Germany and France with young people from child welfare, researchers and members of associations. They offered the co-researchers a two-day introduction to survey methods for the German project and four days on site for the French project. The aim was to agree on the aims of the research and the methods to be used, but also to found the collective. They used pictures and stories from their every daylife to introduce the collection of emotions and put them in a situation for data collection. Work on short academic texts followed to confront them with their perceptions. Issues that were not initially considered emerged during the discussions (such as horizontal socialisation). Concerning the analysis, two-day exchange periods in Germany and around twenty weekends in France were organised to analyse in a group the material collected. It was made possible thanks to readings of the verbatims of interviews with several people, for example, in order to try to jointly analyse the data.

EXAMPLE 3 - PAR TO BETTER UNDERSTAND AND PREVENT SITUATIONS OF BREAKDOWN IN CHILD PROTECTION PATHWAYS

Interview with Virginie Muniglia (Research Teacher) and Karrine Guilloux (Research Engineer), on 13/05/19

A team of social workers asked EHESP researchers to conduct research on disadvantaged young people and, initially, about why they had run away from child protection institutions. With the participation of young people in the research, the topic was transformed and switched to situations of breakdown: between young people's relationships with child protection services. A public consultation took place, specifically with relevant institutions in disadvantaged young people's lives.

EXAMPLE 4 - PAR IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHANGING THE PEDAGOGY OF A MATHEMATICS TEACHER

Laplante, Bernard. 2005. « Cheminement éthique d'un chercheur engagé en recherche collaborative ». Revue des sciences de l'éducation 31(2):417-40.

Bernard Laplante, a university researcher, carried out an action research project with Annie Mona, a 3rd/4th grade teacher in England with the aim of "enriching the teaching strategies used in mathematics lessons". After that, they took turns giving lessons observing each other's course, each other's attitude, and by making systematic feedback to each other.

EXAMPLE 5 - USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN A PAR ON PERCEPTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF IDENTITY

Pool, S. (2018) 'Everything and nothing is up for grabs: Using artistic methods within participatory research' in Facer, K. and Dunleavy, K. Connected Communities Foundation Series. Bristol: University of Bristol/AHRC Connected Communities Programme.

The Being Cindy Sherman project was part of the Community Arts Zone (CAZ) research project, which explored how creative methods could be used in research with young people A group of researchers drew inspiration from Cindy Sherman's photographic style (self-portrait series about identity), and worked closely with high school teachers and students for six weeks in three schools in the Niagara region of Canada, where students took their own conceptual photographs and attended an exhibition of their work in a local art gallery. The aim was to draw attention to how we introduce and represent our identity, and how these representations affect it.

The young co-researchers were encouraged to write texts to support the photographs in an attempt to extend their story. The public was also invited to interpret the photographs. Researchers then conducted interviews with three students from each case study high school, as well as taking notes in the field during observations and practical work with the students. All teachers who participated in the research were interviewed. All these views were used in the analysis.

EXAMPLE 6 : A PAR FROM A PARKOUR GROUP TO ANALYSE AND COMMUNIVCATE ABOUT THEIR PRACTICE

Partispace Project

This PAR Project was done by and with a group of tracers, i. e. people practicing Parkour, a physical training method that develops the ability to overcome obstacles (physical and mental) by moving through a - typically urban - environment to get from a starting point to an arrival point as efficiently as possible. They argue that the fleetingness of parkour activity generally prevents any use conflicts from taking place, so there is very little public inconvenience. On the contrary, according to this PARproject, Parkour allows participants to extend their sensory perceptions throughout the city and, as a technique of spatial conquest and self-conquest, can be understood as a form of individual self-expansion. A video was produced by the participants to convey how their style of participation is influenced by space and place but also what it means to be involved on an individual and collective level.

EXAMPLE 7 - A PAR TO ADVANCE GENDER HISTORICAL ANALYSIS ANF THE WAY HISTORY IS TAUGHT AT THE UNIVERSITY

Myers, K. and Grosvenor, I. (2018) 'Collaborative Research: History from Below' in Facer, K. and Dunleavy, K. (eds.) Connected Communities Foundation Series. Bristol: University of Bristol/AHRC Connected Communities Programme.

"Groups about Feminist history" brought together women looking for historical issues and provided a space not only to share results but also problems encountered. The technique used was the collection of testimonies, with the aim of writing and transmitting a story that takes into account, emotions and feelings. These groups are part of a movement led by students at the University of Birmingham who wanted, among others, "another type of education", specifically at the level of history: an education that would encourage students to think critically about who writes, in what context and for what audience. The "group about feminist History" at the University of Birmingham has helped to cultivate the revolutionary gender and analysis of class that will be published in the book Family Fortunes. This research also led to a public march (sponsored by the Feminist Reviews) on the topic of Birmingham women: Past and Present.

EXAMPLE 8 : A PAR PROJECT BY YOUNG MEN HOMELESS MEN IN MANCHESTER.

Rowley, H (2019) Lost and Found: Ethnographic Researcher and Arts Practitioners getting lost and coming home in Ferro, L. and Poveda, D. (eds.) Arts and ethnography in a contemporary world: From learning to social participation. London: The Tufnell Press.

Partispace Project

'The Box' is a social and arts charity for young homeless men, the researcher (Harriet Rowley) worked with a core group of participants (8 men) to generate a creative installation in the city to explore the lived experiences of being homeless and counteract stigmitised, neoliberal narratives often associated with the homeless community. The men took an active role in the direction of the project and in developing and making the creative outputs. The art installation that was created ultimately centred around viewing boxes displaying aspects of being homeless on a miniature scale. Evoking imagery from Victorian Britain's 'freak shows', the boxes were designed to encourage audience members to peer in and view a depiction created by the men around five aspects of their lived experience – mental health, substance use, washing, sleeping and getting support. The boxes were located in planters containing a variety of flora and fauna, which worked in tandem with the visual material inside the boxes. The boxes were temporarily placed in key sites around the city designed to attract the attention of passers-by. Over two days, three of the ten men led walking tours to pre-selected groups comprising of local government representatives, third sector workers, academics, community artists, educators and members of the homeless community, explaining their creative process alongside their personal experiences of living on the streets. A film was also produced which explained the process of the PAR project and included interviews and reflections from those involved.

AND SOON YOUR OWN EXAMPLES !

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A useful web-based archive of PAR projects :

https://connected-communities.org/index.php/cluster/participatory-arts-2/

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