Case Study: Participatory Development

Participatory Development was a very popular development approach in the 1990s, and continues to be used. It evolved from and includes "Participatory Rural Appraisal" (PRA) which was an innovation in the sense that it combined Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Research into a new development approach. It is an interesting case study because it is a "software" technology rather than a "hardware" technology, because it has undergone a huge amount of reinvention during and since its diffusion, and because it has, over the last few years, seen a trend of "abandonment" (it was a development phase that is not so popular anymore).

1. First, please read the article by **Robert Chambers**. This is a rather technical exploration of the innovation in its early years (you can skim the technical parts).

2. Next, I would like to sketch the evolution from PRA to participatory development. A good way is to *chronologically* look through the titles and perhaps abstracts of articles in the Journal "PLA Notes". The list of the previous 55 issues is available at: **http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/backissues.html**. Note how the subjects evolve from RRA to PRA to a range of other approaches to problems/criticisms...

3. Participatory development became hugely popular in the 1990s, and had many positive results and effects. I could give you some readings about how great PD is, but I would like to focus on the more interesting (for the purpose of this class) diffusion stages of reinvention, confirmation, rejection: Please read the short editorial by **Guijt and Cornwall**. This outlines the major questions that begin to arise around PD in the middle-to-late nineties. PD has in some instances evolved to improve on these issues, but overall has lost its momentum. A closer look at PLA Notes No. 50 can perhaps give you an idea of current trends.

There is not a lot of reading (24 pages + a list of abstracts) involved, but perhaps more thinking. My goal for the class discussion is to try to understand the diffusion process of this innovation. While you read, please think of the following questions:
- who were the innovators;
- who were the early adopters and who were the middle and late adopters;
- which particular applications/fields corresponded with early, middle and late adopters;
- in which ways has the innovation been "reinvented" for the good and for the better;
- what goes on during the "confirmation stage";
- how can we explain the abandonment of the innovation;
- is the abandonment a "replacement" in favour of a better technology;
- what are the lessons we can draw from the PD experience;
- what do you think of this innovation?