

# Action Research



Ever felt out of touch from decision making? Fed up complaining and want to do something? Get more involved in your community?

## Participatory Action Research is an approach to Learning, research and action.

We have all been asked to fill out questionnaires and consultations with tick box answers. This kind of research we will be carrying out is different from that. Tick box consultations are about collecting data and producing an analysis of the data - and that's it. Our research will be about collecting information and using it to do something.

## Training

It will also be about training and learning: Training up local stakeholders. Working out methodology and approaches to working. Engaging the community in forming the questions that will be asked. Designing literature, formats for collecting, processing and collaborative analysis of findings. And. Creating our own documentation to represent our findings.

We hope to find community facilitators by doing workshops to find who can help with the consultation and also helping to building the group. This kind of research is an approach to improving social practice by "changing it" and learning from the consequences of change.

Can sounds more difficult than it is. But these

are tools you will not give up once learned. The point here is, if we do not do this work, someone else will on your behalf and you probably won't like it, because it will have little to do with you if you are not involved in the process.

## Who know best?

People in the community are the real experts on community matters and any solution to address community matters should include their voices. This would seem obvious. It is not the case though. The community needs to find the confidence, that they, are the real experts, because they, are the closest to the expedience.

## Deserted island thinking

**Think about it this way:** What would happen when the surviving passengers from a sunk ship reach dry land on a deserted island. So these are people with various capabilities and skills - The doctor, the mathematician, the millionaire boss of a corporation, the carpenter, the

warehouse man, the waitress... So what happens. Does the millionaire, after swimming ashore, reach for the nearest hammock and say, "I don't need to work, I am a millionaire." Does the doctor join him on another and say. "There is no one sick yet, I need not work." Does the waitress then run around serving everybody -while the carpenter builds the shelter?

I think not. At that stage in time the value hierarchy the social order, would reverse.

For, what good is a millionaire on a desert island? Whereas, a carpenter could produce, maybe even life saving possibilities by the use of his or her skills, in designing and constructing a shelter. So, should the carpenter head for the hammock and say. If you pay me well, I may build a shelter for you? No of course not. Probably they all would have to dig in and decide on the allocation of work to be done by each of them, if they are to survive. New skills would need to be learned and decisions made by each of the group that could be crucial for their survival. They would need to think afresh of their situation. When we build our community resources this is how we need to think.

## Who's values?

There is nothing stopping people from creating their own institutions, their own conventions, their own value systems and making them work. Some would say it is an imperative that we do. To state this is to remind ourselves of how far society has been locked into the ridged structure that forms so much misery for many people. We are not beans to be counted by corporate values, we are human beings and our views far to sophisticated for box ticking. We need to ask. Like the above example we need to ask. What does a millionaire know about how we should live your life? Why should we let folk just because the own property decide your existence? That's basically how the present system works. We need to think afresh about these ideas, but we also need to participate and act if we want to build an alternative. Most of the problems in the community can be solved by the people in the community. Not by those unaware of the community experience, working out-side of its boundaries and importing solutions in.

## Questioning ourselves

But the community also needs to ask questions of itself. How we get

ourselves going. How we motivate activity. How we learn to work with each other. How we learn to respect each others view points. How we find consensus on activities that can help us move on.

Getting started on the process of community activity, can be very difficult at first but at the same time, be the easiest thing out. We talk to each other all of the time about our

problems, about our solutions to them. Then we tend to stop! Or repeat them over. This is a very important part of the process, we need to voice our concerns. But we can not deal with our problems in isolation.

## Small steps

The next part of the process is to take small easy steps. Talk to your neighbours, friends and associates. Discover the interests or issues that are most important to you all. Discuss ways you can get more folk involved. A social gathering, event, trip, walk, picnic, stuff that is kid friendly and at a time most folk can get to them.

No one from the outside can tell you what to do here. Every group has its own dynamic, interests, circumstances. The group needs to make the decision themselves of where they are headed. What is it we want to achieve. (Small achievable things at first). Then it is an idea to look around the community, put out some feelers, to see if anyone else is already doing the same kind of work as you. You could amalgamate groups. But whatever you do, at least you will be aware of what others are doing and you will have started.

## Change

This is important because we can not make big change on our own. We will need many people and the more we are open to creating solidarity with others the stronger we will be down the line. This can be important to learn earlier on, as there is always the danger, groups become single issue entities, when funding and paid employment can start to influence the core aims of the group. But that is for later.

We are all involved in community activism by the simple fact that we live there, work there, or have a relationship to the place. But what is described above is how communities have dealt with local politics for millenniums. There is absolutely nothing complicated about it, you do not need to become an "activist" you

already are. There are no qualifications needed, you do not need permission to participate and there are a tonne of resources, groups, people that can help out.

## Where there's a will

The most important ingredient that hasn't been mentioned yet is "will" To paraphrase the old saying with no will, there is no way. The lack of will in folk to do anything, is probably a bigger threat to our communities than all the corporations, gentrifiers, polluters and social ills put together. We also need to use and become aware of the liberties, assets and advancements that ordinary people have sacrificed through struggled for centuries to better folks lives now. Our work should also protect these legacies -one of great importance being the commons.

## So what is the Common Good Fund?

The "Common Good Fund" is very special in Scotland because there are a set of laws (unique to this country), through which assets such as land, buildings and objects—art-works, collections donated by people from all kinds off backgrounds can be placed and protected in public ownership. These assets are part of a Common Good Fund through which money derived from these valuables (such as through rent) is, by law, supposed to go back into that fund and be made available for public benefit. At present Common Good Funds are often poorly maintained and the public are not receiving the full benefit of them.

Common Good assets can run into tens of millions of pounds in different towns, villages and cities. And these are only part of huge public assets that have been accumulating all over Scotland for over 500 years.

## The Fairfield Farmhouse

is the building that sits within the community garden in Elder park. A trust was set up to renovate the building and bring it into community use. The project is being developed within and as part of the common good of the city. The vision for the use of the building is being created through developing an education policy that will encourage community members to participate in every aspect of the process. Which is the main basis of the Participatory Action Research Project.

We do not set out in this work to solve your problems for you, only you can do that. What we do offer are the tools that can allow participation through a useful lens that will allow folk to look at things around their own interest and concerns and how they could go about tackling them.

## WANTED



£1.8 billion or more of land and assets belonging to the public has been lost due to centuries of mismanagement and corruption. Campaigners claim this land and assets are being misappropriated or even stolen.

Treasure hunt - Where is our Common Good? The Common Good is all around you - see if you can find some. Send us pictures. Ask us questions. What about your local library, your park. Who do you think owns all the pictures and treasures in the art galleries? Lets learn to find and recognise our public common good - take public ownership of it. Because if we don't someone else will and we will never see it again.

Wanted: Common Good Detectives, Researchers, Information, Contact: [Info@comglas.co.uk](mailto:Info@comglas.co.uk) for updates. Meetings, Schedules, Events, Contacts.