

NEGOTIATING WITH KNOWLEDGE AT DEVELOPMENT INTERFACES. ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE QUEST FOR PARTICIPATION¹

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Whose participation, whose development?

‘Participating in Development’, the title of the 2000 ASA Conference, contains an intentional ambiguity and leaves room for interpretation: Who will participate here and in whose development? Is it the anthropologist, for whom ‘exciting events’ in the development scene have opened opportunities ‘to engage practically as never before’, as the call for papers suggests? Is it the local communities, for whom ‘a revolution in anthropological method and theory in the new millennium’ might open the door to be ‘no longer research subjects but participants’ (ibid.)? Even if many anthropologists seem happily unaware of it, Sillitoe recognizes ‘a revolution in the pursuit of ethnography’ (1998b: 204, also 1998a) in an article published three years ago. This revolution comes together with the recent participatory approach in development circles, namely the interest in local knowledge/indigenous knowledge² in bottom-up approaches. With the expertise needed here, Sillitoe sees a chance for anthropologists to consolidate their place in development practice as implementing partners.

¹ Thanks go to Christine Bald, Christoph Antweiler and Paul Sillitoe for valuable comments and critique to earlier versions of this contribution.

² Following Ellen (1998) I take indigenous knowledge (IK) to describe knowledge that is ‘local, orally transmitted, a consequence of practical engagement, reinforced by experience, empirical rather than theoretical, repetitive, fluid and negotiable, shared but asymmetrically distributed, largely functional, and embedded in a more encompassing cultural matrix’ (Ellen 1998: 238; see also Ellen and Harris 1997). Concerning development in resettlement schemes for example, cultural identity sometimes can be found to be bound to specific symbolic places in the old area. Here anthropological expertise on culturally bound IK is mostly needed, because people may not adapt even to a physically similar environment (cf. Cernea 1999; Sillitoe 1998a for IK in situations of rapid change). Local knowledge in a broader sense fits with ‘situated knowledge’ where practices of (different kinds of) people living together in an environment draw on locally available resources (cf. Antweiler, this volume).

In the early 1990s Johan Pottier (1993) in his *Practising Development* noted an increased emphasis on research informed by ethnography. The discovery of the 'human factor' and participatory approaches to development has provided several openings for qualitative, contextual research and Pottier sees a new generation of social analysts emerging. 'This new generation of (mainly) social anthropologists has gained relevant experience by eking out autonomous positions at the interface between local-level agency personnel and targeted beneficiaries (Pottier 1993: 2). A combination of participatory and anthropological research in the project context should help us to escape the dilemma of conventional anthropological research, 'so often criticised for being isolationist and unrelated to community needs', and at the same time exploiting the advantage of ethnographic understanding, reducing the risk 'that false assumptions creep into the design of development programmes'(Pottier 1993: 3).

I would, however, doubt both assumptions: that of a revolutionary new era for the practice of anthropology with development,³ and that of new opportunities for local communities through the marriage of participatory and anthropological research. My reservations towards the first assumption come from academic anthropology's unresolved relationship with development and applied research; the reservations towards the second from fundamental inconsistencies between participatory and academic anthropological research tradition.

Though empirical in view, an actor oriented theoretical perspective informs the chapter. It seeks to understand social action at development interfaces. Here people from the academy, development agencies and 'local communities' shape processes and outcomes in ways that are both creative and constrained.⁴ It accepts but goes beyond the discourse oriented 'deconstruction of development approach' offered by Escobar, Ferguson or Hobart in the 1990s (Escobar 1991, Ferguson 1990, Hobart 1993). Modernity, development and knowledge from this perspective are not only categories imposed by a Western discourse to discipline and transform local realities. They are also features that are reworked from within by local actors to shape and enhance their room for action, in a field where power and resources are limited and unevenly distributed.⁵ This holds true for local actors in places where development practitioners work and anthropologists undertake research. It also holds true in the institutions that employ developers and anthropologists, where they earn their living, seek approval and power, and advance their careers.

Opportunities for anthropology to engage practically in development as never before

³ For other critical comments on this assumption see Brokensha (1998), Ferradás (1998) and Posey (1998).

⁴ Cecile Jackson, in a comment to Crewe and Harrison's (1998) inspiring book *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid*.

⁵ Regarding the aspect of knowledge and power in this approach, on a theoretical level see Long and Long (1992); on a methodological level see Smith et al. (1997). Regarding development and power see Nelson and Wright (1995); on 'counter development strategies' see Arce and Long (2000). Regarding the construction of multiple modernities see Comaroff and Comaroff (1993) and Arce and Long (2000).

As the national institutional settings are different, in order to assess anthropology's opportunities to engage in development, I take the German scene as an example, and only then take a look abroad to countries sharing the same development discourse.⁶

Many anthropologists in Germany, some in prominent positions, oppose the disciplines engagement with development. This is reflected in the at times uneasy position of the Working Group on Development Anthropology/Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklungsethnologie (AGEE) with its mother organization Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde (DGV). In 1987, when the informal working group asked for recognition as an official working group of the DGV, there were massive protests by members, some of whom even threatened to resign, leading to a refusal of the application. Basically the critique was connected with three positions, which I will label: 'the purists', 'the innocents' and 'the ethical correct' Their arguments may be characterized as follows:

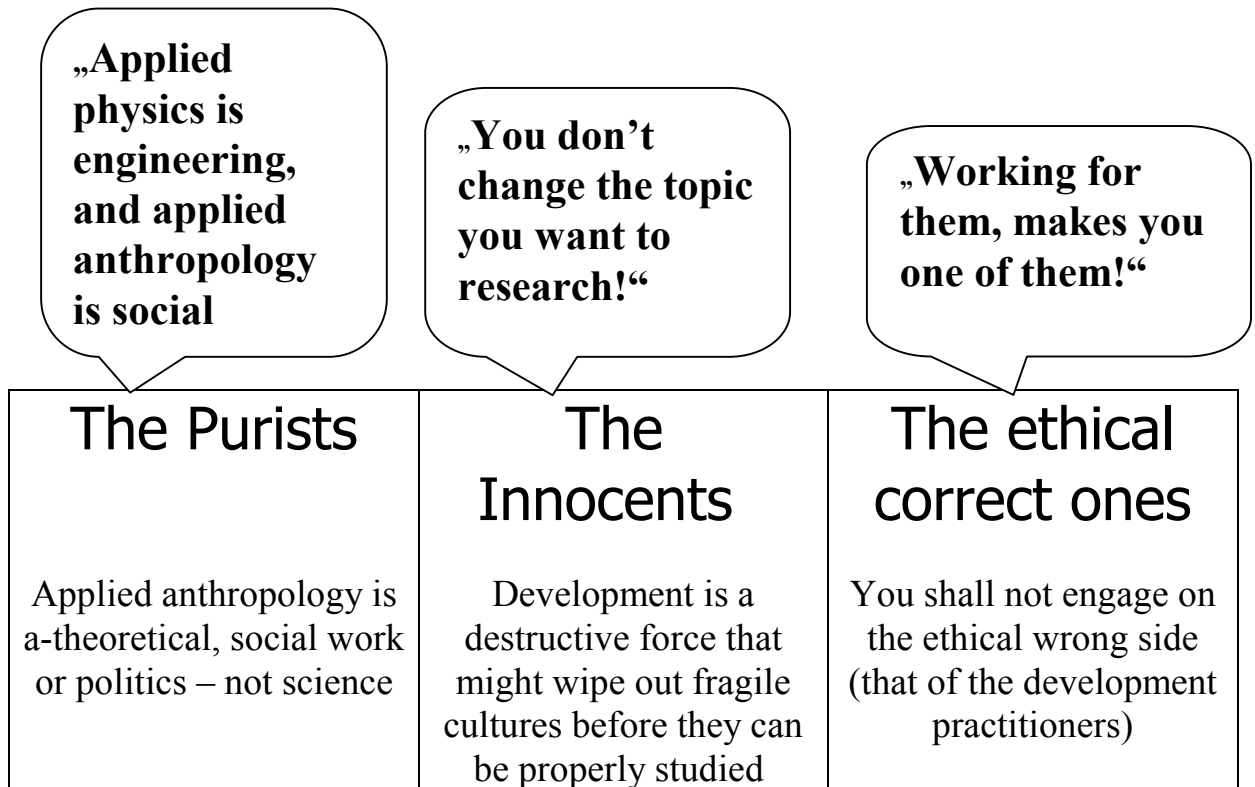


Fig.1: "Positions against the participation of anthropology in the practical arena"

The argument of the *purists*, shown in a testimony attributed to the famous American cultural anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn in the 1950s, reflects an old but still existing conflict between those paid by and working for an academy, and those who earn their money beyond the halls of an academy, dependent on market rules. As

⁶ Namely the Western donor countries with an anthropological tradition. For a totally different development discourse of a non-Western donor country (Japan), see John Clammer's remarkable contribution to this volume.

a result of the discussions with the faction of the *ethically correct* – representatives of a Working Group on ‘Ethics’ in Anthropology in Germany (cf. Amborn 1993) – the AGEE has developed ‘Ethical Guidelines’ for anthropological work (AGEE 2000). The strength of their position has somehow declined in the debate in recent years. However, the positions of the *purists* – those who look down on practical anthropology as being non- scientific – and of those whom I named the *Innocents* – for whom development is a destructive force that might wipe out fragile cultures before they can be properly studied (Ferguson (1996)) – still is prominent in Germany. Most practice oriented development researchers with an anthropological background have left the halls of academe and are engaged within development agencies or non-governmental organizations. Although AGEE received official ‘accreditation’ in 1989, it is still not advisable to be either an anthropologist in development (i.e. to be engaged practically) nor to work and publish at the interface (i.e. an informed anthropology of development) if you do not wish to lose academic credibility (cf. Antweiler (1998), Bliss (1988) and Schönhuth (1998b)).

Looking abroad

In Germany there is only a loose connection between anthropologists engaging with development and the discipline, be it through distinguished representatives of anthropology, ⁷ through institutional cooperation agreements, or research institutes that work at the interface.⁸ To my view, the absence of anthropological institutions at the interface is one major obstacle to further anthropological engagement in this field.

This applies beyond Germany, as Prudence Woodford-Berger observes regarding the six anthropologists employed in the Swedish Development Unit (DSU) in the 1990s:

Few is the number of those, who look back on a qualified anthropological education, who understand themselves as anthropologists and who work at the same time as anthropologists in development co-operation [...] Actually, not one of us succeeded in linking these two worlds successfully in our personal careers to some extent (Woodford-Berger 1996: 118).

A review and comparison of development anthropology in five countries (USA, Great Britain, Norway, Sweden and The Netherlands, cf. Schönhuth 1998b) reveals that the arguments put forward against the establishment of the AGEE in the 1980s exist in the wider anthropological community. Even for the United States, where work on social change (development, modernization) increased in status after World War II, Ferguson (1996) describes anthropological work on development as becoming more and more adjusted to the bureaucratic demands of development agencies at the expense of intellectual rigor and critical self-consciousness, ‘leaving behind a low-prestige, practice-oriented sub field of “development anthropology”’ (1996: 159). I won’t dare to judge this argument for American development anthropology in general,⁹ but looking at the excellent work of the

⁷ Such as Fredrik Barth in Norway, Roger Bastide and George Balandier in France, Raymond Firth, Polly Hill and Scarlett Epstein in England, Elizabeth Colson, David Brokensha, Michael Horowitz and Thayer Scudder in the USA.

⁸ Postgraduates interested in the field have to move to other faculties where anthropological topics in the field of development are touched upon, e.g. development sociology in Bielefeld, agrarian (Berlin, CATAD) or economic courses of intercultural communication (Munich for example).

⁹ Regarding the situation for practising and development anthropologists in the USA see Baba (1994),

Institute of Development Anthropology in Binghamton for example, one can hardly find proof for this testimony.¹⁰ On the other hand it is remarkable that out of 11 commentators of an overview article on IK and applied anthropology (Sillitoe 1998a) only one (Brokensha 1998) admits that many academic peers are sceptical or even hostile towards any involvement of anthropology with development.

In my view, the prejudices and arguments against development oriented anthropology also seem to work abroad. Maybe, the fact that during the ASA 2000 conference the ‘pure academic faction’ of British anthropology with its prominent representatives was hardly to be seen, was also not by accident, but due to this circumstance. I would agree with Sillitoe that, from the side of development, the prospects to integrate anthropological competence are quite good.¹¹ It is the triade of reservations from the discipline of the “purists”, the “ethically correct” and the “innocents”, that makes me sceptical about anthropology’s opportunities to engage practically in development as never before.

Combining academic anthropology with the participatory approach – new opportunities for local communities?

Anthropological research can often be a vehicle for the appropriation – not the protection – of indigenous knowledge (Posey 1998). Bridging the gap between observer and observed, and making local people active partners in research is therefore the request of anthropologists who combine participant observation and participatory research.¹² For Wright and Nelson in their comparison of both approaches a synthesis would hold the possibility ‘of combining an approach constructing people as active agents in research with new theoretical understandings of wider processes of domination, in which both researcher and participants are located and which they are in different ways seeking to change’ (1995: 59). The approaches are compatible to a great extent. Local/indigenous knowledge¹³ and

Hess (1997) and Horowitz (1994); regarding anthropological careers in general see : <http://www.ameranthassn.org/careers.htm>.

¹⁰ The Institute was founded by David Brokensha, Michael Horowitz and Thayer Scudder in 1974 and is mainly engaged in the side effects of dam projects. Scudder is one of the world’s leading experts on relocation effects. For a recent assessment of IDA’s research see Postel (1999). The homepage of the Institute is <http://www.devanth.org/index.htm>

¹¹ This also has to do with an increasing interest in culture and development. In 1997 the ‘world decade for cultural development’ came to an end and a flood of publications and conferences accompanied this event, the last one being the conference of the World Bank and UNESCO on culture and development held in Rome in October 1999. Internationally the most influential may have been the World Commission on Culture and Development Report: *Our Creative Diversity* (1995). The latest development in Germany was the delivering of a ‘cross-sectional participation concept’ in September 1999, which obliges BMZ’s administrative branches to make target group participation and consideration of the sociocultural dimension of development central to projects and programmes (see BMZ 1999).

¹² I confine my focus to the combination of research oriented anthropology with participatory approaches in the 1980s and 1990s. I will therefore not follow the much older strands of applied anthropology, action anthropology and advocacy anthropology (Read 1906; van Willigen 1993; Seithel 2000)

¹³ For a long time the richness of local knowledge was not mentioned in the participatory research paradigm. The focus was powerless people’s awareness of their oppression. It is only in recent years that it gives more credence to local perspectives (Sillitoe 1998a: 224; Biot et al. 1995).

realities lie at the heart of both, and both seek expression of local perceptions, categories and classifications. Both stress the importance of the emic perspective (from within). In both approaches building a good rapport with the group is a necessary precondition. The attitude is one of 'learning', or even 'learning to unlearn', to be open for local systems, strategies and values. The aim is to establish a dialogue – in ethnography usually with informants, in participatory research with a community group. In both approaches methods such as observation (from unobtrusive to participant), interviews (from non-structured to semi-structured) and forms of focus group discussion play a prominent role and both work (in different depths) with maps, tables and diagrams to visualize local history, physical and social relationships.

Through the principal overlaps new approaches have developed in the 1980s and 1990s that try to integrate the advantages of the ethnographic view into action oriented programmes.¹⁴ Participatory methods on the other hand also enriched the sociocultural research agenda. The National Association of Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA), a subsidiary of the American Anthropological Association, delivered as early as 1991 a brochure in which the advantages of Rapid Rural Appraisal methods (RRA) were introduced to an anthropological audience (van Willigan and Finan 1991). So the preconditions for anthropologists to engage practically in development in the last few years have been quite good.

But there are fundamental inconsistencies between participant observation and participatory research, which have to do with their different traditions. The first, from Malinowski's days onwards, takes indigenous knowledge (IK) as a resource to describe and translate sociocultural reality according to scientific standards. The second takes local knowledge as a resource to act on and change sociocultural reality together with people in a world of domination and unjustified distribution of resources. It is these different traditions that make the combination a difficult task, in which the researcher faces unsuspected dilemmas, and the actors may lose as much as they can win by negotiating with knowledge in a participatory mode.

The prerequisites of participatory research

To illustrate my point, a look at the origins and prerequisites of participatory research is helpful. Participation of local communities in research and action is far from being new. Its origins can be traced back as far as the early work of Engels (in his alignment with the working class of Manchester) or Marx (in his use of 'structured interview' with French factory workers; cf. Hall 1981: 8). In more recent times, the liberation movements in Latin America and the work of theorists on the mechanisms of cultural and economic dependency in the 1960s advanced the political participatory

¹⁴ The Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP), invented by Scrimshaw and Hurtado (1987) for the UN and spread through UN universities, understood themselves as anthropological methods for the improvement of the effectiveness of health programs. The Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA) approach of Bentley et al. (1988) stands in this tradition too. 'Listen to people' was the central message of Lawrence Salmen's (1987) 'Beneficiary Assessment' approach, which brought the method of participant observation into the evaluation programme of the World Bank's development projects. At the Development Studies Unit of the Swedish development authority SIDA, anthropologists worked on the inclusion of anthropological fieldwork methods into SIDA's 'Community Baseline Studies' in the 1990s (Rudqvist 1991).

research agenda.¹⁵

Participatory research became a prominent methodological concept when the ‘Participatory Research Network’ was created through the International Council of Adult Education in 1977. It brought together social scientists but also literacy teachers, community organizers, administrators, factory workers, and urban activists. Owing much to the work of Paulo Freire participatory research was described as ‘an integrated activity that combines *social investigation, educational work and action*’ (Hall 1981: 9, emphasis added).

Only the first edge of this triangle, the social investigation process has its roots in a scientific tradition. The *educational mandate* of academics towards a liberated knowledge of ordinary and marginalized people and the *strive for political transformation for the better* demand an explicit value position from the researcher, who sees him or herself as an agent of change in a world where social justice is still to be reached. The emphasis on action and educational work in participatory research can be seen as a reaction from Third World activists to the dominant Western research paradigm of empiricism and positivism.¹⁶

This also involves the process of social science investigation. Not only is the methodology action oriented, the research process itself is informed and partly controlled by local communities, now partners in research and analysis. The researcher becomes a facilitator in this process, who does not control the research agenda nor own the results any more. This is a process ‘by which the “raw” and somewhat unformed – or, at least, unexpressed – knowledge of ordinary people is brought into the open and incorporated into a connectable whole’ (Hall 1981: 12). The concept of participatory research has on one side socially and politically deprived communities and on the other side activist researchers with certain theories of change in mind as ‘natural’ and ideally equal counterparts. The *activist* researchers are accountable to the communities they are working with, and of course to the social or political theory which guides the researcher’s activities. The problem for the activist researcher is how to avoid imposing alienating, elitist concepts of reality or preconceived theoretical constructions on the community, a charge sometimes made against approaches inspired by the Marxist models of society.

Problems combining academic and participatory research: Evidence from practice

The problems for the researcher who tries to combine participatory research methodology within an academic research design are different from that of an activist researcher. A workshop at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in 1996 noted

¹⁵ Other strands can be found in the sociology of work, organizational psychology and the organizational management tradition of the 1930s and 1940s and the political participation of civil society in community planning such as advocacy planning, community control, neighbourhood government in USA or the German ‘Planungsbeirat’ and ‘Planungszelle’ (cf. Rucht 1982).

¹⁶ As Hall observes ‘The Third World’s contribution to social science research methods represents an attempt to find ways of uncovering knowledge that work better in societies where interpretation of reality must take second place to the changing of reality’ (Hall 1981: 8).

several dilemmas (cf. Attwood 1997) regarding time, ownership and frames of reference:

- How to reconcile the interests of researcher and local community (even if community and researcher agree on a common interest their agendas will differ, the first aiming for local action and development, the second for a Ph.D or other academic outcome).
- How to match time frames (the pace at which community members and the researcher want the project to unfold may differ considerably, the first having a life time perspective, the second time restrictions due to funding or reporting of research results).
- Who should own and who should be allowed to communicate research results (while the topic of ‘intellectual property rights for indigenous groups’ is discussed among anthropologists¹⁷, field research results are most credited by academy if they are validated, interpreted and controlled by a single author).

I want to address some of these problems empirically. The field examples mainly come from a GTZ¹⁸ project in the Rukwa region in Tanzania where I was engaged as a short term consultant on a three to four weeks per year basis from 1995–7, from numerous field workshops between 1993 and 2000 with different groups, and from a field research training programme in 1999 with students of anthropology in a Siberian village with an ethnic German population.

Finding the ‘right’ representatives

Finding the ‘right’ representatives who are legitimate counterparts within the community and not creating a biased relationship right from the start can be a problem. In a participatory one-week field workshop we facilitated in an East German village shortly after the German reunion in 1993, the first official contacts were made through the village mayor with an active group around the village pastor. Informal talks during the field stay and results of some of the participatory instruments revealed that this group and especially the pastor were marginalized in village life to a great extent because of their change orientation, the symbol of which being the modern windmill in the pastor’s garden that could be seen from every point in the village. What seemed to be a good start (having official and interested counterparts) came to be one of the main problems for a trustful research partnership with the rest of the village (cf. Schönhuth (1994); for similar experiences see Botes and van Rensburg (2000)).

In another participatory research with students of anthropology in a Siberian village in 1999, which had the situation of ethnic Germans as a research focus, the preparations had been made also through official channels together with the local teacher of German. We asked her to arrange housing for the research team of 13 people in at least four different families to get different household perspectives and family strategies into view. It was only at the end of the week, while trying to generate a kinship village diagram, that we recognized that the whole research team was lodged in one and the same big family clan (cf. Schönhuth et al. 2000). Although

¹⁷ Cf. Greaves (1994) for an overview and Strathern et al. (1998) for a controversial debate.

¹⁸ GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit). The German Development Agency is the implementing agency for personnel cooperation of the national ministry of Development (BMZ).

marginalized informants and biased field access are classic ethnographic research problems (cf. Stocking 1983), in participatory research the question of who biases the information and to whose end is much more prevalent because of the active part local people play in the research process.

At the end of the field workshop we presented a video taken in Trier, our University town in Germany. It showed interviews with German emigrants (*Aussiedler*) from Russia regarding their partly problematic integration into German society. We wanted to confront the idealistic imaginations of those who wanted to migrate with the reality of those who already had migrated. It was remarkable that not one of the participants wanted to comment on the testimonies in the film, and even more so that there was little enthusiasm to discuss with us the outcomes of the one-week appraisal in the village. Of course we didn't force our research partners to share more of their reality with us than they wanted to. But it was also obvious that in spite of contacts beforehand and a common agreed field contract with the participating villagers, our reference frames in the end did not match (cf. Schönhuth et al. 2000). Local research partners have their own research interests, and their own, sometimes hidden, agendas that may differ greatly from those of scientific researchers.

Authorship

Research normally starts with a research proposal. It is unlikely that the researcher will have the time and money to tune and negotiate the proposal with the local community beforehand. Even if this is possible, the representations of community members might be difficult to translate into the scientific aims and demands of the funding agency. However interactive the research process, in the end, the scientist must also validate his understanding and interpretation to the academic community. At the time of writing, representations become controlled by the author, whose voice is privileged (Wright and Nelson 1995: 150). They pass over into the property of the Western world, becoming part of their 'truth regimes' (Foucault 1980) or 'world ordering knowledge' (Hobart 1993). The academic establishment expects academically authored pieces. But 'does the anthropologist need to be an author?' asks Jain (2000) in her paper submitted to the ASA conference, 'Can't there simply be a dialogue where the erstwhile objects become subjects and anthropologists follow the leads given by them' (Jain 2000: 1)? If an author expects academic peers to recognize and credit his work, the answer seems to be 'no', although this is not in line with the philosophy of participatory research where information should be collectively owned (cf. Attwood 1997: 3).

Expectations raised

Engaging in participatory research implies interfering in a community where change will affect people's lives and not that of the researcher. This relates to the different time frames of the actors. Time restrictions on the side of the researcher concerning funding or the reporting of results collide with the lifetime perspective of local people. This has consequences for the pace at which the respective parties would like the project to unfold, how they decide on explicit or implicit research strategies, and allot their resources and energy. On the other hand, people usually identify much more with research results whose co-authors they are than with results produced for them by external experts. This raises expectations for action. If the researchers lack the resources to meet these expectations or to assist the processes triggered by the

research they face practical and ethical problems. Veronika Ulbert's experience in her participatory study with women in Ecuador is typical: 'When the author withdrew from group work at the end of the PRA research process, many women reacted with indignation. Their expectations of continued "animation for problem analysis" had been disappointed. Moreover it lay beyond the competence of the author to implement the solutions developed together with the women into concrete action for change' (Ulbert 1995: 87).

Participatory research within an academic setting needs backing within an institutional context that allows longer time involvement and action orientation – preconditions often not found within academic institutions.

Reliability of data

Another problem comes with reliability standards of data. Whenever trying to explain the methodological principles of 'optimal ignorance' and 'appropriate imprecision' in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)¹⁹ to academic audiences you can find yourself in discussions about the reliability, not to say the seriousness, of the whole approach. Some of the harshest critics come from anthropology.²⁰

It is the methodological pragmatism, which in case of doubt sacrifices scientific rigidity and depth of data to appropriateness for action that makes the participatory approach suspect for pure academics. Those who work at the interface face a classical dilemma here.

In one of my first PRA exercises in Tanzania the project team wanted to find out categories of vulnerable households in the village for whom special funds had been reserved in the project budget. We used a participatory method called 'wealth ranking', by which villagers can define wealth categories according to their local criteria and then rank the households. To ensure reliable results, the leading social scientist in the team not only wanted to select village participants according to random sampling criteria,²¹ she also provided that the participants did not know why they were doing the game and to what ends. To guarantee confidentiality the work had to be done in a closed setting.

At the end of the village workshop in Tanzania the local participants of the wealth ranking game faced strong interrogation by their fellow villagers: All other PRA instruments had been facilitated and shared in the open, they asked. Why not this one? When specific households got their material inputs some weeks after the village workshop, we could be quite sure that the participants of the wealth ranking game had selected them without any biasing interest. But at the same time we had generated envy, gossiping, uncertainty and distrust in the village and between village and project.

¹⁹ Chambers (1991: 522) called this the concept of 'optimising tradeoffs'. It relates the costs of collection and learning to tradeoffs between quantity, relevance, timeliness, truth, and actual beneficial use of information. This means knowing what is not worth knowing or when enough is known and then abstaining from trying to find out more; and avoiding measurement or precision that is not needed.

²⁰ cf. Richards (1995) for example; on the other hand Brokensha (1998) for an anticritique

²¹ In fact, the problem reliability of data is also seen by other facilitators. Vietnamese PRA trainers, reflecting their experiences, complained in a workshop: 'A small sample size, and lack of control over sampling procedure can lead to highly unreliable results [especially] as local leaders and guides have had a considerable effect on the sampling process' (Danish Red Cross 1996: 34).

The reliability-of-data-problem in participatory approaches not only concerns contemporary researchers. Wright and Nelson (1995: 52f) report how a professor of sociology trained three thousand ‘mass observers’ in the 1930s to work all over Britain, to collect information on various topics to create an ‘anthropology of ourselves’ by the people of Britain.²² Anthropologists at that time disapproved of this method of collecting data and representing ‘everyday life’. In a critique of such mass observation Marshall (1937) pointed out that ‘observations of ordinary citizens are shot through with selection and interpretation’, and Raymond Firth (1939) argued that an inquiry should be informed by a clearly established theory of society to define a particular problem on which facts will be collected. Firth was a student of Malinowski, who in his classical work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* stated that the ‘natives obey the forces and commands of their tribal code but they do not comprehend them’ (1922: 11). For him, as for generations of students after him, it is the authoritative task of the ethnographer ‘collecting concrete data of evidence and drawing the general inferences for himself’ (Malinowski 1922: 12). The central message of the mass observation approach – to aspire to bridge the gap between observer and observed in order to make the understanding of society a task of society itself – was not apprehended by any of the anthropological critics of that time.

Scientific, expert, local knowledge

Negotiating with knowledge elicited in a participatory way can also become a problem when the anthropologist feeds back participatory research results to decision makers in development. Anthropologists who have done consultancy work for government organizations or NGOs know about the difficulties involved in integrating ‘soft’, ‘local’ or ‘indigenous’ or even anthropological knowledge into executive summary reports. The anthropologist has to have a leading position in an evaluation team to give these topics relevance. Otherwise his arguments often can be found buried in the appendices of such reports. This sort of negotiating within power structures is a quality urgently needed if anthropological competence is to have a stronger influence in development.

In relation to this, if anthropologists are part of multidisciplinary teams, they have to translate the knowledge and constraints of indigenous people to foresters, hydrologists, nutrition or agricultural specialists in a way compatible with the language of those sciences. The experience of the German Development Service (Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, DED)²³ with the anthropologists employed in the organization in the 1990s shows that intercultural competence did not entitle them in the same way to communicate successfully with team members of other disciplines. Heidt (1997: 97) summarizes: ‘They [the anthropologists] sometimes don’t find it easy to illustrate the anthropological and social science insights and findings in a way that local and German team members can find in it an aspect essential for the success of the program’ (for this argument see also Cleveland (1998), Sillitoe (1998a)).

²² Sillitoe, in a comment to an earlier version of this paper, remarks that this type of ‘mass observation’ is reported to continue still in Britain.

²³ The German Development Service (DED) is the development service of the Federal Republic of Germany for personnel cooperation. Almost 1000 development workers are currently working in approximately 40 countries.

When it comes to planning with local people after participatory appraisals, experts often find it difficult to plan on the basis of pictures and models that the people have created. The results are often criticized as being childish and not to be taken seriously – a problem we faced in Tanzania more than once. Even if the results are translated in a format compatible with administrative structures, layman's knowledge and expert's knowledge might not fit. A review of experiences during the implementation of a participatory approach in German village planning in the 1990s (Boos-Krueger 1998) showed that the most critical point in the process was reached with implementation: when the ideas and plans of local people should be executed by planning authorities or implementing agencies. For local people who have given days and weeks of their leisure time in participatory village planning, it is demoralizing when they learn that for technical, legal, or administrative reasons their proposals are dismissed by the authorities. I agree with Brokensha (1998) that it is the integration of local knowledge/IK into administrative structures which may cause the most critical and demanding communication gaps to close.

How to balance expert knowledge, scientific knowledge and local/indigenous knowledge in participatory processes is a demanding challenge, requiring a lot of communicating skills right from the start. In the participatory processes in Rukwa region in Tanzania, from the second year onwards we made sure that the political and administrative branches of the regional development office were integrated from the very beginning. The project submitted information workshops or invited the decision makers for exposure days in the field. Even though some of them found it a strange experience to be exposed to village life, others were impressed by the capacities and knowledge of people elicited by participatory methods. They are valuable and easy to interpret tools to demonstrate the richness of local knowledge to outsiders. Those of the decision makers who understand the potential lying in these processes are the best brokers when it comes to channeling local people's knowledge into planning schemes of the administration.

Anthropology's reservations towards participatory approaches

In spite of the common features and positive encounters with anthropology it is a remarkable fact that participatory approaches have been mainly developed by other disciplines and the most explicit critiques do come from anthropology.²⁴ The anthropological reservations mainly go in two directions:

- In their effort to produce timely and action oriented results, approaches like rapid rural or participatory appraisal (RRA/PRA) fade out crucial parts of local reality and also the sociocultural dimension.
- Participatory approaches contain implicit or explicit assumptions that relate to a Western discourse, but not the cognitive structures and decision making processes of local cultures.

Participatory methods should inform external researchers but they should also give local people the opportunity to analyse their situation. For the anthropologist, the

²⁴ Cf. Becker et al. (n.d.); Mosse (1994); Richards (1995); Rew (1997); Pottier (1997); Nelson and Wright (1995). For an overview see Cornwall and Fleming (1995) and other articles in PLA Notes 24, 1995.

question arises as to whether the smallholder in rural Africa or South America structures and analyses experience this way. Classic anthropological studies (Bourdieu 1977; Richards 1985) suggest that structure in these societies develops above all from experience. Knowledge is very much transferred by traditions (Sillitoe 1998a; Ellen 1998). Decisions are derived from practice, not from counting together and analysing tables or matrices. Vokral (1994) and Ulbert (1995) for example doubt the value of PRA methods on the basis of their experiences in Ecuador in the Andean context. Vokral finds these methods much more appropriate 'for the public, often aggressive discourse in the North American culture [than] for the relatively taciturn and ritualized one of the Andean society' (1994: 42). To put it in the words of a local team member, reviewing the first year of our Tanzanian PRA village approach, 'I have the feeling that the PRA toolbox is not culturalized into the setting of the village. In identifying problems [for outsiders], it's good. But in action and problem solving [for people themselves] it's still dependency' (Schönhuth 1998a: 127). Rew takes up this point in his critique of the PRA approach and adds:

The PRA method emphasizes intensive interrogation and the use of role reversals and visual techniques in public settings. Each of these emphases can be problematic. First, the information is elicited in a social situation where the influence of power, authority and gender inequalities are great and highly likely to bias the PRA results...Secondly there is a high bias towards verbalized information in PRA...Thirdly, an important part of practical cultural knowledge remains encoded in technical routines and everyday experience and cannot easily be elicited verbally (Rew 1997: 100, see also Becker et al. (n.d.: 2ff) for these arguments).

Rew refers here to contexts that rapid/participatory approaches have tended to fade out until recent times: the social, the political, and the cultural. Richards (1995: 15) asks: 'Was it ever realistic to think that a discourse-oriented PRA/RRA would evade co-optation by local politics?' and he continues, 'any confidence that PRA/RRA operates independently of established local structures of political discourse...is based on faith, not science' (1995: 16).

In applying a participatory methodology the anthropologist faces a 'which power do I want to serve' dilemma. Twenty years ago it was called 'pedagogy of the oppressed' or 'liberation anthropology'. Its promoters worked within an anti-imperialist movement against the Western development apparatus, seeking to effect a structural change in the power system. Nowadays it is called 'empowerment', seeking mainly to extend room for individual or local action, but not seriously questioning existing power structures. It was RRA and PRA, having almost no political connotations and not the approaches with a 'liberation of the oppressed philosophy' of people like Huizer (1989) or Freire (1970), which entered the development arena so easily in the 1990s. PRA and its successor PLA (Participatory Learning and Action approaches) use a more political rhetoric nowadays (cf. Blackburn and Chambers (1996); Holland and Blackburn (1998) but still they are locked in existing hierarchies, facing the danger to only support improved data collection for Western world ordering knowledge.

From my experience, if used in a culturally suitable way, visualizing tools can be extraordinarily useful for the outsider to gain a quick picture of the local situation together with people. Far from being objective, these pictures provide an

excellent basis and act as a catalyst for elucidating discussions on local features, local knowledge and local views of reality within homogenous groups, and between different groups. But as these visualizations are process results, highly situational and context specific, they require interpretation and explanation by knowledgeable experts (i.e. local and from the facilitating team). Many participatory approaches like GRAAP, DELTA, SWAP, PRA and others make strong use of the visual principle. Ranking, mapping, and modelling draw their theoretical value among others from the 'projective' element contained in the visualization. The strength of these projective methods lies in the weak pre-structuring by the facilitator. But because of this loose pre-structuring, projective methods (Lindzey 1961) need experience, training and theoretical knowledge to be interpreted correctly – a sort of expertise refuted by its proponents in the participatory development context ('everyone can do it'), but at the same time often highly missed by participants of RRA/PRA trainings (cf. Holthusen and Paulus (1998).

Participatory diagrams are by no means an analytically deduced portrayal of local knowledge, which can be handed over to decision makers as a basis for development decisions, or bound into the analytic part of so called 'participatory' scientific studies – a misunderstanding unfortunately sometimes produced in field reports and publications. The tools are also only seldom a good basis for local people's decisions. Local decision structures often run along other pathways than those of official village decision meetings organized by external personnel at the end of participatory village workshops.

An example from Rukwa in Tanzania (cf. Schönhuth (1998a) where the ethnic Fipa constitute the majority of the local population illustrates this point. At the end of one of the PRA village workshops we wanted the villagers to decide on possible projects. To minimize biases of power and gender we enabled a differentiated voting process. Women voted with beans, men used corn. The seeds were cast into gourds – one for each project – going round, so that everyone could participate in voting secretly. When counting the votes, the local health worker, who was integrated into the PRA workshop, took me aside, telling me: 'Mr. Michael, this is not the Ba-Fipa way'. He pointed out that in this area village decisions were made in the responsible men's and women's committees in a process that lasted up to one week. After a controversial discussion the PRA team agreed to quit the democratic and gender sensitive decision making process and met with village officials to find a compromise: Projects related to the village should thus be decided in accordance with local structures of decision making. The PRA team however, retained the option to support certain groups independently (e.g. women and vulnerable households for which special programmes in the project budget had been designed).

Conclusions: Opportunities at the interface

I have dealt with only some of the dilemmas faced when working at the interface, touching upon or leaving others aside; for example the sometimes problematic consequences of empowering people (see endnote 28) or the question of sustainable solutions, which sometimes run counter to the immediate interests of local groups and their knowledge (Ellen 1998). Nevertheless, empirical evidence allows some conclusions.

What is positive in the encounter between anthropology and participatory development? Firstly, on an ethical level working also with and for people and not

only 'on' them helps us to come to terms to a certain extent with the ethnographic field worker's dilemma, mentioned by Pottier (1993) and described vividly by Elizabeth Koepping in her article on trust and its abuse in long-term fieldwork:

To what extent is it proper to use information gained almost by chance, that is during the conduct of an everyday life with friends, to clarify and expand ones anthropological understanding?...When one grasps enough to write the whole, one has also reached the point where silence is a more decent response, a bizarre situation which perhaps offends the positivist as much as the voyeurist...Then is the time to give back more than before to the other, to the source of one's own knowledge and success (Koepping 1994: 115).

This is where anthropological appropriation of IK can give way to facilitation and brokerage.

Secondly, on a methodological level anthropology could profit from making more use of visual cues to focus group discussions, and to elicit cultural maps of reality.²⁵ Research results, which are normally analyzed at home by the anthropologist after fieldwork, could be discussed and corrected in the field, together with the local people. The perspective of the outsider, communicated through discussion of research results, can help to generate new insights and new momentum for change in the community, even where there are no funds or project. For example a villager in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, an area of the former German Democratic Republic, reflecting on the impact of PRA training with GTZ personnel in his village in 1992 commented, 'we can't say whether the workshop will initiate change here, but it was the first time since the reunion in 1989 that we as a community talked to each other about village problems' (cf. Schönhuth 1994). The empowering aspects of research do happen through interaction during the fieldwork itself, not so much through claiming to give people a voice, or through representations in texts afterwards (cf. Cameron, *op. cit.* Wright and Nelson 1995: 49).

Thirdly, at an operational level ethnographic research and the PRA approach could profit from each other. Anthropological theory and field practice could contribute to a better understanding of how knowledge is created and used at the local level ('studying down'), at the interfaces and in development institutions ('studying up', cf. Shrijvers (1995). It could help bring into focus competing local perspectives and decision making.²⁶ It could function with Western decision makers as a broker for the rationality and functionality of indigenous knowledge, by returning to the roots of anthropological fieldwork²⁷ It could help deconstruct and localize concepts of empowerment, participation, community, human rights, democracy and partnership.²⁸

²⁵ For the universal usefulness of formal cognitive methods, if they are adapted to the local cultural setting, see Antweiler (this volume) with an example drawn from the Indonesian urban setting.

²⁶ See Goebel (1998: 254f) for competing local perspectives; Pottier (1997) for cultural differences in the 'openness' and participation of decisions.

²⁷ See Elwert (1996) for this argument, also Sillitoe (1998a) who sees one of anthropology's main contributions being to challenge ethnocentrism.

²⁸ The sometimes dangerous side-effects of empowerment and the question of the protection of the empowered poor are described in Shah and Shah (1995) or Appleton (1995), who asks: 'Do facilitators and researchers have the skills to deal with such situations?' (1995: 47); on democracy and participation

This chapter has doubted both assumptions, that of a new era for the practice of anthropology with development, and that of new opportunities for local communities through the marriage of participatory and anthropological research. The reservations towards the first assumption had to do with academic anthropology's unresolved relationship with development and applied research. The reservations towards the second assumption are concerned with fundamental inconsistencies between participatory and academic anthropological research traditions and the problem of integrating IK into scientific and administrative structures.

Nonetheless, anthropologists have a role to play at the interface between knowledge, participation and development.

To illustrate this let me give a last example from the Philippines. Here patron–client relationships occur primarily through the institution of 'owed gratitude' (*utang na loob*), part of a hierarchical system of reciprocal and often lifelong relationships of goodwill and obligations not backed up by contract. The clients use this system as a network for support and help during times of crisis. Apart from the local political leaders there are also other influential members of society that provide resources such as loans, or they enable access to patrons who are important for providing certain strategic resources. In community development processes the local political leaders are usually assigned the responsibility for the project. They tend to select the beneficiaries of projects from their own group of clientele, according to the *utang na loob* principles. The motivation of 'beneficiaries' to participate in programmes depends much more on strategic decisions within the *utang na loob* system than external sponsors and experts might realize. Without intending it, such persons will be integrated into the cultural system of dependence, owed gratitude and lifelong obligations as modern 'patrons', including all the misunderstandings and disappointments that derive from this situation on both sides when the development intervention finishes and the departing expatriates take their resources with them (Schönhuth et al. 2001; cf. Teves 2000).

Where indigenous knowledge is woven into the fabric of the local world ordering, and people localize global concepts, it is the anthropologist who has the professional skills to translate this to outsiders. On the other side the anthropologist should also take the opportunity to translate Western world ordering knowledge in a way that empowers local people so that they can negotiate more successfully at development interfaces.

Cancian (1993) in her research on conflicts between activist research and academic success evaluated three successful strategies of her interview partners: participating in an organization that is accountable to both academia and activists; employing a 'two career' strategy that enhances scientific credibility through research and mainstream publishing for academic colleagues, whilst at the same allowing participatory research; and working in an academic department that values activist research. If the anthropologist is aware of the dilemmas inherent in participatory research and has got the institutional backing, this is the place where he or she can

cf. Beckmann (1997); on the cultural relativity of human rights see Schönhuth (1998c), Said (1978).

contribute most to development – as a two-way translator or a mediator at the interface.

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