

Report PCR Section IAMCR Paris Conference 2007

The IAMCR Paris conference has been very successful for the PCR Section. During the three days of activity, the Section coordinated nine one-and-a-half hour sessions, with four till six papers presented in each one. People from 25 different countries participated and the panels and the sessions were well attended. Six poster presentations were added to the sessions. Although time was too limited to do justice to all the work, the Section's tradition to have discussants commenting on the presentations was upheld. Moreover, Section's members initiated and participated in two special panels. In the first panel all the previous Section Heads discussed the history and future of participatory communication research. In celebrating the IAMCR's 50th anniversary, the panelists reflected on the history of participatory communication research and its theoretical and practical developments inside and outside the IAMCR. The second special event that took place was a panel session on assessing participation in communication interventions. The event was co-sponsored by the Task Force on Media and Communication Policy of the IAMCR. The panel explored methods for assessing participation in social change efforts ranging from health communication projects to media development programs. In doing so various methods were presented and evaluated. Although the focus of the work of the presenters varied, all the presenters and other participants in the different events shared a commitment to communication and participation. The sharing of their work is valued and appreciated.

One of the themes that ran through many of the PCR Section presentations was that in theorizing the field of participatory communication we need to put power issues in the center. Change occurs in interaction and in networks, and these inter-human relations are never power-free. There is a need to incorporate political theories in theories of participatory communication. How to include 'the local voice' in decision-making processes is a question that connects not only to logistics, but also to processes of democratic representation, hierarchical power structures and economic dependencies. It is in this area that future work of the Section could make itself of relevance to participatory change and development.

Another theme that was touched upon in different sessions and needs to be on the future agenda is the 'new' role of the communication researcher who is doing participatory communication research. The role of the researcher seems to be evolving towards having an integral part, not only in the research process, but also in the change process. The field of research on the one hand, and processes of transformation on the other hand seem to become inseparable when doing participatory research. The field of participatory communication often deals with complex problems, and the active involvement of the researcher in dealing with such problems is under discussion. The scientist is thus an active participant in both, the process of research and the process of change, and considering that these problems are stakeholder bound, the role of the scientist can never be neutral. He is an active stakeholder and also often a facilitator of change. As an active participant in the analysis of changing situations, he is also a creator of reality. The scientist is one stakeholder in the participatory process and the image of the scientist as

an 'external expert' is under attack as he is not an objective outsider, but an engaged insider.

Besides taking up these two themes, the Participatory Communication Research Section of the IAMCR continues to work with a broad definition of participation applied in a variety of fields. The Section still underwrites its original three basic aims, which were formulated as follows:

- To work towards theoretical and methodological clarification;
- To share perspectives of participatory approaches focusing specifically on the communication processes in contexts of social change, including development communication, and;
- To discuss case studies across the spectrum of social change processes focusing on the (often integrated) use of communication and media at different levels of society.

The Section continues to bring media researchers and practitioners together in communication aimed at achieving democratic and participatory social change. Topics of interest are broad, including: the ways in which communication processes can be used to incorporate participation, the subjects and processes of democratization, communication and information rights, ICTs for sustainable development, health communication, environmental communication, agricultural extension services, folk media and social movements, communication planning activities and interventions, national and cultural identities, community studies and the relationship between participation, empowerment and gender, community radio and participatory video production, non-formal participatory forms of education, participatory rapid appraisals, and participatory action research.

The next issue of *the Glocal Times* (www.glocaltimes.k3.mah.se) is going to be devoted to reflections on the PCR Section's activities in Paris and will have a variety of contributions by members of the Section.

Rico Lie
Head PCR Section of the IAMCR
Wageningen University, The Netherlands