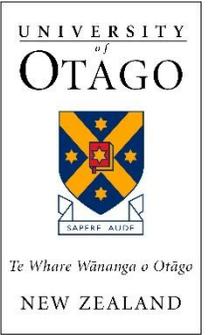


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Uncomfortable Bedfellows or Equal Partners?

Practitioners, Grassroots Organisations and Participatory Development

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Introduction

- ‘Participation’ as a transformative methodology for development
- Role of practitioners within this methodology
- Anarchism as a suitable theoretical framework
- Empirical experiences that challenge the NGO – social movement divide through ‘anarchistic partnerships’

Shifting paradigms in development theory and practice

- 1970s-80s – growing discontent with mainstream development
- Two main responses: (Kothari, 2005)
 - Alternative forms of development (AD)
 - Radical post/anti-development (PD)
- Points of convergence between AD and PD: (Parpart and Veltmeyer, 2004)
 - Critical of top-down approaches
 - Emphasise the role of civil society
 - Champion participatory and non-directive methodologies
- One point of divergence seems to be that PD theorists attribute more potential to social movements, while AD is often identified by its focus on NGOs

Debating the participatory orthodoxy of mainstream development practice

- Since the 1980s, participation stands out as the new centrist development orthodoxy (Kapoor, 2005; Kothari, 2005)
- However, participatory development was accused of:
 - Being co-opted into the neoliberal development discourse and praxis (Kothari, 2005)
 - Neutralising radical language and practices (Hintjens, 1999)
 - Being exclusionary and even tyrannical (Cooke and Kothari, 2001)
 - Ignoring power relations within grassroots groups and between them and development practitioners (Kapoor, 2005; Mohan and Stokke, 2000; Parfitt, 2004)
- Still, even a superficial practice or rhetoric of participatory development could achieve empowerment among marginalised communities (McKinnon, 2006)

Making participation transformative

- Hickey and Mohan (2005) suggest that participatory development tends to be transformative when:
 1. Pursued within a wider radical political programme
 2. The aim is to secure citizenship rights for marginalised groups
 3. Development is understood as a process towards social change
- Progressive social movements may be a more obvious vehicle for such transformative participation, but NGOs and public institutions also contain this potential

The 'professional expert' in development

- The professionalisation of development practice and knowledge awarded the 'expert' with the ultimate ability to deal with 'under-development'
- Historically done through Western criteria of expertise (Escobar, 1995, 2007)
- The problematisation of the 'experts' and expert knowledge in development is ongoing and comes from both PD and AD perspectives
- Attention to the importance of the developer's self in development studies (Brigg, 2009)
- A complex picture of experts-knowledge politics: development professionals can be self-reflective and create space to manoeuvre between 'official' knowledge and what they consider to be best practice (Tamas, 2007)

Bringing anarchism into the debate

- A proposition: anarchism has been largely overlooked as a radical framework for development theory and practice
- A modern radical political philosophy that has experienced resurgence in recent years
- A practice-oriented theoretical framework
- Basic principles of 'classical' anarchism
 - **Against:** authority, domination, states, political representation
 - **For:** Freedom, equality, direct action, self-organisation, mutual aid, voluntary association
- Today: anarchism + post-structuralism = post-anarchism

Contemporary post-anarchism

The core principles of current anarchist ideology: (Gordon, 2007)

- Struggle against domination
 - Convergence of social struggles (gender, race, ecology, economy)
- Direct action and prefigurative politics
 - Methodologies for social change
 - Action without intermediaries
 - Living the envisioned society in the present
- Diversity and open-endedness
 - No blueprints for a post-revolutionary society
 - Perpetual experimentation
 - One size does not fit all

How can we identify anarchist elements?

- Reluctance to label oneself 'anarchist'
- Examples of some inherently anarchist concepts:
 - autonomy, self-management, prefigurative politics, horizontality, collectivism, consensus decision making, networks
- 'Autonomous geographies' (Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006: 730)
 - 'spaces where people desire to constitute non-capitalist, egalitarian and solidaristic forms of political, social and economic organization through a combination of resistance and creation'
- Popular with the alter-globalisation movement

Different development in rural north-west Argentina

- Two case-study peasant-indigenous organisations:

- MOCASE-VC

- Formed in 1990
- Internal division and a split in 2001
- 9 organisations, 200 communities, 8-9k families



- Red Puna

- Formed in 1995 as a coalition of development organisations
- 1998: consolidation as a grassroots organisation
- About 28 organisations and communities divided into 5 regional entities



RED PUNA

- Both are member of La Vía Campesina

Red Puna



MOCASE-VC



MOCASE-VC and Red Puna

- **Context:** historical marginalisation of peasant-indigenous communities; land grabs; return of democracy (1983); neoliberal economic restructuring; re-emergence of civil society
- **Aim:**
 - Securing land-tenure and improving standards of living
 - Generating social, economic and political change towards a more equal society and a more sustainable economic system
- To be achieved through a different, more inclusive, politics in the form of a horizontal participatory model of organisation:
 - A non-hierarchical, decentralised decision-making and tiered organisational structure, based on direct democratic participation and consensus building

Bridging the professional/expert/NGO and grassroots divide

- Different processes of social mobilisation and organisational consolidation, but involvement of NGOs in both cases
- What role should or could development NGOs, institutions, professionals, activists and the like have within such politicised projects for change?
- Matthews (2008: 1035) notes that 'an important question raised by the debate between post-development theorists and their critics is the question of how privileged people are to respond meaningfully to their own situation of privilege and to the contrasting situations of poverty experienced by so many.'

Bridging the professional/expert/NGO and grassroots divide

- MOCASE-VC: CENEPP, a development NGO, supported one of the factions in the 2001 division and later dissolved into it
- Red Puna: one of the founding organisations – API – integrated into the grassroots organisation
- Result: professional development experts becoming **members** of the grassroots organisation
- These individuals are known as *técnicos* (experts), or *campesinos de manos blandas* ('peasants of soft hands')
- This development-related phenomenon cannot be easily identified in theoretical or practical development literature
- An anarchist framework is useful for analysing this partnership

Uncomfortable bedfellows or equal partners?

- What does this form of partnership between predominantly urban, middle-class, university graduate experts/activists and peasant-indigenous people entail for promoting development through horizontal politics?
- Some research participants believed that the MOCASE-VC and Red Puna are managed by those *técnicos*

‘[Having *técnicos*] for technical assistance may be good; but if they come to lead the organisation it’s bad for us. Because all those who came to this day and continue to lead the organisation [Red Puna] are foreigners that have another vision, a western one let’s say.’ (Nicolas, Red Kolla)
- Pertinent issues: class/socioeconomic divide, ethnic divide, representation, leadership

Uncomfortable bedfellows or equal partners?

- Such criticism was utterly refuted by members of the MOCASE-VC and Red Puna
- *Técnicos* were seen as integral and equal members of the organisation

‘Inside the movement there are no *técnicos* — they are comrades in the struggle, they are militants... There was a time we also said ‘peasants of soft hands’ because [they come] from a university; but we have come to realise that we are all *técnicos* or we are all *campesinos*.’ (Focus Group 2, MOCASE-VC)

- The *técnicos*’ response:

‘It’s true, we are not Santiagueños, we may not live off the land, [but] we live from another form of production. We are very devoted to writing project applications, to obtaining the resources; we do a lot of these things, which is another way of producing.’ (Teresa, MOCASE-VC)

- A common response: *técnicos* and *campesinos* complement each other’s knowledge and work together for the benefit of all

Anarchistic partnerships in development

- Aim to accommodate multiple knowledges within horizontal 'autonomous geographies' in a non-hierarchical and non-authoritarian manner
- This does not mean that power is equally distributed among the members of the group, or that there are no leaders
- Rather, through participatory, horizontal and radical prefigurative politics, a politicised space is created, where leaders do not act like a vanguard would and where the power vested in them is utilised in a different way
- Participatory radical politics can make room for a different form of association between the 'expert' and the 'grassroots' where the lines separating them are challenged and blurred

Participatory Development

Transformative Participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2005)

- Pursued within a wider radical political programme
- The aim is to secure citizenship rights for marginalised groups
- Development is understood as a process towards social change

Anarchism (Gordon, 2007)

- Struggle against domination
- Direct action and prefigurative politics
- Diversity and open-endedness

Practitioners/experts/activists/ NGOs

Grassroots/social movements

Anarchistic Partnership

Benefits

- Multiple and complementing knowledges
- Enhanced autonomy
- Solidarity
- Empowerment

Challenges

- Power imbalances
- Leadership
- Internal and external friction
- Reduced legitimacy

Mitigating measures

- Horizontal structure
- Non-decisive leadership
- Consensus decision making
- Self-reflexivity

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