

## Participatory Action Research Model: Bridging The Gap Between University and Community Partnership

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sustainable partnership between university and community will create a good civil society. This paper will highlight some causes that emerge on the field, such as worldview gap, practical aspect and cultural sensitivity between university and people in community during conducting community-based program/research. Three type of research studies that engaging community will be discussed. This paper will explore the writer's personal experiences in facilitating community empowerment program with university students, including a) the challenge and opportunity in facilitating community program/research; b) The benefits of using participatory action research model in facilitating community work; and c) Improving the cultural sensitivity of university student's worldview and people in community in developing long-term partnership.

*Keywords: community, participatory action research, partnership, university*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Globalization and technology innovation change the social structures, academic culture, student's learning style, even the future orientation of people in community. One of the social problems that emerged in village was youth's mindset about modernization. To be a farmer, gardener, local entrepreneur is not something to be dreaming of by youth in village anymore (Widuretno, 2017). Local knowledge and culture were associated with old-fashioned style. It is way better for them living in urban area and getting job as laborer, shop man, housemaid, etc rather than living in village and descend their parent's work, which most of them are physical works. Widuretno (2017) assumed one of the reason was the subjects in school did not relate with their student's way of living. Formal education was separated from their living context. This phenomenon indicated there is a gap between what students have learnt in school and their daily living and environment.

Separating knowledge production from the living context of people and culture may contribute to several problems in local community such as losing local identity, community coping to external problems, urban immigrants, even the environmental destruction. Santoso (2017) argued that local knowledge and culture values in a village were the instruments to strengthen community capacity and resiliency, especially in responding to external problems, such as disaster or social conflicts. Culture values, such as religiosity, local wisdom, solidarity, communal practices, mutual deliberation were social capital that originally existed in village. It was proved in 2006 when there was an earthquake attack, a village in Bantul-Central Java was very fast recovery because people in community were working together to revitalize the infrastructure and supporting each other to bounce back from the devastated situation (Novianty, 2011; Prawitasari, 2011). The characteristic of people in village represented as collective community type in which social support in emergency situation mostly helped them to bounce back from suffering (Kulig, Edge, & Joyce, 2008).

Science knowledge and technology may reform the way people's life nowadays, yet history, local knowledge and culture patterned our responses and behavior (Joesoef, 2017). It is very important to understand how the knowledge was produced and delivered to students in university setting. Unless the knowledge is relevant in student's daily living, it only ends up as a good theory in the book. It is essential that students acquire an understanding of and a feeling for values. It is not adequate enough for university students only learn about scientific knowledge (man of science), they also need to value the wisdom (wisdom man) (Joesoef, 2017). Engaging community in producing the contextualized knowledge that able to be applied in community will result the co-learning process on both parties, as well as wisdom and value for students. Having practical wisdom makes them possible to use their knowledge to extent their daily works, pursuing the happiness, and contributing to the community where they live in.

Ideally, research in university could contribute in sustainable community development to solve community problems. To understand what kind of relevant knowledge that could be applied in solving community problem, university has to develop a good partnership with people in community, they were eager to learn together as well. Co-learning between both parties is the key principle in sustainable university-community partnership (Hacker, 2013). In fact, Contribution the university and community partnership in local sustainable development is not something new. Many projects of university-community partnership were done, some are very fruitful and sustain, yet some cases were 'one shot' type of project, even there are

cases which left behind the underserved community that making lost in trust towards university.

Shiel, Filho, do Paco, and Brandli (2016) highlighted the barrier in developing sustainable capacity building in their sampled institutions, such as lacking of monitoring and evaluation. They were addressing some difficulties such as lack of interest and institutional commitment, absences of adequate resources (mostly financial and human resources), lack of knowledge about how to monitor and evaluate capacity building (type of approaches and methodologies), and the nature of engagement with stakeholder and partners. It seems the design of community programs in their sampled institution was not community-based participatory design program, because the academic was the main source of knowledge for defining the problem in community and giving the education and skill in community. This community project design seems only benefit for students because they can experience genuinely the connection between community and environmental issues in developing their understanding about interaction between individuals, community and environment. The role of community only provides the location and real life issue, whereas academic institution (as members of the community) are core to educating citizens, professional, innovators, and problem-solvers (Shiel, Filho, do Paco, & Brandli, 2016).

Historically, research involving communities had not always included people in community in a participatory manner. Rather, research may be done in communities or on community residents, using the community only as a laboratory. As a result, members of community may feel exploited by researcher, depart, and leave nothing behind. The community-based participatory approach encourages engagement and full participation of people in community in every aspect of the research process from question identification to analysis and dissemination (Hacker, 2013). The goal of community-based participatory research is to produce research that is relevant to the life circumstance of communities and the people who reside within them. Knowledge does not only emanate from academia; rather 'people' also create and possess knowledge. There is knowledge and benefit in the shared partnership between academia and community (Hacker, 2013).

Hacker (2013) also concluded some principles in community-based participatory research, including: a) Acknowledging community as a unit of identity; b) Building on strengths and resources within community; c) Facilitating a collaborative, equitable partnership in all phase of research; d) Encouraging co-learning and capacity building among

all partners; e) Integrating and achieving a balance between knowledge generation and intervention for mutual benefit of all partners; f) Focusing on the local relevance problems and ecological perspectives; g) Involving systems development using a cyclical and iterative process; and h) Disseminating results to all partners and involving them in the wider dissemination results.

Community-based participatory research approach was frequently used in designing university-community program. According to Wang et al (2017), as academic researcher, to be able to engage in community, they need interpersonal skill such as listening and respect to community, be humble, humility, patience, affability and respect for others. Both groups described a skepticism about commitment to engage in sustainable program. Community leader was unsure whether having inter-organizational experience of conducting community based research project changes the university research culture for the long term. University research was concerned about the support of intra-organizational within university affects inter-organizational relationships. There need to be “a champion” in university organization and community. In this study power sharing and race also arise as an issue in university-community partnership. University believed that community was protected by regulation, so they will free from exploitation, yet community leaders are very aware and ‘traumatic’ toward perpetrated historical exploitation by the institutions.

## **DISCUSSION**

Community-engaged program/research exists on continuum ranging from research in the community setting to research that fully engages community partners. Hacker (2013) divided three types of research approach, such as traditional research approach, research with the community, and community-based participatory research approach. Three types of studies by writer in which conducted at community setting will be discussed.

### *Study 1: Traditional Research Approach*

Andrew, Lydia, and Yeo (2017) under supervision by writer conducted a research at undeserved community at suburban Jakarta about exploring the perception of community well-being through photovoice technique. The researchers lived in that community during five days. The participants were local people (children, teenager, and adult) at slum area. The method was qualitative approach with photovoice technique. The roots of philosophy of

photovoice technique were critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography. The idea was local people have their own knowledge and perception about their well-being. Some issues were very sensitive to discuss verbally, so photo could be a medium to raise the certain issue. The participants were allowed to take any photos (except people's face) to answer certain questions from researchers related community well-being. Later, the participants were asked to explain by writing/verbal about the photos that was taken. Data were analyzed by categorization of photos and themes that emerged from local people's narration. The results showed seven themes that related to the local people's perception of community well-being, including economic, social relation, basic needs, education, health, community service, and religiosity.

### *Study 2: Research with the community*

Research was conducted by eight university students that was assigned in macro-clinical psychology internship which supervised by the writer. The purpose of this community program was initial community assessment and community intervention design at Child Friendly Integrated Public Space (RPTRA). Intervention mapping approach was used as community program framework. Intervention mapping was an approach which placed the importance of theory and evidence on planning programs. By the term evidence, it means not only data from research studies as represented in the scientific literature but also opinion and experience of community members and planners. Intervention Mapping provides a detailed framework for this process (Bartholomew, Parcel, Kok, & Gottlieb, 2006).

University students were involved in RPTRA during two months while conducting community assessment and giving brief course to children at RPTRA as part of rapport building and assessing problems. The methods were used to collect data were participatory observation and interview. The participants were children and staffs at RPTRA. The initial problems were lack of children's participation at RPTRA and lack of initiative programs from staffs at RPTRA. Data were analyzed by categorization and inserting into logic model of problem and logic model of change schema. Logic model of problem was constructed to understand the main causes of problem at any levels (interpersonal, organizational, society, etc). Meanwhile, the logic model of changes was constructed to understand the determinants of problems and becoming a reference for planners to design a program to change the behavior and environments.

The result indicated that intervention mapping was eminent in designing evidence-based program as well as the indicator and the detailed what to change. Intervention mapping steps maintained the program planner to look out the problems with ecological perspective and considering various level intervention. On the other hand, this model was not that flexible to be applied in dynamic community in which the issues were changing so fast that impacted the change in logic model of problem and logic model of change, which means taking longer time to defining the problems and the changes. The program planner who used this model need to be experienced in collaborating with multidisciplinary team and stakeholders, as well as validating primary and secondary data.

### *Study 3: Community-based participatory research approach*

Starting from 2017, Novianty, Hadiwirawan, and Prawitasari (2017) were conducted in a village at Bantul-Central Java to revive the local knowledge and traditional art by youth after earthquake attack. Johana E. Prawitasari (2007) developed ‘Happy Stage’ as medium to facilitate the psychosocial function in village. Happy Stage was designed by both sociodrama and social artistry concepts. It was evaluated positively by people in village to reduce the interpersonal conflicts that contributed in the long-term community coping in village. Youth people were eager to replicate Happy Stage based on their own story and creative ideas to entertain people in the village, as well as to reinforce collective bonding of youth generation in the village by their origin traditional art and local values. The researchers engaged along community during a year. The participants in this study were young people in village. Participatory action research design was used in this program, which consisted of several steps including preparation, planning, implementation, and evaluation. The methods that used in collecting data were participatory observation, focused-group discussion, photo and video documentation.

The results indicated participatory action research lead the research as facilitator and people in community fully engaged in defining the problems, solving the problems during the program, and indirectly mutual assistance and joint deliberation comes up in youth groups dynamic. The challenges that comes up in this program were the decision making is quite long and has to be agreed by everyone, sometimes youth are very passive, sometimes their commitment is very low, sometimes feeling helpless. The solving problem that researcher and youth were used including creating small unit to do specific job, fund raising by youth in

village, and creating social media forum to communicate. Table 1 showed the comparison between those three types of research that have been conducted by writer.

Table 1

*Comparison Three Types of Research*

	<i>Traditional Research</i>	<i>Research with Community</i>	<i>Community-based Participatory Research</i>
<i>Who defines the problems?</i>	Only the researcher	Mostly researcher, less contribution from people in community to define the problem of research.	Researcher and people in community collaborating together in assessing the issues in community.
<i>Researcher and people in community role</i>	Researcher is the master of the issue on the field of research.	People in community as the source, whereas the researcher as the interpreter and the problem solver.	People in community is the master of their own issues, researchers act as facilitator.
<i>Who gain the knowledge and the skill</i>	The researcher	The researcher	The researcher and people in community
<i>Power sharing</i>	The power is not equal	People in community only have less power	The power is equal between people in community and researcher.
<i>Dissemination</i>	The result usually only disseminated by researcher in academic forum.	The result usually only disseminated to participants (probably as a part of data validation), most of data were disseminated by researcher at academic forum.	The result could be disseminated for public in a way that people in community easy to understood (less language barrier, contextual, and creative), by academic or people who involving in research.

*The Weakness, Benefit, and Opportunity in Conducting Community Based-Participatory Research*

The writer argued that community-based participatory research is the best approach to develop mutual university and community partnership. On the other hand, the researcher and stakeholders have to realize some points of weakness in conducting this approach including:

- a) Time allocation. This approach needs longer time to identify the key person in community and convincing them to join in the program, as well as time consuming of people in community to identify their own issue, comparing to those identified by standard assessment procedures;
- b) Research design, could change unpredictably in the field in adapting community dynamic and taking longer time to implement;
- c) Grant proposal and funding. Seeking input and engagement from people in community may slow the process and implementation when time constraints are often present by donor;
- d) Commitment of people in community need to be maintained for long-term involvement;
- e) Data collection, analysis, and interpretation need to be disseminated to community in which taking longer time and repeated discussion between both researcher and people in community.

The strengths of community based-participatory research, including:

- a) The impact of the research could reach and benefit for people in community to contribute in solving their problem. Researcher also gain the new knowledge and skill in enhancing the theoretical framework from westernized knowledge production into contextualized knowledge production;
- b) Participation of community in identifying their own issue and intervention will highly relevant to them and maintaining their commitment in the completion of program/research;
- c) Avoiding community exploitation and keep the power equal between both of parties;
- d) community will know and feel that they are contributing in the advancement of knowledge, as well as using the knowledge and skill in solving their community issues.

Community-based participatory approach is very relevant to be applied in Indonesia because the variation of culture, ethnicities, and resources that already exist in community that was inherited from old generation to the next generation. On the other hand, the heterogeneity in community also could lead to the various issues or conflicts between people in community. In order to identify the right issue/problem, people in community have to fully engage in empowering their own community.



## CONCLUSION

Community-based participatory research/program has immense potential to be applied in building a mutual university-community partnership. This approach provides more ethical approach that intended to benefit both parties. Even though this approach has a critical point, especially not the highest quality science (non-experimental method), but it has the ability to improve academic-community collaboration to contribute in sustainable community change, as well as to prove the theory into evidence and the evidence into contextualized theory. This approach also stimulated process-oriented in developing community program with the effort of engaging people in community in every steps of research/program to be aware of their own issue, use their local knowledge and value, and experiencing co-learning process between university and community.

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