

# Action Research for Sustainability

## Being a Green Activist-Researcher

Rebecca Laycock

PhD Student, Sustainability Project Officer

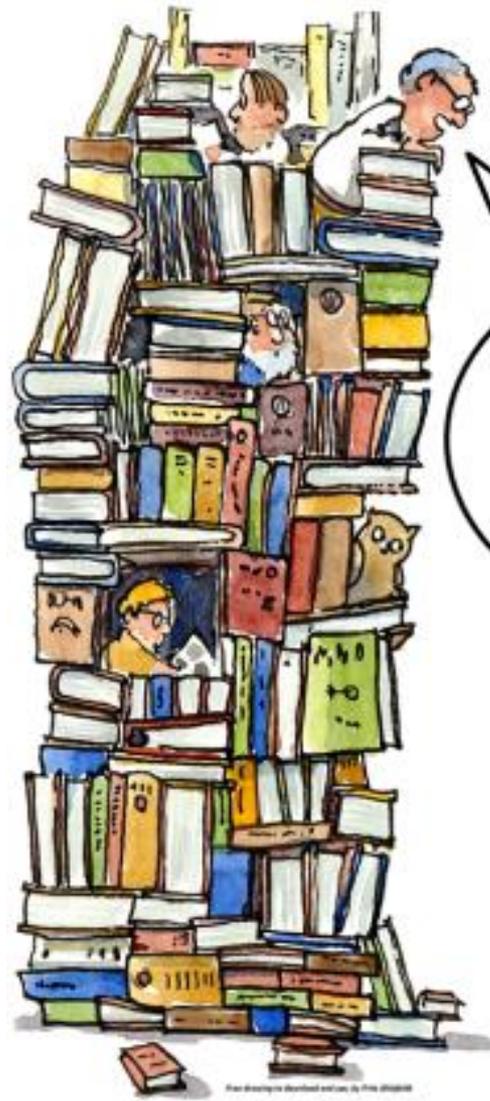
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Why does the field of Sustainability need Action Research?

What is Action Research?

Examples of Action Research for Sustainability

Challenges for Sustainable Action Researchers



No, no - **WE** just  
**write** about the  
world...

**YOU GUYS** have to  
go out and **save**  
the bloody thing!



“for knowledge [in support of decision making for sustainable development] to be truly useful it generally needs to be **“coproduced” through close collaboration between scholars and practitioners**” (Clark & Dickson, 2003, p. 8059)

“sustainability challenges require **new ways of knowledge production** and decision-making. One key aspect of sustainability science, therefore, is the involvement of **actors from outside academia into the research process** in order to integrate the best available knowledge, reconcile values and preferences, as well as **create ownership** for problems and solution options.” (Lang et al., 2012, p. 25)

“sustainability science research must be created through processes of co-production in which scholars and stakeholders interact to define important questions, relevant evidence, and convincing forms of argument. The **pertinent actions are not ordered linearly in the familiar sequence of scientific inquiry, where action lies outside the research domain.** Rather, these are combined in entangled patterns relating to the problem to be tackled and the practical constraints of inquiry.” (Kates et al., 2000, p. 2)

“users of knowledge are needed to transform knowledge claims into trustworthy, **socially-robust**, usable knowledge” (Kates et al., 2000, p. 3)

# Action Research is...

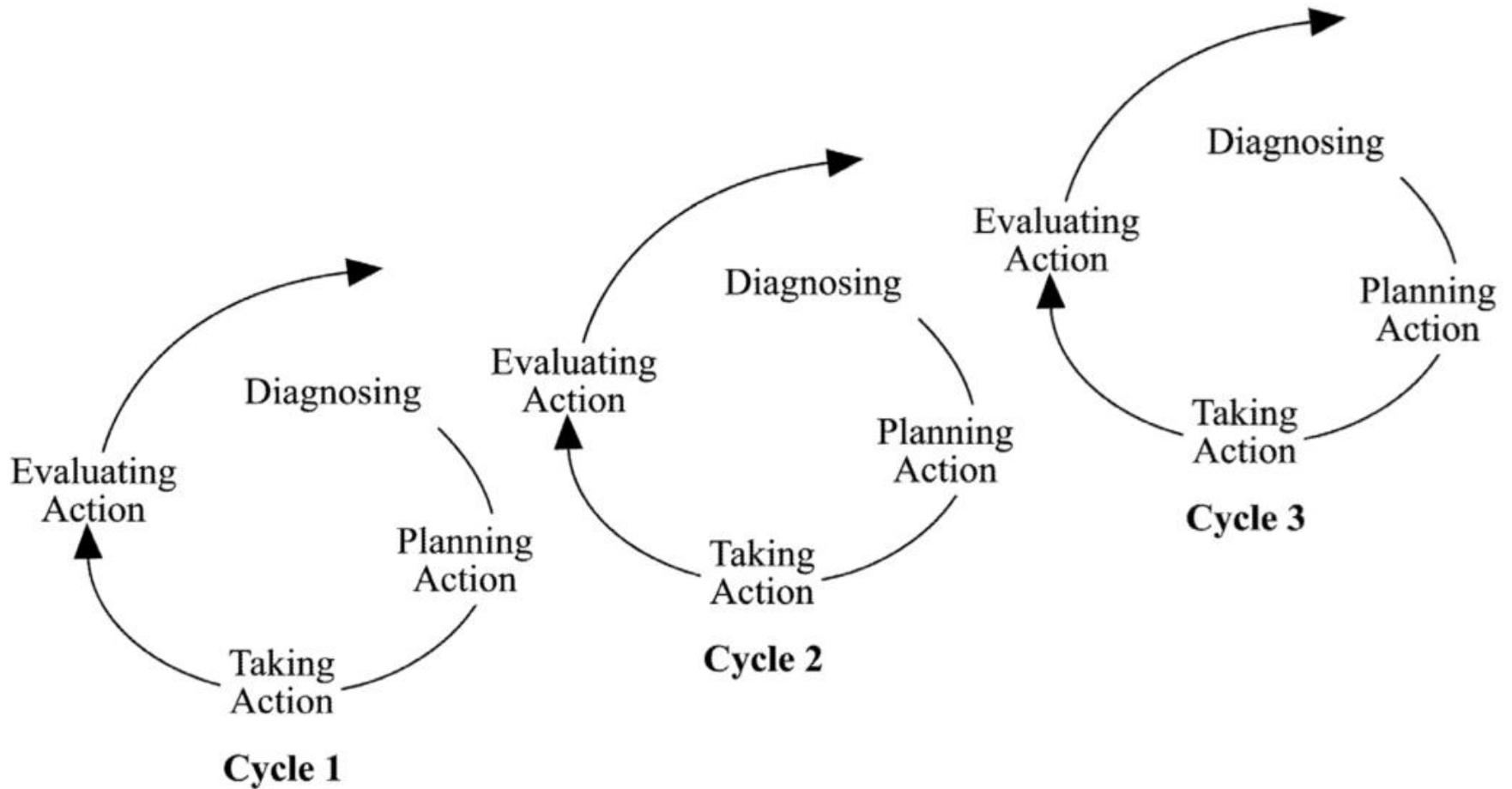
a **participatory, democratic** process concerned with developing **practical knowing** in the pursuit of **worthwhile human purposes**, grounded in a **participatory worldview** which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to **bring together action and reflection, theory and practice**, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to **issues of pressing concern to people**, and more generally the **flourishing** of individual persons and their communities.

(Heron & Reason, 2001, p. 1)

Taking  
Action

Doing  
Research





(Coghlan & Brannick, 2005)



(Coghlan & Brannick, 2005)

It is important not to regard this (Action Research spiral) as a rigid prescription of how things will turn out. It is idealised. Sometimes events do follow this sequence... Often, however, things do not turn out as we hope.

Making sense of what happens when things do not go according to plan is just as much part of an action enquiry as when they do. The research is in the action, whether the action goes as we hope or not. The learning is in the practice.

It is also important to remember that, presented like this, elements of the model above appear as unproblematic. They can, however, be highly problematic. For example, 'identifying an aspect we want to improve' can be a very complex process. Sometimes we are not clear what it is we are trying to improve, or why.

(McNiff & Whitehead, 2002, p. 71)



# **Farming Concrete**



# Farming Concrete BARN

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# OVERVIEW

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286

GARDENS RECORDING DATA

43

CITIES RECORDING DATA

76,090

POUNDS OF FOOD HARVESTED

4,483

POUNDS OF COMPOST

and counting!

A yellow plastic jerrycan is shown in a dark environment, illuminated by a spotlight from above. The jerrycan has a handle and a spout. The lighting creates a soft glow around the container.

# **USING HUMAN URINE AS FERTILIZER**





**World Café**



**Participatory Rural Appraisal**



**Citizen's Jury**



**Photovoice**



# Challenges...

What counts as an 'action'?

How much control do you allow the research participants to have over the project?

Ethics

Incorporating *intergenerational* justice into Action Research

Bias and objectivity

Academic timescales VS Action Research timescales

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- Videos:
  - How to Measure the Environmental Impact of Your Farm or Garden: <https://vimeo.com/135215615>
  - Human Urine as Fertilizer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KHrMQHNCYs>
  - Map Me Happy - Participatory Mapping: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQynTomBAQs>

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