

Action Research for Sustainability

Being a Green Activist-Researcher

Rebecca Laycock

PhD Student, Sustainability Project Officer

KUSRN Seminar Series, Nov 4, 2015

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)

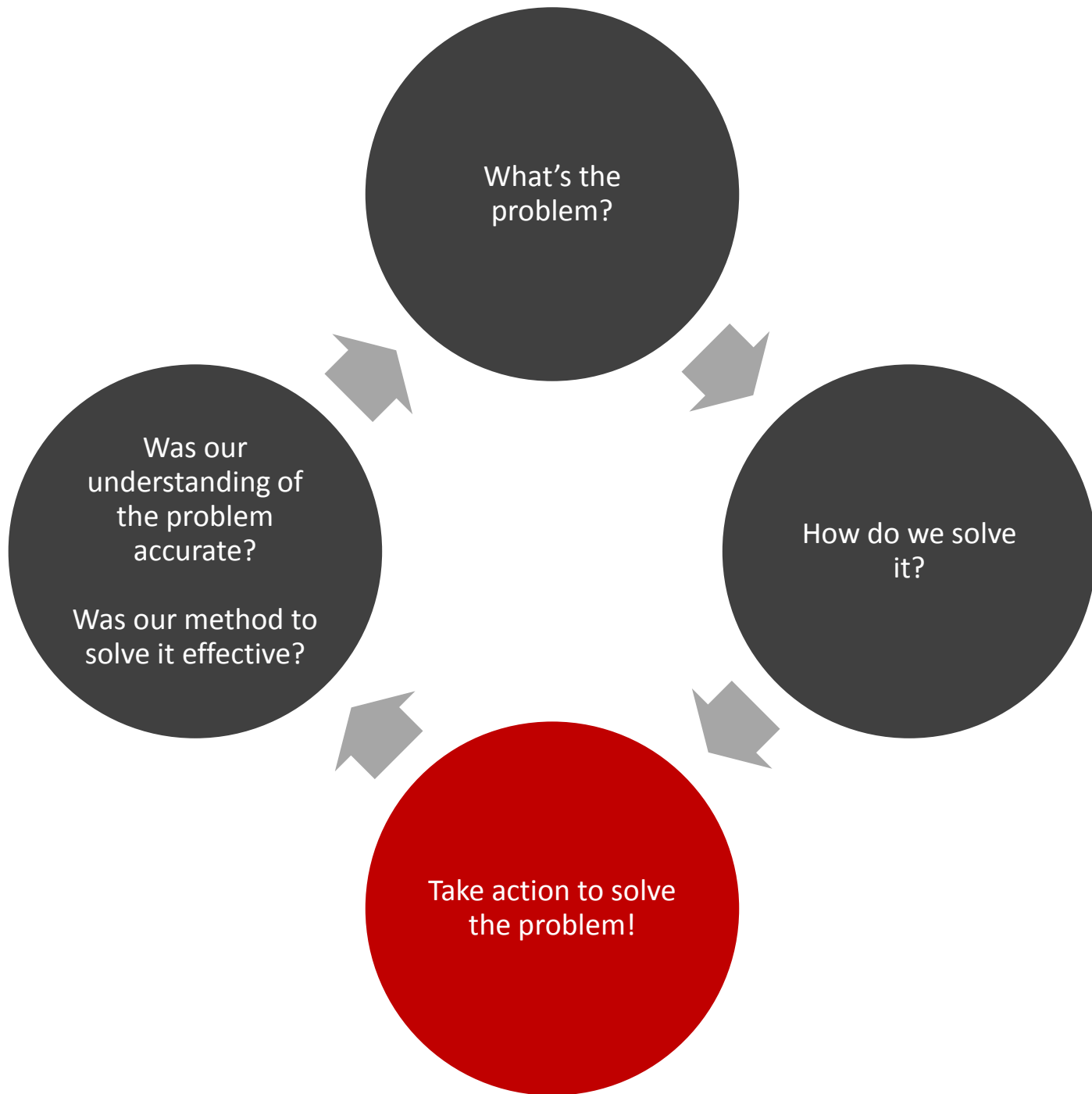
Action Research is...

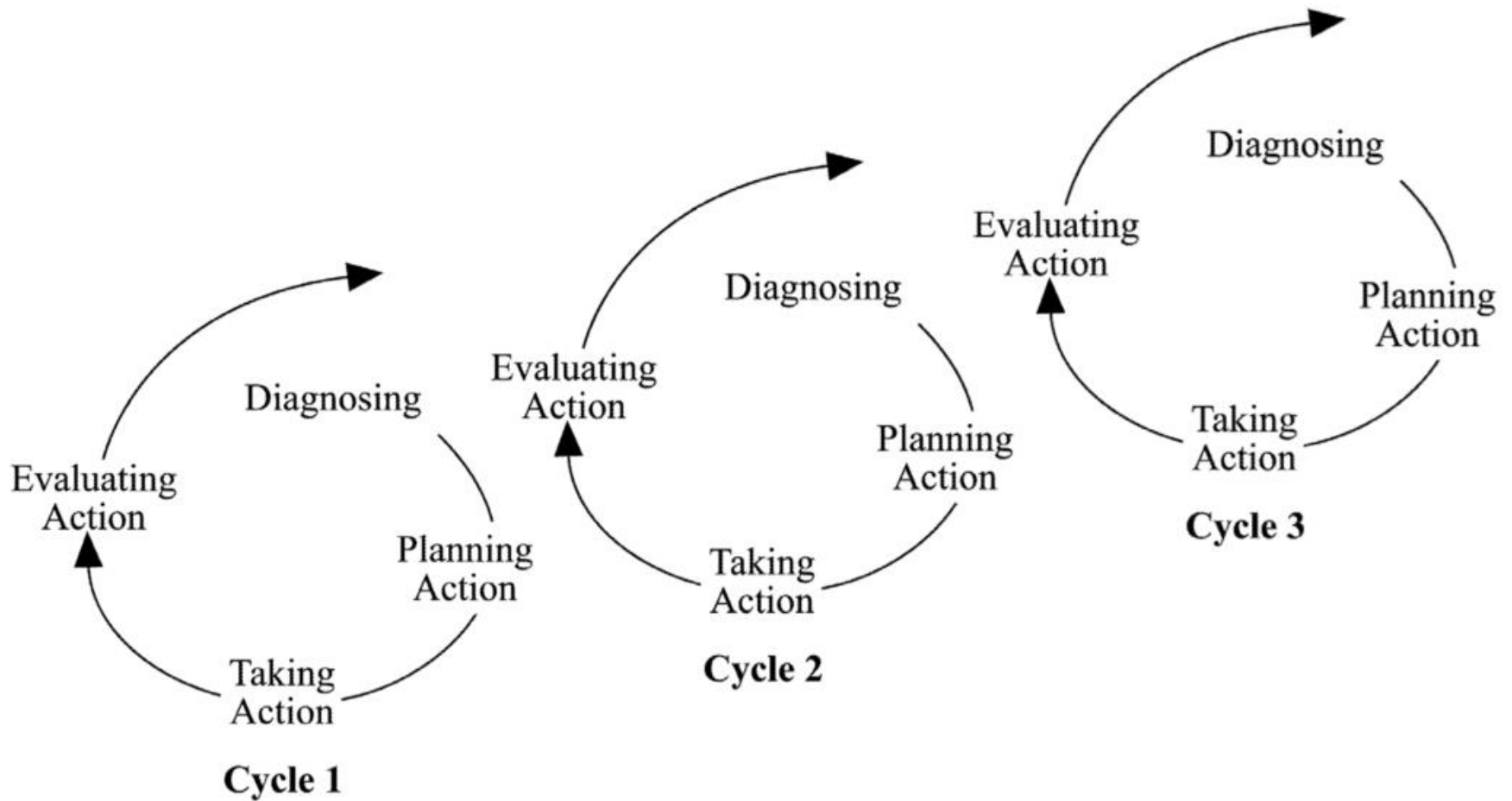
a **participatory, democratic** process concerned with developing **practical knowing** in the pursuit of **worthwhile human purposes**, grounded in a **participatory worldview** which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to **bring together action and reflection, theory and practice**, 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



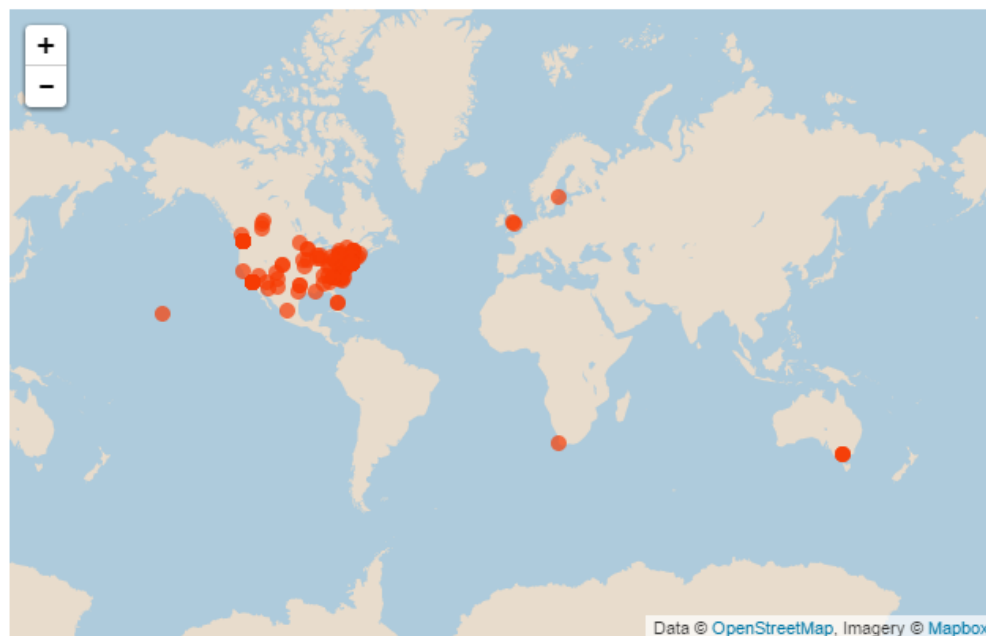
Farming Concrete BARN

[OVERVIEW](#)[DATA COLLECTION TOOLKIT](#)[ENTER YOUR DATA](#)[DATA REPORTS](#)[LOGIN](#)[FARMINGCONCRETE.ORG](#)

Welcome to the [Farming Concrete Barn](#), where you can store the data you collect with the [Farming Concrete Data Collection Toolkit](#), developed by the Design Trust for Public Space in collaboration with Farming Concrete.

If you are a gardener and would like to start entering data, please [log in](#) first. If you don't yet have a login, you can [create one now](#). If you are just visiting, we will eventually have some public reports here for you to view.

If you have any problems or questions, please email us at [gardens \(at\) farmingconcrete \(dot\) org](mailto:gardens@farmingconcrete.org).

[REGISTER](#)[LOG IN](#)

OVERVIEW

286

GARDENS RECORDING DATA

43

CITIES RECORDING DATA

76,090

POUNDS OF FOOD HARVESTED

4,483

POUNDS OF COMPOST

and counting!



**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

REFERENCES

- Andersson, E. (2014). *Fertile Grounds? Collective Strategies and the Political Ecology of Soil Management in Uganda*. Centre for Sustainability Studies. Lund University, Lund. Retrieved from <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=4437976&fileId=4437977>
- Clark, W. C., & Dickson, N. M. (2003). Sustainability science: the emerging research program. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 100(14), 8059-8061. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1231333100
- Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Kates, R. W., Clark, W. C., Corell, R., Hall, J., Jaeger, C. C., Lowe, I., & ... Mooney, H. (2001). Sustainability Science. *Science*, 292(5517), 641-642.
- Klenk, N. L., & Hickey, G. M. (2013). How can formal research networks produce more socially robust forest science?. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 37, 44-56.
- Lang, D. J., Wiek, A., Bergmann, M., Stauffacher, M., Martens, P., Moll, P., ... & Thomas, C. J. (2012). Transdisciplinary research in sustainability science: practice, principles, and challenges. *Sustainability science*, 7(1), 25-43.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead (2002). *Action Research: Principles and practice* (2nd ed.). London, UK: Routledge. Retrieved from <https://saidnazulfiqar.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/action-research-princip-and-practice.pdf>
- 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>

FURTHER READING

- Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2005). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2014). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hirsch Hadorn, G., Bradley, D., Pohl, C., Rist, S., & Wiesmann, U. (2006). Implications of transdisciplinarity for sustainability research. *Ecological Economics*, 60(1), 119-128. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2005.12.002
- Komiyama, H., & Takeuchi, K. (2006). Sustainability science: building a new discipline. *Sustainability science*, 1(1), 1-6. doi:10.1007/s11625-006-0007-4
- Marshall, J. (2012, November 27). A radical, action-based approach to leadership. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/blog/action-research-radical-sustainability-leadership>
- McNiff, J. (2013). *Action Research: Principles and practice* (3rd ed.). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Reason, P., & Bradbury, H. (2001). *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Stringer, E. T. (2007). *Action Research* (3rd ed.). California, USA: Sage Publications.
- Videos:
 - The citizen science revolution | Leesa Ricci | TEDxSUU: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8zVkVNs49Y>