Redefining process and progress for the Puget Sound Partnership:
Employing Participatory Action Research to move the Agenda forward.

Michal Russo
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In the Puget Sound Partnerships’ 2012 Lessons and Legacies report the tension between the different paces of policy and science are highlighted: Over the course of the last four years, the Partnership has had to balance the public’s and the Legislature’s sense of urgency with the scientific community’s insistence on taking the time to ensure that we do this work right1 (p19).

While numerous other critical challenges plague the ability of the PSP to achieve their ambitious goal of restoring the Puget Sound ecosystem by 2020, I believe this sentence captures the fundamental misconception that has thwarted their efforts. The legislative mandate has organized the recovery effort around scientific objectivity, however I propose that the layers of uncertainty embedded in achieving ‘success’ requires making subjective decisions (reaching agreement) based on open dialogue between scientists, policy makers and affected parties. Here, I imagine what a Participatory Action Research (PAR) might lend to redefining the process and progress in order to move the Agenda forward. I propose that PAR could re-orient the objective to center around making progress meaningful (subjective), rather than ‘getting it right’ (a generalizable objective).

In the proceeding pages I argue that the process and progress of the PSP has been thwarted by three challenges. First, the PSP relies on science to define the problem at the cost of input from the diversity of affected parties. This input is critical to building meaning and acceptance into consequent policy. Second, the PSP does not establish a transparent or accountable process for how decision are made (including prioritization and evaluation) and how progress can be achieved based on lessons from action (i.e. adaptation). The lack of accountability is the cornerstone of their failure according to the State’s audits2. Thirdly, the PSP has not leveraged their power to support the growth and capacity of governments and organizations to respond to problems at the local level towards system-wide resilience. I assert that while this objective is not in their mandate, it could radically transform the effort from triage to prevention.

Based on a review of Participatory Action Research literature, I see a great potential for the perspective of PAR to be applied to the Puget Sound Partnership in order to achieve meaningful progress. I reformulate a conceptual model for PAR that directly addresses the three challenges of the PSP by highlighting three core tenants – communication arenas, consensual iterative
cycles, and capacity for self-organization. I consequently explore each of the challenges in relation to these three core PAR tenants and formulate research agendas for redefining the PSP approach and moving forward.
THE CHALLENGE OF THE PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP

The PSP is a state umbrella agency tasked with coordinating and supervising the restoration and protection of Puget Sound. The Puget Sound Partnership (hereafter referred to as PSP) was proposed by Governor Gregoire and created by Legislature in 2007. The intended objectives were to:

1) coordinate the many existing cleanup efforts in the Puget Sound,
2) hold all levels of government agencies accountable for their part of that work,
3) and at the same time maintain the prosperity of the Puget Sound region.

The PSP was first chaired by William Ruckelshaus, former EPA director and longtime national and regional (West Coast) environmental policy leader. In a 2008 speech at Evergreen College, Ruckelshaus made his perspective on the approach of the PSP clear - the PSP must represent a collaborative problem solving approach. While in the past point source pollution dominated environmental challenges, today dispersed land-use management issues dominate. Rather than large industries, these problems are driven by stakeholders with diverse needs and interests. Ruckelshaus therefore describes the (herculean) challenge of cleaning up the Sound as reliant on mobilizing public awareness and acceptance. He outlined four critical steps to ensure a successful process: 1) trust building, 2) early involvement of every stakeholder, 3) an authoritative sponsor (the PSP) and 4) mutual gains with explicit statement of tradeoffs.

Ruckelshaus’ strong stance on participatory democracy dates back over 25 years ago when he said: “the question before us is not whether there is going to be sharing (of power with citizens), whether will have participatory democracy with regard to the management of risk, but how.” However, through the mandated outcomes, the WA State legislation stipulated charges for how the PSP should proceed.

1) Define a 2020 Action Agenda (within a year) that identifies work needed to protect and restore Puget Sound, based on science and with clear and measurable goals for recovery
2) Determine accountability for achieving results including performance, effectiveness, and the efficient use of money spent on Puget Sound; and
3) Promote public awareness and communication to build support for a long-term strategy.

I argue that within these initial charges the framework for defining both the process and progress of the PSP was created, and here that the three challenges began. First, it creates a false and harmful dynamic where science is truth and the public needs to be educated. This is in direct contradiction to the importance Ruckelshaus saw in resolving the conflicts between the technosphere and the demosphere. Second, accountability becomes unachievable as the
complexity of the system is artificially minimized to demand immediate answers (reflecting to the initial lesson about tensions over incongruent paces of science and policy). Thirdly, the mandate codifies a static institutional structure which reduces the ability to self-organize and adapt. Instead of focusing on the coordination of existing and proposed actions through power-sharing, the PSP becomes the director of all work to be done around the Puget Sound’s recovery.

**HOW MIGHT A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH IMPROVE THE PSP?**

The PSP currently operates in a detached format where scientific data is used to direct targets, which are then shared with local governments (both stakeholders and policy makers) who respond with input towards revisions. Consequently the ongoing and proposed action by local areas is retrofit to match the goals of the Agenda. Decisions are constantly revisited which precludes the ability to build off existing work, whether conceptual or physical. The goal of increasing public awareness and acceptance is limited as the capacity for learning is too narrowly construed as ‘public outreach and education’ as opposed to true collaboration. And measures for accountability are not collectively agreed upon and adhered to – for both the Partnership and the local governments which erodes trust over time.

I propose that the unique approach of PAR could facilitate a better process and progress which re-aligns the Partnership with the approach that Ruckelshaus initially proposed (Table 1). Participatory Action Research is a loosely bound family of approaches which highlights participation by engaging traditional subjects as co-directors of the research agenda with a focus on improving the practical everyday lives of society (human flourishing) as a result of

<table>
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<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Lack of input and acceptance by affected parties</td>
<td>Educate and communicate science to public</td>
<td>Build vicarious experience by co-generation of knowledge</td>
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<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td>Lack of transparent process for prioritization, evaluation, and learning</td>
<td>Science based indicator selection and measurement of performance, effectiveness and efficient spending</td>
<td>Trust building through consensual cycles of agreement, reflection and revisions.</td>
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<td><strong>Action Agenda</strong></td>
<td>Focus on centrally controlled triage instead of locally supported system-wide resilience</td>
<td>Prosperity through strategic actions</td>
<td>Capacity building to increase self-organization through flexible feedback cycles between actions and impacts.</td>
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PAR is intended to leverage social science research, which is characteristically different from physical science research due to the lack of generalizable or universal theorems and the reflective nature of research subjects. Instead, the strengths of PAR include a focus on transformation (meaningful action) rather than transferability (application outside of context) and bi-directional transfer (or co-generation) of knowledge rather than one-directional knowledge gained from learning from subjects or educating/empowering subjects.

Figure 1 reflects a revised interpretation of the PAR conceptual framework with three tiers which directly corresponds to the three tenants I identify earlier (communication arenas, an iterative cycle, and capacity for self-organization). Communication arenas (the large black circles) characterize open dialogue and decision making in which co-generation of knowledge between the researcher and the affected parties occurs. Arenas are brought in at 4 critical steps in the process 1) defining the problem, 2) generating ideas 3) agreeing on a plan (and implementing priority actions) and 4) evaluating and adapting the plan. The second level reflects an iterative cycle or rhythm to the process. This occurs both between the arenas – plan (open), act (close), observing and reflection (pause), as well as encompassing the arenas as a sequence in an ongoing, a cycle where an evaluated plan becomes the reflective primer for the next plan. The third level represents building a capacity for self-organization, as collaboration between insiders and outsiders occurs within the communication arenas. Red dots represent the researcher or outsider. Orange dots reflect insiders, or affected parties. Over the process affected parties get larger (gain power) while the researcher becomes smaller (loses power) as an intentional step of creating. Further, additional parties are integrated and the network becomes more established.

Each of the three tenants maps onto the three challenges of the PSP to present opportunities to shift the approach towards a more collaborative and democratic process that supports meaningful progress. I imagine how ‘communication arenas’ help bring in the diverse input of affected parties to define the problem and co-generate knowledge. Here the targeted goal is expanded beyond awareness, to not only acceptance but potentially social change brought on by personal experience. An iterative and consensual process of reaching agreement after open dialogue, observing and reflecting on progress, and collective evaluation of how to refine the process could broaden accountability of both the Partnership and affected parties. Lastly, building off both shared knowledge and shared ownership, the balance of power could shift, creating a flexible network of actors who are empowered to understand and act on their immediate environment.
LINKING PAR TENANTS TO PSP CHALLENGES

1. Communication Arena // PSP relies on science to define the problem at the cost of input from the diversity of affected parties

A communication arena is a room for discourse and learning resulting in interpretation and actions that participants trust. Power dynamics are central here and it is the role of the outsider to balance asymmetries in order to open up the possibility of reflection and support co-generation of knowledge. Co-generation of knowledge refers to a new level of understanding that stems from an open and balanced discussion where disparate (individual or group) knowledge is juxtaposed to support a dialectical connection where new shared ideas are formed. Co-generation is based on a synergy between tacit and expert (trans-contextual) knowledge. It requires active engagement and exploration by participants who are evoking their own actions and experience, rather than a filtering through an outsider perspective. In addition to power dynamics, diversity and conflict are essential elements of the communication area - seen as opportunity to generate greater knowledge and understanding. Flyvberg,
Landman and Schram even go as far as writing that ‘conflict is the key to social change’\textsuperscript{12}. “Agreement is often based on disagreement”, write Ury and Fisher, “differences in interests and believe make it possible for an item to be of high benefit to you, yet low cost to the other”\textsuperscript{13} (p75). Within the communication arena the tension between agreement and disagreement is paramount – an effective researcher should harness diversity and conflict towards tradeoffs and innovation while highlighting shared goals and understanding to frame the problem. In Mondragon Spain, a case study of Action Research, conflict was sought to enhance the strength of the system – where broad goals and a set of rules of debate created a flexible and resilient armature for heterogeneous viewpoints to inform diverse and innovative planning\textsuperscript{8}. Greenwood and Levin discuss the importance of creating a shared history and vision, writing that while a unified understanding might not exist, there must be a tolerable level of mutual understanding and agreement on goals\textsuperscript{9}.

**Who are the insiders and outsiders in the Puget Sound Partnership?** The PSP is governed by a 7 member Leadership Council of experienced leaders appointed by the Governor, a 23 member Ecosystem Coordination Board (ECB) that advises the Leadership Council comprised of local and state elected officials, tribal leaders, and environmental, academic, and state and federal agency representatives, and a nine member Science Panel (SP) that advises the Partnership. The programmatic efforts and governing bodies are supported by an Executive Director and staff\textsuperscript{14}. I envision the PSP acting as the ‘outside’ researcher asking the question – *what actions are necessary to restore the health of the Puget Sound ecosystem by 2020?* One could argue that the PSP itself represents both outsiders and insiders – the ECB representing affected parties and the SP representing expertise. However, the PSP represents a surprisingly narrow diversity of backgrounds and interests. The leadership council members have all held public office in the field of natural resource protection for the last several decades\textsuperscript{15}. Even representatives for business and ports within the Ecosystem Coordination Board have a long history of working with environmental groups\textsuperscript{16}. Currently, as an insider, the PSP has the challenge of balancing its efforts to solve the problem, with its interests in pursuing certain actions. While an outsider does not necessarily play the role of a neutral s/he does re-prioritize the effort to facilitate a co-learning process aimed at solving the problem\textsuperscript{9} (p93).

I propose expanding the research ‘insiders’ to include both scientific experts (academics and practitioners) and affected parties (local governments including policy makers, residents, business owners and advocacy groups). Here I depart from a PAR convention where the insiders ‘own the problem’ while outsiders reflect ‘expertise’\textsuperscript{9}. I incorporate scientists studying the Sound as insiders because they represent a hybrid expert/stakeholder advocate – being neither objective, reflecting a narrow band of interest prioritizing particular species, habitat and functions, nor strictly value-laden, focusing their reflection on scientific evidence.
**How is input integrated into the problem definition?** The Puget Sound Partnership is organized around science-based reports that feed into the Action Agenda—a roadmap for prioritizing restoration actions. The (scientific) Action Agenda is vetted through a political process including a Leadership Council, negotiation with local and regional agencies and input from ‘the public’. The PSP exclaims that the Agenda uses of a ‘fundamentally different way from traditional ‘topdown’ - using transparent public forums and soliciting extensive citizen and scientific input. However, there are no documents that articulate the process by which these ‘value-laden’ groups influence the final Agenda. I argue that while stakeholder involvement is significant in terms of time and effort, input is not transparently (if at all) translated into final directive outcomes in the Agenda. For example, in defining ‘what is a healthy sound’ authors of the 2012 Action Agenda write that Puget Sound residents overwhelmingly agree that a healthy environment is a legacy that must be passed on to our children and grandchildren, but that defining the elements of a healthy system is very difficult. While their Public Involvement and Outreach Summary (PIOS) clearly reflects the gathering of extensive input of numerous residents and affected parties, it is not clear how that input was used to set the boundaries for the definition. Instead, the Agenda relies on the original prescriptive definition articulated by a legislative mandate.

2. **Iterative Cycles // the PSP does not establish a transparent or accountable process for how decision are made (including prioritization and evaluation) and how progress can be achieved based on lessons from action (ie. adaptation).**

Kurt Lewin describes action research as incorporating a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the results of the action. Action research stipulates important characteristics of these components. Planning occurs as a co-generative process incorporating all affected parties, action is based on consensus based agreement, and fact-finding includes jointly established criteria for observation and reflection with the intention that the evaluation of the action will directly inform the next planning process.

Consensus building among affected parties is not a PAR tenant per se, but can rather be found in many practices including Collaborative Adaptive Management (CAM). What is specific about PAR is the coupling of communication arenas (forum for open discussion in which diversity and conflict is leveraged to co-generate new knowledge) with consensus building (forum for closing the discussion and reaching agreement). Effective communication arenas that address power

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*a The first Agenda was published in 2008, a yearlong process begun after the initiation of the PSP. A second Agenda was developed in 2012/13, and responds heavily to criticism from the State Legislature (see below).*
dynamics and produce shared knowledge, should improve the capacity to reach consensus. If however, participation is limited or coerced, the consensus building process will be of limited value.

Accountability is intrinsic to the iterative cycle by ensuring that 1) all affected parties participate from the beginning—so when agreement is reached, there is no-one outside the group that should be able to halt the process, 2) power is distributed - a fact-finding process to ensure that actions are valid and workable as evidence is defined and evaluated jointly and 3) credibility is built over time - therefore trust between insiders and towards outsiders grows.

Adaptation is a key component of the iterative cycle, structuring plans as a series of experiments rather as fixed strategies. The theory of AR describes the “world as more complex that our apprehension of it can be, we always approach it through a series of imperfect compromises. One can never know that all relevant accounting for data has been formulated.”9(p83). Adaptation occurs as participants learn new things about the problem they face through observing the actions taken. It is through the intimate experience of careful observation that participants become owners of the problems. And through the reflection and revision of collective action plans that a critical shared understanding is gained.

**How are decisions made?** Two important decisions frame the Action Agenda: 1) what is the status of the Puget Sound and what are the biggest threats to it? and 2) what actions should be taken that will move us from where we are today to a healthy Puget Sound by 2020? It is not clear who, when or how agreement has been made on these two fundamental questions. In answering the first question, the PSP sought to select indicators to assess the status and threats to the Sound. The PSP saw this process as science-driven, though they sought out the input from stakeholders along the way. Unfortunately, it is not clear what role that input had in selecting the final set of indicators. Dozens of multi-hundred page documents reflect the heavy investment the PSP and its predecessors (both the Puget Sound Action Team and the Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership) have put into answering this question. Lists of indicators, numbering over 800, have been collected, analyzed and prioritized with the intent of developing a clear picture of the ‘State of the Sound’19,20,21,22. Today the PSP boasts a Vital Signs Dashboard with a colorful display of prioritized aggregate indicators and targets agreed upon by the Leadership Council23. While the website describes how the indicators were developed through an engagement with regional experts and the public to identify key ecosystem indicators and pressures NOAA paints a different picture where an initial fact-finding process collaborated with the public was eventually washed out by scientific discussions and leadership designation (Table 2)24.
In prioritizing actions to support a healthy Sound, the same lack of transparency is reflected in how decisions are made. After a strong push by the legislature to prioritize near term actions, the 2012/13 Action Agenda prioritizes three strategic initiatives: prevention of pollution from urban stormwater runoff, protection and restoration of habitat and recovery of shellfish beds. However there is little connection between 1) the prioritization of local areas and the prioritization at the Sound level 2) science-based prioritization and policy based-prioritization and 3) how prioritization of specific actions is controlled in terms of criteria, weighting, and input\(^{17}\) (p27-30). The PSP has continuously avoided the critical task of articulating the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with alternative actions. While it is clear from published documentation that these tradeoffs are not described in either of the Action Agendas, it is less clear how tradeoffs might be discussed by meetings of the ECB or LC. While scientific uncertainty might preclude quantitative tradeoffs to be calculated, clearly different interest groups prioritize goals and actions differently. For example, the Sustainable Lands Initiative, a local organization based in Snohomish County, has been to address critical tradeoffs between farming vs. salmon habitat restoration along floodplains in the Snohomish Basin\(^{25}\). However, the PSP has not moved beyond developing scientific measures of health and importance to address how to negotiate and prioritize across values. For example, what is more important, water quality or water quantity, species diversity or air quality – if the PSP is to select actions to prioritize, these tradeoffs need to be made explicit. However, these conversations are tabled to be addressed by local governments with no clear relationship to the larger process. In the Sound Science Update of 2012 the Science Panel summarized an over 700 page document describing a conceptual framework and indicators to prioritize actions with a proposed methodology for evaluating which strategies ecologically and fiscally effective\(^{21}\). The report culminates with a final thought about recognizing that the evaluation system has a drawback of not integrating how, where and by whom the application would be implemented which are highly dependent on the setting where the strategy would be applied\(^{21}\) (p678).

**How is progress evaluated?** Since 2008, the Action Agenda has inspired over 700 restoration and protection projects around the Sound, investing over $450 million and supporting over 15,000 jobs\(^{26}\). The PSP documents reflect a strong backing - *across Puget Sound, federal and state agencies, tribes, city and county governments and other agencies, businesses, environmental organizations, watershed groups, landowners, and individual citizens have stated*
their support for the Action Agenda and their willingness to implement their role in restoring Puget Sound\(^3\)(p3). However, the PSP is continuously humbled by their daunting task writing: *although we have made significant strides in restoring and protecting habitat, we continue to lose more ground than we are gaining*\(^7\). While nationally the project is often heralded as a state-of-the-art and progressive effort\(^27\), regionally, the PSP has received serious criticism\(^2,29,20\). Perhaps most significantly is the audit by the legislative in 2011 and updated again in 2013\(^29,30\). The audit criticizes the Action Agenda for lacking ‘critical accountability tools’. Specifically, JURIS critiques the PSP for failing to set measureable benchmarks, linkages between actions and goals, prioritized actions and monitoring and transparent reporting\(^29,30\).

The notions of progress and accountability are intertwined by the PSP with no clear articulation of progress of who and towards what. Further, progress is seen more as a static mark to ensure that money is well spent, rather than as an evolutionary process where lessons from past successes and failures is leverages to improve future progress. The PSP is defends that their lack of measureable progress is due to the limitation that actions do not directly relate to goals due to the complexity of the natural system. For example, restoring a beach does not necessarily mean a greater rate of escapement, due to both natural variability and confounding variables. I agree that it is critical to separate an analysis of the health of the Sound, based on collectively agreed upon measures of health, and the progress of the PSP, which is only partially predicated on the health of the Sound in the near term. Further, each of these analyses needs a unique selection of indicators as they indicate different processes and phenomena.

**Who is accountable to who?** The initial objective of the PSP was to hold all levels of government agencies accountable for their part of that work\(^3\). Further, the State mandate told the PSP to determine accountability for achieving results including performance, effectiveness, and the efficient use of money spent on Puget Sound\(^3\). The WA legislative mandate included seven action areas reflecting geographic sub-areas whose role is to develop a ‘large part’ of the Agenda in terms of local plans, programs and actions\(^31\). These areas were supposed to consider scientific information, identify key actions, evaluate existing programs, and recommend specific actions for the Agenda\(^31\). However, by the 2012/13 Agenda action areas were transformed into Local Integrating Organizations – groups of local governments, tribes, non-profit organizations, watershed, marine resource, and salmon recovery groups, interest groups, businesses, educational organizations, and citizens collaborating, coordinate and implement Action Agenda priorities\(^17\). It is unclear how these LIO’s function differently from Action Areas, why there are additional organizations, and why some of action areas are no longer ‘recognized’ by the PSP\(^17\). However, more importantly the relationship between the LIOs and the PSP seem to be dissolving as opposed to strengthening, as there is little emphasis on developing priorities and ensuring that these priorities are aligned with Sound-wide goals. The 2012 Action Agenda states that: *some (action) areas have prioritized strategies and actions with performance measures,*
others are working to further refine content and add specificity around actions, while others are beginning to establish their LIO and define and prioritize strategies and actions. In the next two years, each local area will continue to move forward in defining priorities, implementing actions, and contributing to a cleaner, more vibrant, and community-oriented Puget Sound\(^2\) (p28-29). Five years after the creation of the PSP it seems daunting that priorities have still to be set or monitored by action areas. Further, it does not appear as if the PSP is holding the LIO’s accountable for failing to achieve intended outcomes. Interestingly, the 2013 State of the Sound, a document intended to report on the progress of the effort in terms of performance measures such as implementation tracking, evaluating effectiveness, and cost-benefit analysis does not include the terms ‘action area’ or ‘local integration organization’\(^1\). The document seems to focus more on the accountability of the PSP to the LIO then the other way around.

3. **Capacity for Self-organization** // the PSP has not leveraged their power to support the growth and capacity of governments and organizations to respond to problems at the local level towards system-wide resilience

PAR is a conduit for institutional change. The democratic ideals of PAR mandate that the researcher not only help solve the problem but build the capacity for the insiders to learn how to control and guide future problem solving\(^9\). I argue that this distinction transforms the approach from triage, focusing on downstream challenges to upstream on prevention. The importance of self-organization came from the historic roots of PAR in systems theory. Lewin extolled the idea of power sharing through flexibility and freedom in specification\(^9\). These characteristics are mirrored in resilient ecological systems, where self-organizing system components can respond to perturbation through diversity and modularity\(^3\). The benefit of self-organization is intuitively responding to future change by (re)establishing direct feedbacks between actions and impacts. The establishment of self-organization is notoriously elusive and has been the subject of numerous sociological and ecological publications. Here I will focus on three dimensions of PAR that might help support self-organization – a shared framework, liberation and phronesis.

Insiders and outsiders provide different skill sets to the table. While insiders have in-depth internal knowledge about the problem, a good outsider facilitator can translate diverse voices into shared concepts to provide a broader inclusive picture. The ability to employ methods to frame shared goals is essential not only to reaching agreement, but also to orienting oneself within the overall roadmap. While the roadmap may change based on new observations and reflections, without a shared roadmap it is nearly impossible to leverage individual actions to achieve a greater whole. It may seem counter-intuitive for a self-organized system to depend on a shared image as components are intrinsically decentralized. However, this shared framing provides the equilibrium state to which institutions feedback towards.
For participants to become active players in a change process, they must exercise power. In the end, to be sustainable, the process must be taken over by local participants. The main thrust of PAR is to increase participants’ control over ongoing knowledge production and action\textsuperscript{9} (p96). Liberating outcomes occur when local participants gain greater control over their own situation as a group and increase their capacity to define and manage their own collective situation\textsuperscript{9} (p135). Levin stresses that it is not through efficiency and coordination, but rather through the increase in the redundancy of functions, and redundancy of tasks that flexibility and freedom are enhanced, and the opportunities for learning (i.e. adaptive capacity, or genuine power transfer), is achieved\textsuperscript{9}.

Phronesis advocates for practical wisdom where researchers and stakeholders become capable of reasoned action with regard to ‘things that are good’. Building capacity specifically relates to being able to prioritize action by developing an intuitive expertise for problem solving within the specific context. Greenwood and Levin reference Nietzsche when they stress that the task at hand is incorporating knowledge and making it instinctive\textsuperscript{9}. Supporting intuitive expertise by the insiders to resolve vernacular challenges is a higher order benefit, or outcome of a successful PAR project.

**A shared understanding of the problem:** The intended potential of the Partnership was to encourage connections and communication across and between action areas, to maintain view of Sound-wise goals and provide support and capacity for local scale work\textsuperscript{31}. However in both the 2008 and 2012 Action Agendas the strategies prioritized by action areas do not correspond to region wide priorities and use a different language and decision making process to move forward\textsuperscript{3,17}. The Agendas do not reflect a higher level shared understanding of ‘what needs to be done’ which is then contextualized within the specific pressures and opportunities of local areas. Instead, the PSP still appears to be in the role of collecting data as a long-term pathway for exploring synergies and tradeoffs between local plans. The lack of integration between Sound-wide and local work is surprising given that it is an explicit ‘high level concern’ raised by commentators reviewing the 2012 Agenda\textsuperscript{17} (p24).

**Power-sharing:** While the PSP does not have regulatory control over action areas, they are responsible to ensure that action areas identify priorities that are in harmony with the overall Action Agenda and that they comply with what they set out to do. Further, the Partnership has the capacity to support local units, to both achieve (through funding, training and labor) their priorities and leverage interests to cost-share with neighbors. Working in partnership with the various entities involved in restoration to support their efforts is a fundamental component of the workplan of the Partnership. The Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) appear to be an outcrop of this process. However, there is currently no published literature on how this process has evolved and what it has accomplished. Interviews with LIOs would be beneficial in
understanding their formation and the role the PSP has had in supporting them. It would be meaningful to explore why some LIOs are not currently recognized by the Partnership. Furthermore, there are several successful organizations that have emerged in parallel to the Partnership, such as the Sustainable Lands Initiative and the Stillaguamish Watershed Coalition. It is not clear what their relationship is with the PSP and what type of capacity building support they might have received.

**Intuitive Knowledge:** Without personal interviews with local organizations and affected parties, it is challenging to interpret how much intuitive knowledge has been gained by the process. However, the Puget Sound Starts Here campaign Research Agenda reflects a potential efforts towards developing local intuitive knowledge to match program goals. The campaign was initiated by the Partnership in 2011 to increase awareness and motivate residents to adopt new behaviors that will decrease the amount of pollution entering the Sound. It is developed by ECO net, an education, communication and outreach network of professionals who are drawing on community level knowledge of local organizations and individuals to benefit a comprehensive vision for restoring the Sound. Posters, clinics and social media reflect a concerted effort to relate action at a household level to Sound-wide challenges – for example pesticide application, pet wastes and car washing. The campaign, while largely focusing on outreach and not collaboration, has made great strides in raising awareness at a local level.

**Conclusions**

In a 2012 review of the PSP by Crosscut magazine, Myers begins with a quote from the 2012 Agenda: “Science – not emotion or expediency – is the most reliable guide to achieving success. The Partnership supports and relies on continuing scientific research to inform its decisions, and to measure what’s working.” However, Myers continues with strong criticism of the Partnership outlining how the past 3 directors have failed to rely on science to prioritize action towards recovery, and instead relied on political motives. He asserts that there are two ways the Partnership can provide leaders – politics or science, and that a science-based approach provides a solid foundation to resist politics and prioritize based on environmental benefit. In this paper I argue that an either politics or science strategy will continue to fail to gain momentum and acceptance. As long as one ‘perspective’ is left out of the decision making table, agreements will continue to be undermined and re-defined. I insist that the Partnership requires an approach that co-generates knowledge based on both science and politics, with all affected parties represented at the table. Further, I argue that co-generation of knowledge must be consensual, iterative and adaptive. The accountability that the Puget Sound Partnership has failed to provide needs to reflect a joint fact-finding process for agreeing on valid evidence, shared responsibility, and an articulated process for observing, reflecting and revising plans based on evidence. Lastly, a true measure of the success of the Partnership will
not rest in ephemeral measures of water quality, or number of returning salmon, but the capacity of ‘insiders’ to intuitively interpret and respond to future changes towards a shared

Participatory Action Research is a focus on the research, and not on the process of collaboration. However, the core tenants of PAR shift the relationship between the outside researchers and the inside affected parties to build a capacity for self-organization and adaptation. The tension between the experts and the affected parties is heavily reflected in the challenges of the Puget Sound recovery effort. In reviewing how the Partnership has played the role of the insider, without power-sharing and effective process to reach agreement and reflect on progress, I argue that re-orientating the process where they serve as an outside mediator may help the Agenda progress. Two important lessons for the Partnership to gain from the PAR perspective are:

1) Do not attempt to hide or minimize differences between perspectives and values but rather leverage these points to seek ways to increase value and to catalyze social change. The challenge of defining health for the Puget Sound cannot be an external imposition of knowledge – but rather should stem from a co-generated understanding of shared goals.

2) Self-organization has the potential to not just provide a better version of ecosystem recovery, but to transform socio-ecological dynamics in cities. If we are to relink the feedbacks between action and impact the relationship between science and policy have to be confronted at a local and intimate level.
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