Who "owns" or controls the products of PAR research?

PAR outcomes will only be legitimate if they are produced in conjunction with the communities involved. It would seem, then, that the outcome of PAR research “belongs” to the communities that produce them. This begs several important questions, though. “How widely can the external research partner who works with the community to produce results spread or share these findings? Can they, for example, publish these findings in pursuit of their academic careers? What if the community does not use the results of the research in the way the external researcher partner expected? Answers to these questions are very much up for grabs. There are no principles of PAR research that offer definitive answers.

We presume the community is the “owner” of the research produced, unless members say otherwise. (By definition, however, if anyone has a right to any research produced, then no one actually owns any research product. See the separate post in this section dealing with the “right to research”.) In our view, the products of PAR research primarily are intended to be used by the community to help solve whatever problems they are facing. It is, therefore, not the role of outside co-researchers to decide what actions are suggested by the findings. On the other hand, it is essential that the results of PAR research find their way into the peer-reviewed scholarly literature, both for broader purposes of public learning and to challenge more traditional thinking in the social sciences. This can happen in several ways. A publishable paper or a book can be written with the participation of the community co-authors. The external academic partner could do the writing, but ask the concerned community to review the author’s findings, conclusions and recommendations. Any disagreements would be noted in the text, although the authorship would be solely the responsibility of the external scholar. In any case, it is crucial in our view that the community involved in any PAR project approves the use of whatever research is triggered by their inquiry. It probably makes sense to spell out whatever concerns the community and the external research partner might have about the control of the final PAR product before they begin their collaboration.