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PRODUCTIVE PRAGMATISM: Industrial democracy under neoliberal capitalist conditions¹

Johan E. Ravn, Oier Imaz, Igor Ortega, Trond Sanne Haga, Davydd J. Greenwood

Abstract: This essay presents two case examples of the context and practices of industrial democracy: Norwegian industrial democracy exemplified with the Aker case and the Mondragon Cooperative Experience (a term Mondragon often uses to describe its whole structure and history). The comparison illustrates the necessity of combining general systems theory, the distinction between political and socio-technical participation, and the role of ethos, worldview, and heedfulness in understanding how these enterprises operate and manage ongoing challenges. Our central motive is to promote the expansion of organizational democracy within the global industrial system as a superior and more humane alternative to global neoliberal capitalism. These are not simple comparisons because these systems have different histories, contexts, and dynamics. In making the comparison, we show that the constant process of balancing and rebalancing political and socio-technical participation is a key dynamic in keeping such democratic systems viable. We also show that enterprise ethos and worldview, far from being an add-on or a “soft” dimension, is the bedrock on which such systems rely. After making this general presentation, we put these systems in motion to show how they address the challenges of downsizing and strategic planning. Downsizing and strategic planning show both systems’ ability to face unexpected events and effectively cope with their potential consequences. We conclude that the differences between the cases show there is no one right way to create democratic organizations, but that paths exist and remain open for many different versions of these more humane and successful industrial organizations so necessary for creating sustainable societies.

Keywords: productive pragmatism, industrial democracy, worker cooperativism, Aker Solutions, Mondragon.

Pragmatismo productivo: La democracia industrial frente a las condiciones del capitalismo neoliberal

Resumen: Este ensayo presenta dos estudios de caso sobre el contexto y las prácticas de la democracia industrial: la democracia industrial noruega ejemplificada con el caso Aker y la Experiencia Cooperativa de Mondragon (un término que Mondragon usa a menudo para describir toda su estructura e historia). La comparación ilustra la necesidad de combinar la teoría de sistemas, la distinción entre participación política y sociotécnica, y el papel del *ethos*, la visión del mundo (*worldview*) y la atención consciente (*heedfulness*) en la comprensión de cómo estas empresas operan y manejan los desafíos actuales. Nuestro motivo central es promover la expansión de la democracia organizacional dentro del sistema industrial global como una alternativa superior y más humana al capitalismo neoliberal global. La comparación

1 All authors contributed equally to this chapter. We have ordered authorship to reflect the professional interest of the co-authors. Johan Elvemo Ravn is the corresponding author: johan.ravn@sintef.no

entre ambos casos no es sencilla; estos sistemas tienen diferentes historias, contextos y dinámicas. Al hacer la comparación, mostramos que el proceso constante para equilibrar y reequilibrar la participación política y sociotécnica es clave para mantener su viabilidad. También mostramos que el *ethos* empresarial y la visión del mundo (*worldview*), lejos de ser un complemento o una dimensión “suave”, son los pilares sobre los que se fundamentan dichos sistemas. Después de hacer esta presentación general, mostramos como ambos sistemas abordan los desafíos de la planificación estratégica y la reducción de personal. En ambos casos queda en evidencia la capacidad de ambos sistemas para enfrentar eventos inesperados y hacer frente de manera efectiva a sus posibles consecuencias. Concluimos que las diferencias entre los casos muestran que no existe una forma correcta de crear organizaciones democráticas, pero que existen caminos que permanecen abiertos para el desarrollo de diversas formas de organizaciones industriales exitosas y más humanas, tan necesarias para crear sociedades sostenibles.

Palabras clave: pragmatismo productivo, democracia industrial, cooperativas de trabajo asociado, Aker Solutions, Mondragon

1. Introduction

Questions about power, participation and legitimacy are always key in organizations within global industrial capitalism. From an industrial democracy perspective, underlying conflicts of interest between capital and labor cannot be abolished or nullified. They are forces to cope with or even to utilize to promote better alternative systems. The economist J. K. Galbraith wrote about the way a balance of power between strong industry/capital, trade unions and the state prevented any one of the actors from accumulating too much power (Galbraith, 1952). Industrial democracy is built on this principle, both as a model and as a practice. It is, however, based on more than the idea of curbing capital. A key premise is that the production process and economic outcomes benefit from working conditions that are sustainable and positively challenging for all employees, including participation in innovation and broader restructuring processes within an agreed-on framework.

This essay builds a comparison of industrial democracy as practiced in Norway and in the Mondragon cooperatives. These are dissimilar systems and operate on different scales, making the comparisons challenging. Despite the differences, these systems are similar in key ways when their underlying dynamics are examined. The Norwegian system is based on a long-standing national structure of laws and partnership agreements among unions, employers, and the government. The Mondragon system, despite its now extensive international reach, is based on a regional network of worker cooperatives located in the Spanish Basque Country and is an important but not dominant part of that regional economy. Both systems are based on democratic principles and provide significant openings for labor to adjust its relations to capital, but they are very differently anchored and structured. The following comparative analysis does not ignore these differences but seeks to analyze the overall system dynamics that enable both cases to function and sustain themselves. In this way, we want to promote the consideration of still other future contexts and designs for industrial democracies

that can survive and even prosper in the current global system, without ignoring the diversity of situations and possibilities in which such systems can exist.

We affirm that key to the analysis is understanding the complex balancing act between political participation and socio-technical participation in both systems. Following Abrahamsson (1977), political participation refers to involvement in high-level goal setting and long-term planning within the company. Socio-technical participation, on the other hand, refers to ‘involvement in the organization’s production’ systems². This balance between the social and the political is always at risk and yet must be maintained. To contextualize this, we argue there is no one ideal formula for creating industrial democratic systems. Rather there are a set of system conditions that must be met in any attempt to move in this direction.

The analysis matters because it underlines the relevance of a participatory/democratic approach to corporate governance in the face of contemporary global challenges. Like any other open system, enterprises and organizations are constantly having to deal with changes and heterogeneity in their environments, and must adapt successfully to survive or to flourish. The comparison between the Norwegian system and the Mondragon system reveals how their successful adaptations to a dynamic and variable environment have relied on ongoing and developmental processes in both realms of political participation and socio-technical participation. The comparison also reveals that adaptation and change critically depend on the capacity of organizations to (re-)interpret and deepen their own ethos and worldviews.

Through more than two years of dialogues and comparative analyses, we have developed this comparative perspective³. We are motivated by the aim both to understand and to improve the functioning of both cases and to draw lessons for other possible industrial democratic efforts elsewhere. We found that focusing comparatively, without ignoring the significant differences between the cases, has required considerable conceptual clarification, agreement on analytical frameworks, and then the actual work of laying out the comparisons and responding to the similarities and differences. In the end, our underlying goal is the improved functioning of both systems, assisted by learning broader lessons from the comparative analysis. Given the richness of our own learning experience in this collaboration, we aim for this analytical approach to encourage future developments of diverse industrial democratic systems and to foster productive comparative analyses of such systems.

In what follows, we introduce the basic concepts and analytical frames employed to structure the comparison. These include general systems theory, Clifford Geertz’s definitions

- 2 Abrahamsson (1977) takes participation to mean involvement of employees in company decision-making. Political participation means involvement in high-level goal setting and long-term planning within the company. It means that employees, through some form of selection process, are represented in consultations and decisions about strategic path choices for the entire company or business. Political participation can as well give employees a right to hold organizational executives to account. Socio-technical participation, on the other side, means ‘involvement in the organization’s production’ systems. Socio-technical participation extends the employees’ involvement into the daily value-creation processes giving rise to the firm’s products. While it may involve the implementation of decisions made at a higher level, it also involves improvements and changes in the production organization, the way to operate, job enhancements, safety, etc.
- 3 The authors of this chapter all practice action research and this is directly relevant to our perspective. One reason that Action Research is exiled from the conventional university social sciences and humanities is that it is based on general systems theory (GST) and does not respect the artificial disciplinary boundaries so abundant and actively defended in academia. Action Research affirms that nothing human can be understood outside of its systems context and that the only way to demonstrate understanding that systems context is by acting on it deliberately to try to produce a desired and socially solidary outcome. AR offends the siloed social sciences and humanities and demands that academic inquiry, driven by prosocial values, be directly developed in real world contexts with the diverse and relevant stakeholders as part of a complex process of gathering and integrating diverse understandings, knowledge, and experience into better functioning groups.

Democratic alternatives to hierarchy — why so few?

Bob Dick

Abstract: Examples are briefly described of organizations that offer a perspective to complement the experience of industrial democracy in Norway and Mondragon. The examples are organizations choosing a structure and culture that minimize hierarchy. They provide a less-traditional approach to balancing political and socio-technical participation. To do so they devolve responsibility for coordination of effort and expertise to individuals and teams most directly providing the effort and expertise. This gives the individuals and teams high autonomy. Examples include a university class, action learning projects in community and organizational settings, and a voluntary self-organizing network of facilitators. In addition, a small sample of organizations from the larger sample documented by Corporate Rebels (<https://corporate-rebels.com/>) is also briefly described and compared. Finally, the examples are located within other, wider, changes taking place.

Keywords: balancing political and socio-technical participation, organizational structure, organizational culture, industrial democracy, minimal hierarchy, butterfly effect, paradigm shift

Alternativas democráticas a la jerarquía - ¿Por qué tan pocas?

Resumen: Se describen brevemente ejemplos de organizaciones que ofrecen una perspectiva complementaria a las experiencias de democracia industrial en Noruega y Mondragón. Los ejemplos son organizaciones que eligen una estructura y una cultura que minimizan la jerarquía. Proporcionan un enfoque menos tradicional para equilibrar la participación política y sociotécnica. Para hacerlo, devuelven la responsabilidad de la coordinación del esfuerzo y la experiencia a las personas y equipos que hacen ese esfuerzo y tienen esa experiencia de manera más directa. Esto da a las personas y equipos una gran autonomía. Los ejemplos incluyen una clase universitaria, proyectos de aprendizaje en acción en entornos comunitarios y organizacionales, y una red voluntaria de facilitadores autoorganizados. Además, también se describe y compara brevemente una pequeña muestra de organizaciones de la muestra más grande documentada por Corporate Rebels (<https://corporate-rebels.com/>). Finalmente, los ejemplos se ubican dentro de otros cambios más amplios que están ocurriendo.

Palabras clave: equilibrio entre la participación política y socio-técnica, estructura organizacional, cultura organizacional, democracia industrial, jerarquía mínima, efecto mariposa, cambio de paradigma

1. Introduction

This paper engages particularly with the tension between political and socio-technical participation and how to resolve it. My intention is to explore some examples that may suggest alternative theoretical and practical approaches. I draw on two different samples. One is my own experience over half a century in structuring academic classes participatively, and in the use of participatory action learning for large action learning programs in community and organization development. I also draw on the 25 years of existence of the Australasian Facilitators Network, a self-organizing network of about 800 facilitators in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. A second, brief, sample is drawn from the growing collection of trail-blazing organizations identified and documented by Corporate Rebels on their corporate-rebels.com website ‘bucket list’.

Let me anticipate the conclusion I will later draw. As in the lead article in this issue by Johan Ravn and his colleagues (Ravn et al., 2023), culture is an important aid or hindrance to innovative structures. In particular, I conclude that existing and partly tacit assumptions about the nature of organizations, leadership, and coordination, are central. A widely held set of these assumptions can be characterized as the bureaucratic mindset. For people with such a mindset, I conclude that some promising alternative structures violate too many of their assumptions. The Ravn et al. article identifies many other aspects in its Norwegian and Mondragon examples. All are again relevant to the examples below, though only the aspects of organizational environment and of individual and cultural evolution are explored.

I too have assumptions. One of them that underpins my understanding of the different examples is explored below. It concerns organizational structure. Organizations can achieve large or complex tasks beyond the ability of unorganized individuals. They do so by coordinating the effort and expertise of multiple individuals and teams. Important questions follow from this idea — how is the coordination actually achieved, and by whom? Answers to this question open up some alternative ways of resolving the tension between political and socio-technical participation.

With this background, and the focus it provides, I now describe each of the examples. I begin with some of my own experience as learning facilitator and change facilitator. I also draw on my experience as the moderator of the email list that is the main coordination mechanism for the Australasian Facilitators Network.

2. Classroom and community participation

2.1. A university class

The example I draw on here was a fourth-year optional class in the final year of a four-year undergraduate program in psychology. The version I describe here evolved from many years of trial-and-error pursuing continuous improvement. My aim as course convenor was to bring democracy and participation to the classroom. For a little more detail see Dick (1991).

The starting point was very different. Initially, in the first week I tried to engage the learners in co-designing course content and process. The outcomes were disappointingly pedestrian. Each subsequent year I continued to experiment to find ways to improve learner

Review of Productive Pragmatism: Can industrial democracy be viable under neoliberalist capital conditions?

Shankar Sankaran

Abstract: I review the two cases of industrial democracy in Norway and Mondragon using multiple perspectives. From a system thinking perspective, I use a General Systems Theory (GST), Viable Systems Model and Soft Systems Methodology. From a management perspective, I examine how institutional entrepreneurship plays a role in creating new ways of coping with regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive forces impacting the two cases. I then view the two economies from a governmentality perspective on how they deal with power and autonomy. My analysis demonstrates that the two democracies have coped well with internal and external forces. I also argue that industrial democracy would face challenges in dealing with new ways of working that have emerged due to the influence of technology.

Keywords: Viable Systems Model; Soft Systems Methodology; Institutional Theory; Governmentality

Una revisión del Pragmatismo Productivo: ¿Puede la democracia industrial ser viable bajo condiciones capitalistas neoliberales?

Resumen: Reviso los dos casos de democracia industrial en Noruega y Mondragón utilizando múltiples perspectivas. Desde una perspectiva de pensamiento sistémico, utilizo una Teoría General de Sistemas (TGS), un Modelo de Sistemas Viables y una Metodología de Sistemas Blandos. Desde una perspectiva de gestión, examino cómo el emprendimiento institucional juega un papel en la creación de nuevas formas de hacer frente a las fuerzas regulativas, normativas y cultural-cognitivas que impactan en los dos casos. Posteriormente veo las dos economías desde una perspectiva de gubernamentalidad para ver cómo tratan con el poder y la autonomía. Mi análisis demuestra que las dos democracias han hecho frente bien a las fuerzas internas y externas. También argumento que la democracia industrial enfrentaría desafíos al tratar con nuevas formas de trabajo que han surgido debido a la influencia de la tecnología.

Palabras clave: modelo viable de sistemas, metodología de sistemas blandos, teoría institucional, gubernamentalidad

Introduction

As I began to review the two excellent accounts of industrial democracy (Norway and Mondragon), it took me a while to reflect on how to respond, as I am not a specialist in the topic area. However, as I started reading the accounts, I began to sense a feeling of excitement that I may have something to say as a scholar working on organizations and management and systems thinking.

I plan to look at what has been written from three perspectives. The first perspective is from the viewpoint of systems theories. The editors mention General Systems Theory in their lead article. My view will be more from a cybernetics perspective, especially using the Viable Systems Model developed by Stafford Beer (Beer, 1984) as their essay asks a question about viability. I will also refer to Peter Checkland's work on Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1989) as the article discusses conflict resolution with multiple actors with multiple perspectives.

The second perspective is from institutional theory as we are discussing institutions and their interactions with the environment in the two cases. I will specifically use Scott's work on institutional theory that discusses "regulative, normative and cognitive structures and activities that provide stability and meaning for social behavior" (Scott, 2014, p. 33). Within this view I will also discuss the role of institutional entrepreneurs. The term institutional entrepreneur refers to the "activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones" (Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004, p. 657).

The third perspective is from a governance perspective as my research covers project governance where we discuss the impact of governmentality on neoliberal theory which "involves a description of the shaping of freedom and power's attempts to negotiate the space between a subtle exertion of authority over subjects and their complete autonomy." (Baerg, 2009, p. 117)

Before I discuss what, I observed about the case studies from the three perspective I will introduce some of these perspectives briefly for the sake of the reader who is unfamiliar with them.

1. Systems Theories

Cybernetics developed from control engineering but has similarities to the concept of GST (Bertalanffy, 1968) in that its founder Norbert Wiener (Wiener, 1948) opined that it works across disciplines as "it dealt with general laws that governed control processes whatever the nature of the systems under consideration" (Jackson, 2003, p. 7). The key concepts of cybernetics include communication, control, and feedback. While the early cyberneticists were mathematicians, engineers and scientists, cybernetics, also attracted social scientists such as Gregory Bateson's (Bateson, 1972), whose work on is mentioned in the lead article. I will also refer to another concept developed by cybernetics. Ross Ashby's concept of requisite variety (Ashby, 1956) is also used in Beer's Viable Systems Model. Ashby's notion of requisite variety implies that to cope with the complexities posed by an external environment a system (or organization) must have sufficient variety. The later cyberneticists developed second order cybernetics which is known as the cybernetics of the observing system taking a more subjective view that recognized the social construction of reality. Stafford Beer's Viable Systems Model is also driven by second order cybernetic ideas which originated from his work on neuro-physiological concepts which he applied to management systems. His original work viewed the firm using human physiology (heart and brain) as metaphors to design a viable organization (Beer, 1972; Beer, 1979).

Comparing organizational democracy in Norway and Mondragon: Lessons learned for other nations and initiatives

Joseph R. Blasi and Douglas Kruse

Abstract: We have been asked to compare and contrast the Norwegian system of industrial democracy with the Mondragon federated corporation of worker cooperatives to arrive at a realistic appraisal of what can be learned from both systems and to discern the lessons to be learned for other nations and other initiatives. In doing so, the kinds of lessons that are needed for the emerging system of broad-based employee share ownership and industrial participation in the United States will be introduced as a part of our analysis. We are hoping that our colleagues and readers can benefit from the books and empirical research sponsored by Rutgers University's Institute for the Study of Employee Ownership and Profit Sharing¹ and our sister Journal of Participation and Employee Ownership².

Keywords: employee ownership, ESOP, worker cooperative, Employee Stock Ownership Plan

Comparando la democracia organizacional en Noruega y Mondragón: Lecciones aprendidas de otros países e iniciativas

Resumen: Se nos ha pedido que comparemos y contrastemos el sistema noruego de democracia industrial con la corporación federada de cooperativas de trabajadores de Mondragón para llegar a una evaluación realista de lo que se puede aprender de ambos sistemas y discernir las lecciones que se pueden aprender para otras naciones y otras iniciativas. Al hacerlo, se presentarán como parte de nuestro análisis los tipos de lecciones que se necesitan para el sistema emergente de participación industrial y propiedad accionaria de los empleados de base amplia en los Estados Unidos. Esperamos que nuestros colegas y lectores puedan beneficiarse de los libros y la investigación empírica patrocinados por el Instituto para el Estudio de la Propiedad de los Empleados y el Reparto de Utilidades de la Universidad de Rutgers y nuestra publicación hermana Journal of Participation and Employee Ownership.

Palabras clave: propiedad de los trabajadores, programas/planes de propiedad accionaria de los trabajadores, PPAT, cooperativas de trabajadores

1. Brief overview of each system

Let's begin with our summary appraisal of what each system has achieved and what it constitutes at a very high level.

1 Available at: <https://smlr.rutgers.edu/content/institute-study-employee-ownership-and-profit-sharing>, www.cleo.rutgers.edu

2 Available at: <https://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/journal/jpeo>

Norway has a population of about 5.5 million people, an economy of approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ trillion in U.S. dollars in size, 2022 estimated per capita Purchasing Power Parity of about \$78,000 (sixth highest in the world) and 2022 per capita nominal GDP of about \$93,000 (third highest in the world). The entire market value of the Norwegian stock market ranged from about \$300 billion to \$400 billion in August and September of 2022 (“Norway,” n.d.).³ The Norwegian system of industrial democracy was built on the Main Agreement” in 1935 between the Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprises (NHO) which was supposed to manage labor-management conflict for employers and democratize economic life for unions and the workers for whom they spoke and hoped to speak. Labor Party governments for approximately three decades after WWII helped strengthen this system. Then Conservative Party governments, alternating Labor and Conservative Party Governments, and a Centre-Left minority government with a Labor prime minister have changed and rebalanced this evolving system.

Five large system changes have affected this system, not necessarily listed in order of importance:

1. The discovery of oil and the large contributions of this revenue to Norway’s sovereign wealth funds that supports the social programs and growth of the economy.
2. The fact that only about half of Norway’s current workforce is unionized although about three-quarters of workers are estimated to be covered by collective bargaining agreements.
3. The added layer of industrial democracy provided by the application of the European Union’s 1994 and succeeding directives on works councils⁴ essentially providing for an elected works council when there are at least 150 enterprise employees in at least two member states.
4. Much of the labor-intensive industry in the country has been outsourced
5. Despite the world perception that Norway’s vaunted Social Democracy has been weakened with the respective alternating liberal and conservative governments, it is important to note, from the 50,000 feet vantage point, that Norway has one of the most developed welfare states in the world and a large state-owned sector in its economy and is regularly classified by global metric systems as the world’s most democratic country, one of the least “failed states”, one of the highest standards of living, with workers who are among the most productive in the world.

The Mondragon Corporation is located in the Basque Region of Spain and is a system of workplace democracy based on a federation (in a self-governing corporate conglomerate) of 95 cooperatives, 80,000 workers, 14 R&D research centers, with the top ranking in the Basque region as a corporation and one of the top rankings in all of Spain as a corporation (Mondragon Corporation, n.d.).⁵ It began in 1955–1956 with a vision of a Catholic priest and a few workers. Using the data presented by the Mondragon Corporation on the number of workers and the estimates of their productivity in U.S. dollars, we estimate that the nominal GDP per worker is \$181,250 which would put it higher than that of the nominal GDP of Norwegian workers. Unlike Norway, Mondragon is almost totally non-union if not over 95% non-union.

3 On the value of the stock market in total market capitalization, see: <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/norway/market-capitalization>

4 On the European Union’s directives on works councils, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=707&langId=en&intPageId=211>

5 For a recent New York Times story, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/business/cooperatives-basque-spain-economy.html>

Varieties of industrial democracy- beyond neoliberalism or not?

The Special Issue Editors' response essay

Johan E. Ravn, Oier Imaz Alias, Trond Sanne Haga and Davydd J. Greenwood

We, the co-editors of this Special Issue, aim to promote the expansion of organizational democracy within the global industrial system as a superior and more humane alternative to a neoliberal model incapable of seeing beyond short-term profit-maximizing no matter what the human or environmental cost. We want to reinforce dialogue and debates about the possibilities of sustaining and expanding industrial democracy and therefore social democratic institutions that are under sustained attack by the current neoliberal domination of the global economy. To support this effort, we asked three well-known experts on industrial democracy and on Action Research to write comment essays in response to our comparative paper. We proposed the following issues as guidance to the respondents and were fortunate in receiving thoughtful and challenging responses from all three.

- These are the prompts we sent to the respondents.
- If industrial democratic systems are not one-size-fits all, how can new efforts in this direction learn from the histories and structures of existing successful systems?
- It is clear in the cases that we presented that culture (ethos and worldviews) is an important resource and component in the success of such systems. How do new efforts build a culture that sustains an industrial democratic effort without hobbling its entrepreneurial capabilities and how does this cultural baseline evolve over time in response to changing circumstances?
- What do unionized environments and non-unionized cooperative systems have to learn from each other about the balancing of the interests of labor and capital in competitive enterprises?
- How are we to understand the complex and dynamic relationship between organizational cultures and socio-technical systems that such organizations are always trying to balance?
- Given the detailed agreements and complex structures to manage the relationships between labor and capital revealed in both cases, how can new startups or transformations of existing organizations learn from these structures of political and socio-technical participation and not have to repeat all the trial and error that led to the consolidation of the systems we have portrayed?
- Are there boundaries or scales beyond which industrial democratic systems cannot survive or to which neoliberal capitalist organizations are better suited or not?
- The responses we received were quite different but complementary in interesting ways. We have ordered our comments on the responses to create a narrative line through them and to offer readers a way to engage in the dialog about these issues.

Interview Davydd Greenwood

The Mid-career Making of an Action Researcher

Davydd J. Greenwood

Danilo and Miren:

Thank you, Davydd, for this interview for the readers of *International Journal of Action Research*. We are pleased to have your insights in this special issue that you have edited together with colleagues from Norway and the Basque Country in Spain. We think that this can provide the reader with a perspective on your experience and trajectory that will help better understand the contents presented through the different articles.

Let's start giving the reader a perspective on your trajectory. Why and how did you come to AR?

Davydd:

Narrating history backwards tends to rationalize that history, making it more coherent than it was. With that caveat, I will dive in.

I did not set out to become an action researcher. Born in Colorado in the middle of World War II, the grandchild of immigrants from four countries and the child of a psychiatrist and a psychiatric nurse, I grew up in Topeka, Kansas, a city almost divided into thirds: a White third, an African American third, and a Latino (in this case, Mexican) third. The latter two were clearly on the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. The reason for this was that, in first half of the 20th century, United States railroads were still important. Topeka, Kansas, the terminus of the "Santa Fe Trail" had the central offices and shops of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, one of the largest in the country. Most African Americans came to Topeka during World War I to work on the railroad and replace the "Whites" who had gone to war. In World War II, African Americans also went to war and so Mexicans immigrated to Topeka to take the railroad jobs. The city was segregated racially until 1954. I was in grade school when the Supreme Court decision "Brown vs the School Board of Topeka, Kansas" made segregated schools illegal. I remember the first African American children coming into my grade school for the first time.

One peculiarity of Topeka was that, in a town of 100,000 people, it had only one huge urban high school, built during the Depression. As a result, all the high school students in Topeka were there. Though the race-ethnic groups kept to themselves to a degree and there was tracking of students into vocational and higher education, we all met in the marching band, the band, the orchestra, the pep band, and on sports teams and events. One of the local Mexican immigrants became my Spanish language teacher in high school. He was charismatic, humble, and fascinating to me and I became a dedicated learner of Spanish because of my curiosity about him. Growing out of this, my family arranged an exchange with a middle-class family in Mexico City and my international life began.

I mention these experiences because there never was a time that I could be unaware of cultural differences, racism, and class, something I discovered later that many "White" Americans were and are oblivious to. And because I had good experiences with my musical

and sports friends from other groups and my parents supported these relationships, I developed an enduring curiosity about people and cultures different from mine.

When I went to college, I wanted to continue in Spanish and became a Spanish language and literature major, later double majoring in Anthropology and adding Latin American Studies. This took place in a 1200 student liberal arts college in the middle of the Iowa corn and wheatfields, Grinnell College. Grinnell was in its fanatical liberal arts phase, teaching us to respect knowledge from all fields and encouraging us to understand that there was an infinite amount to know and learn. I learned that you can never know enough. They even gave us a third-year liberal arts examination on universal knowledge, together with bibliographies running to thousands of pages. I think the aim was to show us how much more there was to learn than we already knew. Grinnell was also where I met my wife of 57 years, a Spaniard, in a Spanish literature class we took together. Our history together initially was only possible because of those Spanish classes back in Topeka and learning to seek out and learn from cultural differences.

Among the many things the Grinnell experience did for me, it affected my understanding of the importance of learning how to learn and how necessary it is to disregard disciplinary boundaries and rules in search of understanding. By comparison, graduate school in Anthropology, despite some wonderful mentors who took an interest in me, was a disappointingly narrow business and served as my first introduction to the Tayloristic world of academic life.

As an anthropologist and fortunately with the support of my mentors, I decided to do my dissertation research in Spain. In the 1960's, this was generally off limits to anthropology because anthropology had become understood as the social study of people of color outside of the United States, Canada, and Europe. Indeed, Europe was not designated an acceptable research area in professional anthropology in the US until the 1990's. Since I was a good student, my mentors left me alone, but I then had to figure out how to work in Spain. My dissertation advisor was an expert on Japan. At that time there was very little anthropology written about Spain. With a tip from one of my professors, I finally found the books on the Basque Country of the brilliant Spanish anthropologist, linguist, and historian, Julio Caro Baroja. Based on reading them, I wrote a proposal to the National Institute of Mental Health and was funded for 3 years of dissertation research and writing. The inconvenience was that I knew next to nothing about Spanish history, ethnography, or even geography. On arrival in the Basque Country, I went to meet Julio Caro Baroja. Generously, he took me on as an informal student and became a colleague and lifelong friend. His immense knowledge and the incredible library at his home in Navarre showed me again how much there was to learn, how little I knew, and the incalculable value of good mentoring.

I completed a dissertation on the political economic evolution of Basque family farming under the impact of industrialization and tourism and the massive rural exodus that was visible in the late 1960 s. While we were there, the ETA movement broke out and I became a witness to and student of ethnic violence and identity politics in the heart of a fascist regime, a theme that has also played a major role in my own intellectual career.

To foreshorten this history, I then got a professorship in Anthropology at Cornell University where I taught from 1970 to 2014. In that context, I found myself quickly unhappy with the restrictive view of anthropology as the study of the "other". I tried hard to develop an integrated biological-archeological-linguistic-cultural introductory course for anthropology only to meet with resistance from my anthropology colleagues. I had more in common with