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Action Research, Democracy and (Global)Citizenship

Building bridges among traditions and practices

Danilo R. Streck

Abstract: The theme of the 6th Symposium of the International Journal of Action Research invited participants to explore the role of Action Research on the edges that societies are facing today around the world.[1] Among these edges, citizenship as a necessary socio-political process to the functioning of democracy is of special relevance, and in a sense connects with all the other edges, from poverty and migration to climate change. The paper is intended to be an initial exploration of how Action / Participatory Research in its different traditions implicitly or explicitly conceives its role in the promotion of citizenship. The argument is that there is an important democratising legacy sometimes lost or forgotten in favor of a more instrumental approach for organisational functioning and productivity. Listening to some selected voices from Europe and Latin America will lead to the proposal of a framework for comparative studies on the theme.

Keywords: Action Research, democracy, global citizenship, comparative studies, learning from differences, systematization of experience

Investigación Acción, Democracia y Ciudadanía (Global):

Construyendo puentes entre tradiciones y prácticas

Resumen: El tema del 6º Simposio de International Journal of Action Research invitó a los participantes a explorar el papel de la Investigación Acción en las aristas que enfrentan las sociedades hoy en todo el mundo. Entre estas aristas, la ciudadanía como proceso socio-político necesario para el funcionamiento de la democracia cobra especial relevancia, y en cierto sentido se conecta con todas las demás aristas, desde la pobreza y la migración hasta el cambio climático. El artículo pretende ser una exploración inicial de cómo la Investigación Acción/Participativa en sus diferentes tradiciones implícita o explícitamente concibe su papel en la promoción de la ciudadanía. El argumento es que existe un importante legado democratizador que a veces se pierde u olvida en favor de un enfoque más instrumental para el funcionamiento y la productividad organizacional. La escucha de algunas voces seleccionadas de Europa y América Latina conducirá a la propuesta de un marco de estudios comparativos sobre el tema.

Palabras clave: Investigación Acción, democracia, ciudadanía global, estudios comparados, aprender de las diferencias, sistematización de experiencias

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1   "Action Research on the Edge" – IJAR 2022 Symposium, October 12–14, 2022, organized and promoted by Arama – Initiative in Action Research, Sabanci University, Istanbul.

As introduction: Is there fire under the ashes?

Action Research, as other research methodologies and science in general, are today challenged to rethink their role. When the proponents of the 6th Symposium of the International Journal of Action Research invited participants to explore the edges of Action Research, they seemed to be suggesting that research may have its share of responsibility for the multifaceted crisis we are facing today and that are well known: hunger in many parts of the world, forced migrations, the installation of authoritarian regimes in many countries, drastic climatic changes and environmental degradation and disasters, to name a few. How does Action Research fit into this picture? Eventually, where can alternatives be anchored?

In these circumstances two simultaneous movements are called for. One of them is to acknowledge the myriad of innovative practices that can be found all over the world. A quick look at the articles published in the *International Journal of Action Research,* and other journals in the field, makes us aware that academics and practitioners are struggling to find ways to make a difference, and in different ways. In the last years I have been happy to see experiments in doctoral dissertations and master theses that constitute healthy methodological transgressions, for instance, mixing Action Research with Autobiography, developing creative strategies of participation in times of Covid-19 pandemic such as writing and sharing "pedagogical letters" for constructing the data corpus to be collectively analysed. These experiments are signs of the unrest which is an essential ingredient for any change.

The other movement is a return to the origins of what has become known as Action or Participatory Research. What where the original promises of Action Research, and to what degree have they been fulfilled? Are they still valid and necessary today? If they have been covered by ashes, are there some embers to be awakened and that can potentialise innovative practices and help to redefine the role of Action Research in today's societies? The search for fire beneath the ashes is evinced through the frequent citations to what can be considered founders or "fathers/mothers" of the movement, such as Kurt Lewin, Eric Trist, Marja Lisa Swantz, Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire, among many others.

There seems to be a general agreement that since its beginning Action Research, in its various formats, is related to the promotion of democracy. I will try to check this argument, and identify aspects that have been highlighted in some discussions in Europe and in Latin America, based on the assumption that different socio-political-cultural contexts will require and produce different approaches to actualise the democratising principle, and that the dialogue among these approaches is an important step towards the understanding of citizenship that, while necessarily linked to nationalities and states, today needs a broader scope given the global dimension of the problems facing humanity and planetary sustainability.

The boundaries of citizenship have shifted significantly in the last decades. Melissa S. William has summarized these boundary shifts in four categories: a) the boundaries of political and cultural identities, meaning that there is a rise in the number of individuals who hold dual citizenship or who have strong bonds of membership in more than one country, such as "diasporic communities"; b) with the trade increase and the rise of multinational corporations, the economic boundaries no longer coincide with the nation state; c) the political-institutional boundaries tend to be expanded through international agreements that generate binding decisions, such as the European Union and other regional initiatives; d) the boundaries of democratic participation are gaining in scope, having increasingly a transnational character,

Dissensus as part of dialogue in organizational change processes: a case study in an NGO

Maider Gorostidi-García, Arantxa Rodríguez-Berrio, Iratxe Aristegui-Fradua

Abstract: In this article we discuss, from the experience of action research on organizational change in an NGO, how interpreting the concept of dialogue in organizational theory has impacted the way in which it has been understood and applied in the processes of change that organizations experience. The ontological relationship that has been established between dialogue and organizational change and the interpretative frameworks used, although they have represented a great epistemological and practical breakthrough, have also limited the potential of the concept of dialogue itself by oversimplifying it. The reflective analysis allowed by action research on the case leads us to propose dissensus as an alternative: recognizing dissensus as natural in the organizational context and as an engine of real change. Understanding dialogue only as a search for consensus leads people to hide differences and not properly manage them in the process of change, because talking about organization is talking about relational and communicative patterns that highlight the influence of power, internal asymmetry and diversity in the processes of change. This complexity demands a new look on know how to read it and understand it properly without oversimplifying it.

Keywords: action research, dialogue, dissensus approach, consensus approach, organizational change

El disenso como parte del diálogo en procesos de cambio organizacional: un estudio de caso en una ONG

Resumen: En este artículo discutimos, a partir de una experiencia de investigación acción sobre cambio organizacional en una ONG, cómo la interpretación del concepto de diálogo que ha hecho la teoría organizacional ha impactado en la forma de entender y aplicar este concepto en procesos de cambio de las organizaciones. La relación ontológica que se ha establecido entre diálogo y cambio organizacional y los marcos interpretativos utilizados, si bien han representado un gran avance epistemológico y práctico, también han limitado el potencial del propio concepto de diálogo al simplificarlo en exceso. El análisis reflexivo que permite la investigación-acción sobre el caso nos lleva a proponer el disenso como alternativa: reconocer el disenso como natural en el contexto organizacional y como motor de cambio real. Entender el diálogo solo como una búsqueda de consenso lleva a las personas a ocultar las diferencias y a no gestionarlas adecuadamente en el proceso de cambio, porque hablar de organización es hablar de patrones relacionales y comunicativos que evidencian la influencia del poder, la asimetría interna y la diversidad en los procesos de cambio. Esta complejidad exige una nueva mirada para saber leer el diálogo y comprenderlo correctamente sin simplificarlo demasiado.

Palabras clave: investigación acción, diálogo, Enfoque del disenso, Enfoque del consenso, cambio organizacional

1.   Introduction

Dialogue is one of the central concepts in action research as has been addressed by prominent authors such as Gustavsen (2007) or Freire (2012). It has also been a concept on which much has been written from very diverse perspectives to try to better understand what occurs *in* and *through* it. But what can happen when we focus too close on a single object? We run the risk of leaving everything else in the shadows. Perhaps with dialogue something similar has happened: so much light on it has obscured the remaining space. In this article we try to shed light on those dark spaces, on what has happened around dialogue while it was at the center of analysis. We consider this to be a particularly relevant debate for action research on organizational change processes.

The focus of our contribution to action research is therefore in the organizational field. Dialogue in organizational theory has been reduced to a communicative event focused on speech and idealizing the results it generates. An example of this vision is found in Ellinor and Gerard (1998) when they affirm that dialogue is a powerful practice of communication that transforms those who practice it. Knowing what meaning is given to dialogue in current organizational theory and how that dialogue has been carried out in the organizational contexts of change, allows us to better understand why dialogue has become such a commonly used word that it has been attributed a behavior oriented towards the search for mutual understanding, the achievement of consensus and the avoidance of dissensus.

This way of understanding dialogue has limited its potential in processes of transformation. In recent years, and influenced by Bakhtin (1985, 1993; 1986, 1994), we find proposals that question these approaches aimed at simplifying the complexity that limit the processes of change and their innovative potential. These proposals rescue the value of dissensus as an approach to understanding dialogue and are proposed as experiences of organizational innovation (Kristiansen and Bloch-Poulsen, 2010). Reflections on dialogue and consensus are also found in the literature on action research (Karlsen and Larrea, 2015). The objective of this article is to propose a strengthening of the value of dissensus in dialogue in association to action research in organizations.

And from this perspective, the article analyzes the experience of the research team in a process of organizational change in an NGO within the framework of action research. Through action research we discuss the dissensus approach as a way to interpret the role of dialogue in processes of organizational change through an organization in a process of change with failed results. It failed due to the inability of the participants to overcome the monological vision of how dialogue should be deployed, denying and rejecting the tensions inherent in communicative processes in general and processes of organizational change in particular.

After this first failed phase, the results of the experience, together with the experience of the research team and the information collected while accompanying the group, show a different and distant reality with respect to the prevailing theory. The tension between the observed, the experienced and what "should be", generated a series of questions: To what extent has the *mainstream* concept of dialogue limited the process of organizational change? What was generating the emphasis on consensus when understanding dialogue? What is the transformative potential of the dissensus approach?

These questions, the result of the tension between what arises through the experience of change and what theory indicates, opened the possibility of exploring the theorization of the

Exploring the Transformation of Habitus: a Case Study of Forum Theatre in Estonia

Nikolai Kunitsōn

Abstract: Habitus is a key concept in Bourdieusian social analysis, which is used to explain (lack of) change in society. Bourdieu was optimistic about the possibility of change in society, but he did not provide an exact recipe for this. I will try to fill this knowledge gap by providing an empirical example of transformation of habitus. In order to achieve this aim I will utilize a Participatory Action Research method called Forum Theatre from my fieldwork with the Russophone minority in Estonia. In results, I will address the change of habitus of participants.

Keywords: transformation of habitus, participatory action research, Forum Theatre

Explorando la Tansformación del Hábito: un Estudio de Caso del Teatro Interactivo en Estonia

Resumen: El hábito es un concepto clave en el análisis social de Bourdieu, que se utiliza para explicar (la ausencia de) el cambio en la sociedad. Bourdieu era optimista sobre la posibilidad de cambio en la sociedad, pero no propuso una receta detallada para el mismo. En este artículo intento aportar a esta carencia proponiendo un ejemplo empírico de transformación del hábito. Para conseguir este objetivo utilizaré el método de Investigación Acción Participativa denominada Teatro Interactivo en mi trabajo de campo con la minoría rusoparlante en Estonia. Como resultado, abordaré el cambio del hábito de las personsas participantes.

Palabras clave: transformación del hábito, investigación acción participativa, teatro interactivo

1.   Introduction

Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are used as a metatheoretical framework to analyse the social world (Bourdieu 1977, 1986). The interconnectivity and relations between these concepts constitute the core of practises of subject positions and co-constitute the objective structures of society which, in turn, constitute the subjective structures. Habitus, a central concept in the Bourdieusian approach, plays a pivotal role in these relations.

This kind of Bourdieusian approach is often deemed to be deterministic (e. g., see Atkinson 2020), explaining why changes in society are not likely to happen. However, Bourdieu himself was more optimistic about the possibility of change; he stated that it *is* possible to transform the habitus of individual subjects; however, he did not provide an exact recipe for this. This paper addresses this knowledge gap by contributing with an empirical example.

The article is built on two major pillars. First, I will provide a theoretical framework for transformation of the habitus, and, second, I will illustrate the process with an empirical example, using a participatory action research (PAR) method called Forum Theatre (FT). The main idea in PAR is that research is done in collaboration with participants; FT is an empowering method, where spectators of a theatrical play are invited to break the so-called fourth wall, and become *spect-actors,* therefore co-creating the play and being involved in the whole research process. This allows to research the change of habitus simultaneously, from the perspective of researcher, and research participants. The article therefore has multiple aims: First, to address the knowledge gap to Bourdieuseian approach in transforming the habitus, and, secondly, to research if the PAR process will influence participants habitus; if yes, then how and to what extent.

The article is structured as follows: First, I will provide an overview of the concept habitus in the Bourdieusian approach, followed by the elaboration of the division between primary and secondary habitus. This is followed by introducing the education framework of Dewey and Freire. Second, I will present a participatory action research method called Forum Theatre, and show how it could be used to transform habitus, based on the ideas of Dewey and Freire. This is followed by an example of my empirical fieldwork with the Russophone minority in Estonia. I will conclude with discussion on the process of field research and my findings.

The innovation of this article is built upon the above-mentioned idea of the separation of habitus into primary and secondary habitus, followed by a Bourdieusian abstract 'recipe' to address the change of habitus, implementing concepts like 'scientific reflexivity' and 'artistic creativity' (Gorski 2016, 288) for achieving transformation. I will share a case where FT as a method transformed the habitus.

2.   The significance of habitus

The action research process presented in this paper combines Forum Theater as Participatory Action Research with two core concepts from Bourdieu, scientific reflexivity and artistic creativity. To make the connection between action research and these concepts, the paper builds on the work of John Dewey and Paulo Freire. Consequently, the following subsections address Bourdieu's concepts first and Dewey's and Freire's next.

2.1.   Key Bourdieusian concepts

As mentioned, habitus is one of the key concepts in the Bourdieusian theoretical framework. The separation of habitus from the field and capital is done here only on an analytical level; typically, in the analysis, all concepts are intertwined and simultaneously observed. Habitus is defined by Bourdieu as the property of actors – "a structured and structuring structure" (Bourdieu 1977, 167). Three distinct, but interconnected meanings of 'structure' are present in this definition: 1) the term "structured" refers to the idea that past experience influences agents, the most notable being family and the education system – e.g the primary and secondary habitus; 2) "structuring" refers to the idea that past experiences constitute an agent's practices and, lastly, 3) it is a "structure" in the sense that it has some inner consistency.

Slow science and "caring" research – the transformative power of collaborative research with hard of hearing youths

Barbara Mihók, Judit Juhász, Judit Gébert

Abstract: In our paper we explore the transformative power of a collaborative research on our own academic perceptions and functions. We have been working with hard of hearing youths since the autumn of 2021 in Szeged (Hungary) in a social citizen science case study within the YouCount project to increase social inclusion in the city. During the process, we, authors of this paper, as senior hearing academics, identified significant aspects where our academic functions led to inner transformations. These experiences led us to recognize the overwhelming importance of relational aspects and caring, the perceived and fostered "slowness" of the research. Inclusion can be viewed as a joint and interdependent transformation of all actors involved towards the defragmentation of community.

Keywords: inclusion, phenomenology, relational dimension, embodied knowledge, defragmentation

Ciencia a fuego lento e investigación sobre los cuidados- el poder transformador the la investigación colaborativa con jóvenes con diversidad auditiva

Resumen: En nuestro artículo exploramos el poder transformador que tuvo un proceso de investigación colaborativa sobre nuestras propias percepciones y funciones académicas. Hemos estado trabajando con jóvenes con problemas de audición desde el otoño de 2021 en Szeged (Hungría) en un estudio de caso de ciencia ciudadana social dentro del proyecto YouCount. El objetivo era aumentar la inclusión social en la ciudad. Durante el proceso, nosotras, las autoras de este artículo, como académicas senior sin problemas auditivos, realizamos aprendizajes significativos sobre nuestras funciones académicas que nos llevaron a transformaciones en nuestras formas de operar. Estas experiencias nos llevaron a reconocer la abrumadora importancia de los aspectos relacionales y de cuidado, como la "lentitud" percibida y fomentada de la investigación. La inclusión puede verse como una transformación conjunta e interdependiente de todos los actores involucrados que nos conduce hacia la desfragmentación de la comunidad.

Palabras clave: inclusión, fenomenología, dimensión relacional, conocimiento encarnado, desfragmentación

1. Introduction

Hard of hearing (HH) young people are a marginalized social group facing many challenges in terms of inequality in education and employment opportunities among others in Hungary. Emancipatory and participatory approaches and a more detailed picture on hard of hearing

youth well-being is needed to increase social inclusion. As part of the YouCount consortium (GA No.101005931) in 2021 we started a youth citizen science project with HH youths for social inclusion in Szeged, Hungary. This citizen science project was a continuation of a previous university project aiming to explore the health equality issues of HH families in Szeged in 2018–2019 (Bajmócy et al. 2022, Gébert et al. 2022). The recent YouCount research process has been aimed 1) to investigate and articulate how hard of hearing youths evaluate their own subjective well-being and social inclusion and 2) to reflect on social inclusion and inclusiveness in the ongoing research process: as senior academics, to explore and thematize our own experience on working towards an inclusive research. During the first 1.5 years of the collaborative process we, senior researchers experienced transformational changes in our professional functioning. In this paper we intend to focus on our second goal and present these transformational changes as an interconnected web of professional and personal experiences that had substantial impact on the development of our theoretical and pragmatic approach towards inclusion. The questions we are addressing are: How were we transformed as academic actors by participating in the research, and what were the experiences that led to these transformations?

In demonstrating our case, we start with the storyline of our collaborative process, followed by the discussion of various phenomena of experiences. We commit to the phenomenological approach to research (see: Papineau 1996, McTaggart 1994).

Phenomenology is a school or movement of contemporary philosophy that emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, following the work of Edmund Husserl. As Tőzsér puts it, the "goal of phenomenology is to systematically analyze conscious experiences from the first-person perspective—to explore and plausibly and exhaustively describe how things seem *to* the subject, from the subject's *point of view*. Phenomenology has strict methodological rules. One is that we have to take extra care not to let commonsense and scientific convictions affect our investigation. They have to be bracketed, so to speak, during the course of our phenomenological investigations. This is the only way for us to focus on the *intrinsic* characteristics of the subject's conscious experiences—those characteristics which the subject's conscious experience has from his own perspective" (Tőzsér 2023. p. 32). We aim to use the phenomenological method to describe in a faithful and systematic way the experiences we had during the research, starting with what our initial expectations were at the beginning of our research and how they have changed in the light of our experiences. The focus of our study is *not* on presenting the empirical facts and their correlations that we uncovered in our research (we will now put them in brackets in the spirit of phenomenology), but on describing our experiences, we underwent during the research and on describing how each phase of the research appeared *to us*.

By 'us', we mean here the three senior researchers of the project. Thus, our conclusions come from the phenomenology of our experiences alone and not from other participants'. After introducing our experiences, we reflect on the related scientific literature but our analysis remains a strongly phenomenological one.