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## A practitioner's journey of change: Interview with Leon Staines

León Staines-Díaz, Danilo Streck, Miren Larrea

### **Danilo and Miren:**

Thank you, Leon, for this interview in International Journal of Action Research (IJAR). We met you in 2020, in the IJAR symposium. You were a PhD student struggling with action research in your dissertation. You have recently finished it successfully, congratulations!

As an introduction to the interview, could you give the reader a perspective of your trajectory?

### **Leon:**

I graduated as an architect in 2007. After working for a couple of years, I decided to pursue a master's degree in the history of architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, where I lived for two years. Upon returning, I initially intended to focus on the historical aspect of architecture. However, having lived in a city with excellent public spaces and a good transportation system for two years, I became increasingly interested in the functional aspect of cities. I began delving deeper into these topics, and a year later, I decided to pursue a second master's degree in urban planning in Mexico. This was aimed at gaining more insights into how cities could be modified to create more human-centric environments with healthier atmospheres. I excelled in my master's program, and in the second semester, I took a class by the then Director of the Urban Planning Office of Monterrey, who invited me to join his team.

As an urban planner, I had the opportunity to work on projects related to traffic calming, sidewalk expansion, and overall improvement of public spaces. Professionally, it was a period of significant growth. However, I noticed that there was resistance from some segments of the population when future projects were announced. For a while, I could not understand why more trees and better public spaces could be met with objections. I realized that while the intentions behind these projects were good, there was a deep distrust of authorities and a lack of effective communication about the projects (and the processes involved). Residents did not see them as positive changes; instead, these initiatives were perceived as impositions.

This realization led me to focus on integrating citizen participation in decision-making processes. As a result, I decided to pursue a PhD at the University of Texas in Austin. My goal was not only to make cities more sustainable and inclusive but also to ensure that this transformation was guided by the collective imagination of the community.

### **Danilo and Miren:**

You come from the field of architecture and urbanism. What is your experience of action research in this field?

# Why Should Mainstream Social Researchers Be Interested in Action Research?<sup>1</sup>

Olav Eikeland

**Abstract:** The essay tries to argue why conventional researchers are obliged as researchers to be interested in certain forms of action research. The 60 years of ignorance have been illegitimate. The essay starts by listing two commonly encountered arguments paraphrasing Karl Marx and Francis Bacon via Kurt Lewin. It tries to show why a certain simplified reading of Marx cannot provide the necessary arguments. It then presents different variants of action research in order to single out approaches that according to this author require attention from mainstream social researchers. The action research approach emerging as central, by demonstrating its presence and effectiveness within mainstream research as well, is immanent critique. The method of research methodology is immanent critique. Immanent critique has to be demystified, however. When it is brought down to earth, immanent critique is really the kind of dialogical and experiential learning approach associated with apprenticeship learning and with organisational learning. This conclusion, making self-reflective practitioner-research the “hard-core” of action research, even internal to mainstream research, also requires a revision of the experimentalist-as-interventionist credo of action research.

**Keywords:** action research, counter-public spheres, immanent critique, method of methodology, practitioner research, research methods

The purpose of this essay is to answer one question: Why should conventional social researchers be interested in action research? My general background for trying to provide an answer is 1) being a philosopher with a special interest in the relations of ancient Greek philosophy of dialogue to modern social research and action research (cf. e.g. Eikeland 2007a, 2007b), and 2) having worked practically as an action researcher in projects in Norwegian work life, mostly municipalities, almost continuously since the mid-1980 s, and with similar projects for several years before that.

There are many reasons why conventional social researchers *should* be interested in action research, but only limited space is available here. Hence, I will try to focus on my arguments searching for reasons, writing as if reasoning actually *could* direct the interests of anyone. Trying to let the arguments speak for themselves, references will be kept to an absolute minimum in what follows<sup>2</sup>. As another consequence of the space limitations, none of the arguments can be elaborated extensively, of course. They will all have to be in outline, only.

1 This article was first published in Vol 3 (2007) of IJAR: Eikeland, Olav (2007): Why Should Mainstream Social Researchers Be Interested in Action Research? International Journal of Action Research, 3(1+2), 38–64. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssor-412887>

2 Further arguments and references to other authors and research literature indicating what I try to argue here are to be found in e.g. Eikeland (1985, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2007a, 2007b). Interested readers will also find my reasons for thinking that answers to almost all the challenges raised in this text can be developed by taking seriously into account the more than 2000 years old works of Aristotle, among many others, of course.

But there are many different variants of action research as well, requiring some kind of selection. All of them are not equally defensible, neither to the same degree nor in the same ways. Conventional social researchers are hardly obliged to show an equal interest in all forms. But I think they are obliged in relation to some, that is, if they take their own research business seriously. In a way, I will be experimenting my way ahead openly and argumentatively in what follows, having a kind of textual dialogue with myself and with the reader. I will try to select, by way of gradual elimination, what I think are the most promising action research approaches to defend. In real life, many of the approaches are combined, of course. But this makes it even more important to keep them analytically apart when arguing.

On the way through this text, then, many secondary and subsidiary arguments supporting some forms of action research will be examined and passed by, which I am sure will weigh heavily for some. But such arguments are not the *main* reasons why conventional researchers should be interested in action research. I consider them subsidiary arguments because they appeal to researchers *qua* human beings, *qua* socially or politically responsible individuals, *qua* commercially interested actors, etc. but not *qua* researchers. This means, in other words, that subsidiary arguments appeal to all human beings, all socially and politically responsible individuals, etc. but not to researchers in particular. But secondary and subsidiary arguments still carry considerable weight. I will end up with what I think are some quite strong reasons, seen from the perspective of research in general, for some quite promising variants of action research.

## Two arguments

The starting point for raising the question to be answered at all is the fact that action research has been carried on by dedicated researcher-practitioners at least since the 1940 s. During the same period of time, and in spite of its origin in “hardcore” social science, action research has been almost completely ignored and neglected by what might be called “mainstream” currents of social research. It still is. But the challenge in this essay is not to explain why 60 years have passed by in this way. It is to provide arguments justifying why this situation should not be allowed to continue. So, why should mainstream social researchers be interested in action research?

Let me start by saying generally and imprecisely that action research is research, somehow concerned with practice and with some kind of social and personal change. Why should mainstream researchers be interested in anything like that? One argument often encountered sounds somewhat like this: (I) Mainstream researchers should be interested because they ought to change the world, instead of just interpreting or explaining it, like Karl Marx pointed out in his famous Feuerbach theses.

A second argument often found is (II) that researchers should be interested because we simply have to change things in order to understand them, as Francis Bacon argued in promoting experimentalism in natural science 400 years ago, and action researchers often quote Kurt Lewin for paraphrasing. Personally, I think the second argument (II) provides the best starting point for a discussion. It strikes researchers more in particular, while the first one (I) strikes everyone equally.

# Moral awareness and different orders of relevance in participatory research with older people and professionals

Isabella Paoletti, Elisabet Cedersund, Konstantin Economou

**Abstract:** Limitations are described in the literature in relation to the actual involvement of older people in action research activities. Empirical social research involving any form of data collection has an impact on the people and the setting studied. Researchers should strive to be morally aware of such an impact. The article describes case studies of participatory research in Sweden, Italy and Portugal. It highlights moral issues confronted by researchers. Moreover actual examples of different order of priorities among researchers and participants are provided. The study shows possible spaces for collaboration, while recognizing the difference of interests and priorities among researchers and participants.

**Keywords:** older people, participatory research, action research, moral issues, data collection, social dimension of research activities

## Conciencia moral y diferentes órdenes de relevancia en la investigación participativa con personas mayores y profesionales

**Resumen:** En la literatura se describen las limitaciones en relación con la participación real de las personas mayores en las actividades de investigación-acción. La investigación social empírica que involucra cualquier forma de recopilación de datos tiene un impacto en las personas y el entorno estudiado. Las personas investigadoras deben esforzarse por ser moralmente conscientes de tal impacto. El artículo describe estudios de casos de investigación participativa en Suecia, Italia y Portugal. Destaca los problemas morales que enfrentan las personas investigadoras. Además, se proporcionan ejemplos reales de diferente orden de prioridades entre personas investigadoras y participantes. El estudio muestra posibles espacios de colaboración, al tiempo que reconoce la diferencia de intereses y prioridades entre personas investigadoras y participantes.

**Palabras clave:** personas mayores, investigación participativa, investigación acción, cuestiones morales, recopilación de datos, dimensión social de las actividades de investigación.

## 1. Introduction

At present, there is a general move toward participatory approaches involving service users and in particular older people, in evaluating and improving service delivery, for example „patient and public involvement in research“ (Baldwin et al., 2018) or „participatory design in gerotechnology“ (Grigorovich et al., 2021, p. 6), „addressing the needs and preferences of older adults in the development of technologies for their use“. Participatory video design (Von Faber et al., 2020) is involving older people in defining the age-friendliness of their neigh-

hborhood. Visual participatory research (Quinton et al., 2022) involves older people in research using visual materials: videos, Internet-based images etc. The term „participatory research“ refers to a broad research area including: action research (Baur & Abma, 2012; Buffel, 2018; Dick & Greenwood, 2015; Glassman et al., 2013); participatory research (Martins Corrêa da Silva et al., 2018); participatory action research (Bendien et al., 2020; Blair & Minkler, 2009; Corrado et al., 2020); community-based participatory research (Cargo and Mercer, 2008; Dabelko-Schoeny et al., 2020; Hall & Tandon, 2017); „co-production“ approaches in community-based research (Buffel, 2018). These are research approaches engaging older people and other community members as co-researchers and involving them in personal, social and institutional changes. The research explores problems that matter to them and their communities. In this research approach, older people are generally conceived as involved in all phases of the research, from selecting the research topic and conducting data collection, to data analysis and dissemination of results; but this is not always possible to implement in all parts.

### 1.1. Limitations in the involvement of older people in research

Many researchers (Baldwin et al., 2018; Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Corrado et al., 2020; Grigorovich et al., 2021) describe, in fact, limitations in older people’s involvement in research. Buffel (2018) points out: „The most common forms of involvement are skewed toward a ‘tokenistic approach’ in which older people have little influence over the research process.“ For example, Corrado et al. (2020) point out in their review of literature of participatory action research (PAR) that older people are often not involved in shaping the research questions. Moreover, learning opportunities to familiarize with research skills are seldom offered to older people, according to the research projects examined by Corrado et al. (2020). They also acknowledge that researchers’ priorities, such as the pressure to publish, could pose limits on older people’s involvement. They highlight the need to critically consider older people’s capabilities, interests, and motivation may set boundaries on if and how academic researchers involve them in PAR research“ (Corrado et al., 2020, p. 423). They encourage researchers to challenge ageist beliefs and consider how older people can meaningfully contribute to all phases of research.

Buffel’s (2018) very useful article describes in detail procedures for the effective involvement of older people in research, in particular recruiting, training and data collection. The co-researchers selected are all older educated people, mostly with university degrees. Forster et al. (2021, 6) point out a similar limitation for their study: „Volunteers over-represent white, English-speaking retired professionals: none of our team were from ethnic minorities or spoke English as a second language.“ In fact, Buffel (2018, p. 59) expresses caution in this respect: „Seeking to democratize knowledge production and fostering opportunities for those involved, projects such as the one described nevertheless run the risk of creating a further divide between an already more „privileged“ group of older people and their more disadvantaged peers“. In relation to the analytical phase of the research, older people participated actively in the coding process. There were codes predetermined on the basis of the theoretical framework, but emerging codes were collectively discussed and decided. Older people also participated in

# Engaging youth in the local environment

Promoting sustainability action competence in Danish high school teaching through citizen social science.

Cathrine M. S. Winther, Michael Søgaard Jørgensen

**Abstract:** Many young individuals experience a sense of disconnection from their immediate environment, which adversely affects their engagement in civic activities. This article outlines experiences with a sustainability actionable approach in a Danish high school, and how it influenced young people's understanding of the local environment. The study entails a three-month collaboration with a teacher and 17 high school students in Copenhagen who were being trained as citizen social scientists. They investigated and proposed youth-friendly sustainable changes in the neighbourhood, which enhanced their sustainability action competence. The article discusses how an action-oriented framework may inspire high school teachers to incorporate citizen social science in planning education for sustainable development that supports youth civic engagement.

**Keywords:** Citizen social science, youth civic engagement, sustainability action competence

## Desarrollando el compromiso de las personas jóvenes en el entorno local.

Promoviendo competencias para la acción orientada a la sostenibilidad en la educación secundaria danesa a través de la ciencia social ciudadana

**Resumen:** Muchas personas jóvenes experimentan una sensación de desconexión de su entorno inmediato, lo que afecta negativamente su participación en actividades cívicas. Este artículo describe experiencias desarrolladas con un enfoque accionable de sostenibilidad en una escuela secundaria danesa y señala cómo influyó esta experiencia en la comprensión que las personas jóvenes tenían sobre el entorno local. El estudio se desarrolló a través de una colaboración de tres meses con una profesora y 17 estudiantes de secundaria en Copenhague, que se formaron en las ciencias sociales ciudadanas. Investigaron y propusieron cambios sostenibles que favorecerían a las personas jóvenes de un vecindario, lo que mejoró su competencia en acciones para la sostenibilidad. El artículo analiza cómo un marco orientado a la acción puede inspirar al profesorado de secundaria a incorporar las ciencias sociales ciudadanas en la planificación de una educación para el desarrollo sostenible que apoye la participación cívica de las personas jóvenes.

**Palabras clave:** Ciencia social ciudadana, compromiso cívico de las personas jóvenes, competencias para la acción orientada a la sostenibilidad



## 1. Introduction

16% of the global population are young people aged 15–24 years. By 2030, the number is projected to increase by 7% to nearly 1.3 billion youths (Nations, n.d.). In recent years, dissatisfaction among youth has received attention, prompting a move to empower them as equal citizens (UN Press, n.d.). In 2022, Danish researchers found that the root of this dissatisfaction lies in societal pressures, including an accelerated education system and heightened expectations (Katznelson et al., 2021). According to Hartmut Rosa (2021), the constant acceleration of society is affecting our lives and can alienate us from our surroundings. He asserts that dissatisfaction is not due to a fragile psyche, but because youths are becoming aware that something is wrong with the way society is constructed (Politiken, n.d.). However, these pressures often leave youths with little time for local engagement, which has a negative effect on their sense of citizenship, belonging and recognition (Iwasaki, 2015; Simmons & Harding, 2011). At the same time, climate change is threatening human and non-human identities, and the latest IPCC report calls for urgent action (Langsdorf et al., 2022). Transitioning to a sustainable society requires, among others, engaging the youth and enabling them to take control of their future. Though young people have participated in activism against governments, many still feel powerless and resort to denial-like strategies to cope with climate change (Ojala, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate new methods for engaging the youth in sustainable development and their local environment.

This article explores how the educational system can serve as a platform to connect youth with their local environment, bolstering sustainability action competence and encouraging engagement. We define sustainability action competence, inspired by Jensen & Jørgensen (2002) and Mogensen & Schnack (2010), as a set of action-oriented and participatory components that foster an interconnected and motivating understanding of sustainability challenges and ability to act. We emphasise that sustainable development requires an understanding of environmental, social and economic perspectives.

Schools are considered essential for building skills and values related to sustainability (Bosevska & Kriewaldt, 2020; Wamsler, 2020), and since the Agenda 21 Report in 1992, suggested linking sustainable development to education, researchers have argued that using educational institutions to promote sustainable development is effective (UNESCO, n.d.). Particularly in high school (when students are aged 16–21 years in Denmark), young people are moulded into individuals and absorb a substantial amount of knowledge, which enables them to think critically (UBU, 2022). However, many young people lack knowledge about their local community. Therefore, active engagement in their neighbourhood can provide valuable insights, which they can reflect on (Gabrielsen & Korsager, 2018).

Educational institutions educate future citizens, giving them knowledge about how to behave in society. Though this is an essential skill, there is a lack of concrete action-oriented approaches in Danish high schools (Christensen et al., 2022). One way of creating action-oriented education is through action research. Conducting action research in educational settings is not new, but it can still be challenging for teachers to include it as an active part of the curriculum. Kemmis (2009) argue that action research can create collective self-transformation, i.e., the transformation of our practices, how we understand them and the conditions that enable or constrain them. Furthermore, engaging students in action research can empower them to influence their social conditions. This approach creates close connections

# Action Research: A Participatory Approach to Improve Measures of Labour Market Integration of Refugees

Alexandra David, Judith Terstriep, Silke Steinberg

**Abstract:** This paper illustrates the benefits action research adds to successfully co-creating measures for the labour market integration of refugees. Germany has become one of the most popular immigration countries in the world. In addition to current refugee flows from Ukraine, migration from third countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey again increased in 2022. Compared to Ukrainians, who are subject to a special measure granting immediate and temporary protection in the event of a mass influx and direct access to the labour market, third-country representatives still have a limited path to the world of work. Following these events, this paper is motivated by the early research on developing measures for the labour market integration of refugees in Germany. It was conducted shortly after the so-called European “refugee crises” during 2015–2017. Due to increasing refugee movements, the findings are highly topical and thus make a renewed contribution to integration policies and action research as a participatory approach.

**Keywords:** participatory action research; refugees; labour market integration; pragmatic approach

## Investigación-Acción: Un enfoque participativo para mejorar las medidas de integración laboral de los refugiados

**Resumen:** Este artículo ilustra los beneficios que la investigación-acción aporta para co-crear medidas exitosas para la integración laboral de refugiados. Alemania se ha convertido en uno de los países de inmigración más populares del mundo. Además de los flujos de refugiados actuales de Ucrania, la migración de terceros países como Siria, Afganistán y Turquía aumentó nuevamente en 2022. En comparación con los ucranianos, que están sujetos a una medida especial que les otorga protección inmediata y temporal en caso de un flujo masivo y acceso directo al mercado laboral, los representantes de terceros países aún tienen un camino limitado hacia el mundo laboral. Siguiendo estos acontecimientos, este artículo se motiva por la investigación temprana sobre el desarrollo de medidas para la integración laboral de refugiados en Alemania, llevada a cabo poco después de la denominada “crisis de refugiados” europea durante 2015–2017. Debido al aumento de los movimientos de refugiados, los hallazgos son altamente relevantes y, por lo tanto, hacen una nueva contribución a las políticas de integración y a la investigación-acción como enfoque participativo.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación-Acción Participativa; refugiados; integración en el mercado laboral; enfoque pragmático

## 1 Introduction

The huge influx of approximately 1.1 million refugees from Syria and the Middle East to Germany between 2015–2017, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, created a need for speedy labour market integration (David et al., 2019). Former studies for Germany (Kosyakova, 2021; IAB, 2015) show that 40% of refugees continue to face difficulties in entering the labour market, also ten years after the arrival of previous refugee cohorts. In response, quick measures have been taken in the case of the Ukrainian newcomers. Those of working age were immediately provided with a work permit, but relatively few work in permanent jobs (Giesing et al., 2022). It must be reflected that several Ukrainian refugees consider Germany as a stopover. However, as the war progresses, the situation is subject to change. Distinct from Ukrainian refugees, third-country refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Turkey (OECD, 2022), in most cases, envisage and strive for a stable social and economic future in Germany. Yet, these groups often are excluded from the German labour market due to their residence status. A reason to revisit German labour market measures and the effectiveness of the approaches between 2015 and 2017 to consider lessons learned. Multiple studies indicate that these measures were mainly designed and implemented without prior consultation with the refugees, leading to their failure (Siebert, 2019).

Contemplating the above, we ask *what the action research approach adds to the co-creation of improved refugee labour market integration measures*. Opening the research process allows refugees to bring in their aspirations and concerns and shape the outcomes (Ataöv et al. 2010) as part of the European ‘Science with and for Society’ concept<sup>1</sup>.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In the next section, we introduce the action research approach used in this paper and its benefits for the transfer of scientific findings into action. The research design following the action research spiral is introduced in section 3. Section 4 presents our findings and the actions taken in response to making a change. We conclude by discussing our findings for future interventions supporting refugees’ labour market integration and its meaning for action research (Section 5).

## 2 Bringing action research into play

Originally, Lewin (1946, p. 35) defined action research as “[...] comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action.” Based on the argument that “[r]esearch that produces nothing but books will not suffice,” Lewin (1946, p. 35), at the core, developed the methodology to study social psychology in the framework of field theory. Since then, the concept of action research has become increasingly popular to justify applied research, especially when undertaking consultation (Rowell et al., 2015; Koshy et al., 2011; Parkin, 2009; Cassell and Johnson, 2006). Leand on Bradbury (2015: 1), all of the action research approaches are based on the “[...] pragmatic co-creation of knowing with, not on, people”.

1 Science for and with Society (SwafS) is a Horizon 2020 programme that aims to build effective cooperation between science and society, recruit new talent for science, and pair scientific excellence with social awareness and responsibility ([https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018–2020/main/h2020-wp1820-swfs\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018–2020/main/h2020-wp1820-swfs_en.pdf)).

# Participatory Action Research for Urban Connectivity: Bridging Inequality in Metropolitan Monterrey

León Staines-Díaz

**Abstract:** This paper argues for participatory action research as a potent method for urban connectivity, surpassing government or expert-led methods. It introduces two approaches: integrating dialogic interviews to foster reflexivity and adopting an Ecosystem mapping-based approach encompassing social, economic, physical, and cultural dimensions. Dialogic interviews promote inclusivity by enabling diverse perspectives to shape research outcomes. Ecosystem mapping visually captures intricate connectivity dynamics. By combining participatory action research, dialogic interviews, and Ecosystem mapping, a robust framework emerges to address urban connectivity challenges. Empowering communities and embracing diverse axes of connectivity, this approach transforms urban planning practices, fostering contextually relevant and sustainable solutions. A co-created, resilient urban future becomes achievable through engagement and active stakeholder involvement.

**Keywords:** Action Research, Dialogic interviews, Ecosystem map, Urban Planning, Monterrey

## Investigación-Acción participativa para la conectividad urbana: Abordando la desigualdad en el Área Metropolitana de Monterrey

**Resumen:** Este artículo argumenta que la investigación-acción participativa es un método potente para la conectividad urbana, superando a los métodos liderados por el gobierno o expertos. Introduce dos enfoques: la integración de entrevistas dialógicas para fomentar la reflexividad y la adopción de un enfoque basado en mapa del ecosistema que abarca dimensiones sociales, económicas, físicas y culturales. Las entrevistas dialógicas promueven la inclusividad al permitir que diversas perspectivas moldeen los resultados de la investigación. El mapa del ecosistema captura visualmente las dinámicas de conectividad intrincadas. Al combinar la investigación-acción participativa, las entrevistas dialógicas y la cartografía del ecosistema, surge un marco sólido para abordar los desafíos de la conectividad urbana. Empoderando a las comunidades y abrazando diversas dimensiones de conectividad, este enfoque transforma las prácticas de planificación urbana, fomentando soluciones contextualmente relevantes y sostenibles. Un futuro urbano resiliente y co-creado se vuelve alcanzable a través del compromiso y la participación activa de las partes interesadas.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación-Acción, Entrevistas dialógicas, Mapas de Ecosistema, Planeación Urbana, Monterrey

## 1. Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to add knowledge to the action research literature about the use of action research in the entry phase of urban planning processes in vulnerable communities (Mitlin, Thompson, 1995; Wilson, 2019).

Using action research in this entry phase can be important because comprehensive plans or beautification projects often disregard public participation and inclusion of actors other than planners; consequently or architects, they tend to be rejected by residents. Hence, it is critical that people from diverse backgrounds are included in the planning process, especially if they live in the area that the plan or project comprehend. The importance of their participation rests on the future well-being of a particular place. Action research can help nurture this participatory dimension of the process.

Action research can help urban planners and public officials to understand and inform the coherence of spaces as they represent and form people's behaviours, livelihoods, agency, and political power. Moreover, it is important that the planner understands the critical significance of the participation of the society that produces their spaces, since its production cannot be replicated for others. As mentioned by Lefebvre:

Any social existence aspiring or claiming to be real, but failing to produce its own space, would be a strange entity, a very particular kind of abstraction unable to escape from the ideological or even the cultural real- It would fall to the level of folklore and sooner or later disappear altogether, thereby immediately losing its identity, its denomination and its feeble degree of reality (Lefebvre, 1974: 53).

Most of this paper is written as a first-person story because it focuses on the lessons that I, the author, learnt conducting the entry phase of his doctoral research. Costamanga and Larrea (2017: 85–86) indicate first-person action research is a method that can help the facilitator remain continuously open to the self-reflection process. This paper operates by stressing the awareness of one's own biases, such as preconceptions, assumptions and positionality in the process of establishing relationships of understanding, mutuality, parity, and equality. The importance of reflexivity on the fieldwork can be traced in Case (2017), Owen and Westoby (2012) and Wilson (2016; 2019). This article shares how to generate a new productive and collaborative conversation among internal community actors and external actors, such as government and scholars around different dimensions of connectivity. More specifically, this case focuses on the relationship between the community (internal) and the action researcher helping the planning process (external).

One inspiration to write this first-person narrative after conducting a second person action research process is the case of Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (OBIC) in the Basque Country of Spain (Larrea, 2018). First-person AR has been used there to mediate between different positions on territorial development practices. The author describes the personal and institutional transformational process of OBIC, founded to study territorial development (TD). In her article, Larrea mentions how the OBIC changed their role of social researchers from a position primarily restricted to TD observers to the self-realization of territorial transformation actors/agents. I argue I could operate similarly in the contested relationship between planners, researchers, and community members in Monterrey, Mexico.

This paper is based on the experience of the author in the first stage of creating an issue ecosystem map through dialogic stakeholder interviews in La Campana (Mexico). It is an important step for social researchers starting their inquiry, to establish a comprehensive