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# Editorial

## Future perspectives on action research

Miren Larrea

This is my first editorial as editor in chief of *International Journal of Action Research* (IJAR), and I am happy to open it by referring to the first contribution in this issue, a tribute to Danilo Streck, who has preceded me serving our journal for 12 years, from 2010 to 2021. The tribute is signed by Werner Fricke, who made the initial proposal and Olav Eikeland, Richard Ennals, Øyvind Palshaugen, Emil Albert Sobottka and me, who have had the pleasure to work with Danilo in the group of editors of IJAR in recent years.

As part of the same transition process, Øyvind Palshaugen will not continue as editor in the future. It is thus a good moment to learn from his experience with action research, which we do through an interview entitled "*40 years in 40 minutes*" where Øyvind starts by sharing how he came to action research; reflects on relevant authors, organisations and traditions in his trajectory, and discusses the "use of words" and the relevance of action research cases as a mean to create knowledge of general value.

These changes in IJAR take place in a moment when humanity is dealing, among others, with a pandemic, wars, and the imminent need to react to climate change. We need, thus, to continue asking ourselves what was, what is, and what can be the contribution of action research to social challenges.

Werner Fricke, Davydd Greenwood, Danilo Streck and I have been writing about it since we met in the IJAR 2020 event. At that moment Werner Fricke posed the emergent challenges he saw for action research and invited the rest of us to develop a coherent argument about it without hiding our differences and diverse priorities. We believe we have come together with an article, "*On Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research"*, that manifests ways of making our differences count.

Our exploration of common ground starts by acknowledging that the new forms of capitalism are fracturing individuals into apolitical wants and needs, neutralising the core of action research, which is the integrity of the individual and the social fabric. Based on the discussion of free market, disaster capitalism and surveillance capitalism, we have searched for positive deviants. These are action research related processes where participants aim at counteracting these trends in some way or other. Learning from these experiences, we discuss how action research can contribute to re-creating the citizen-actor, and to integrating individuals in society.

Our aim with this paper is not to provide any definite answers, but to initiate a dialogue forum in IJAR on the future perspectives of action research, stimulating a discussion about the questions raised. Regarding the actual and historical strengths and weaknesses of action research and the social and economic changes that have occurred since the times of Kurt Lewin and Karl Polanyi we think the time has come to reflect on whether and how action research can meet the challenges of the more and more aggressive and destructive forms of modern capitalism. We insist in action researchers' responsibility to foster and to build on the integrity and common decency of the individual, to enable active citizens to self-determination at work and to create democratic societies. Action research is about democratic and

participative values, which are the essence of its social responsibility very much in contrast to that of neoliberal scholars.

We argue that AR has been successful in various initiatives to practice its values in co-operation with a great variety of practitioners and practitioner organisations. What is missing so far are powerful social and political actors who are able to make AR values guide social practice beyond a series of single cases or projects limited in time and space. The crucial question is how AR may reach social impact beyond these limitations. One way may be coalitions between action research and social movements. Another option is action research organised by social movements, and a third possibility may be to engage in cooperation between action research and social movements.

We want to stimulate a dialogue among action researchers on these issues, visions and research practices, and on how to enable action research to contribute to or create social movements against the destructive tendencies of modern capitalism.

The first discussion paper integrated in this dialogue is the one by Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga in this issue. He considers that the keystone of Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck's text is their call for the recreation of integral individuals endowed with agency and in search of a change in power relationships. This is, in his opinion, a nodal point of the various traditions of action research. His discussion is entitled "*When the Cinderellas unite"*, and he uses this metaphor to address the change needed by vulnerable people more accustomed to scrubbing floors (like Cinderella), than dancing in luxurious salons (like stepmothers). He argues that the role of action researchers is to help Cinderellas to throw off the yoke of those who condemn them to prostration, allowing them to rise up to recreate new forms of power. However, he expects no fairy godmothers' magic to bring about this change. Instead, he advocates connecting work, effort, intelligence and determination of the different Cinderellas, which he names as the magic of society.

Another relevant contribution to the discussion initiated in this issue is the book review by Jan J. Zygmuntowski. Under the title "*Surveil and Control: A critical review of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism""*, he discusses Shoshanna Zuboff's book, "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism", which is one of the main references in Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck's article. Zygmuntowski takes a critical stance and argues that this concept has taken a life of its own, becoming a sign of a great oeuvre and a dazzling artist, but much less of critical accuracy. His review mirrors the book's structure, which is divided in three parts: the origin of online surveillance, expansion to real-world spaces, and transformation into a hegemonic power.

Zygmuntowski argues that the total equation is more complex than surveillance alone, and it is a consequence of the legacy of capitalist economy and novel ICT technologies. Acknowledging such complexity is necessary to leverage the planetary collective intelligence to rapidly tackle the problems of Anthropocene: climate change, loss of biodiversity, emerging biothreats, inequity and instability of our civilization which produce suffering and conflicts.

If action research is to make a contribution to tackling these problems, it will be relevant that more researchers join this endeavour and to achieve this, we can work to make action research a feasible alternative in different fields. This is the challenge the two other articles in this issue can help address.

Liliam María Orquiza, Laura Sánchez García and Bruno Gabriel Costelini, in their article "*How is Action Research Being Used in Computer Science? A Review"* help us understand the

extent to which action research is being considered in this field, which is relevant in the face of the discussion on surveillance capitalism previously presented. The paper analyses top cited papers, authors, journals, countries and institutions that apply action research in computer science and describes how action research contradicts practices of unequal and nondemocratic political economic and social systems, challenging the statement of a positivist view of science and promoting the idea of socially built knowledge, starting from a position of change with others.

One of their conclusions is that the focus of action research in this field, invariably, leaves the artifact behind and locks in the user and their context. They also explore the idea that human actions and social contexts are moved by complex expectations and interpretations, making their results contingent, unpredictable and nondeterministic. Consequently, ITCs artifacts, such as algorithm machines are incapable of dealing with them. In this context they conclude action research can be an invaluable tool to help advancing and developing a more effective and just field within Computer Science.

On the other hand, Malida Mooken, in the article "*Articulating inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development",* explores what features of action research can be most valued by researchers in territorial development that are not nowadays using action research. This can be a reflection on how the community of action researchers can grow to gain critical mass to make action research more relevant in the face of social challenges. Mooken shares her influences in action research, John Dewey and action research for territorial development, and embarks on a self-inquiry process based on two cases where she participated as a researcher. As a result, she proposes a conceptual framework composed of the three features/values of action research that motivated her decision to adopt this approach: inquiry in real time, contextual-temporality and value orientation. Their discussion, combining conceptual influences and practical knowledge, helps understand the potential of action research.

We hope that the issue inspires action researchers to explore common ground to face social challenges and non-action researchers to consider action research as a potential path to make their research more transformative.

# Tribute to Danilo Streck

Danilo served our journal as an editor-in-chief for 12 long years, i. e. from 2010 to 2021. Werner's idea to invite him to our editorial board was to broaden the scope of the *International Journal of Action Research* beyond its former eurocentrism. Not exclusively, but in the majority, its authors had been Europeans and North-Americans. This changed when Danilo took over responsibility. He brought the whole Latin American world (tradition, thinking, social movements' experiences) with him. He not only incorporated the tradition of PAR as developed by Orlando Fals Borda, and Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed; living in the city of Porto Alegre he witnessed the concept and praxis of participatory budgeting, and what it means for a regional system of representative democracy to open opportunities for people's direct participation. This encounter and living work relations with Latin American values and experiences, represented by Danilo, was a great enrichment for our journal. See e. g. the contributions by Danilo himself, Alfonso Torres Carrillo, Emil Sobottka et al. in IJAR as of 2010.

In the editorial of the last IJAR issue Danilo was responsible for (vol. 17 ( 3), 2021), he formulated a very beautiful characterisation of Paulo Freire's concept and practice: "*Dialogue, he [Freire] tells us, has some preconditions that research shares with education, such as trust in people as companions in the process of understanding and changing the world, love to people and the world, and hope that allows working towards a different and better future for all."* Another Latin American experience, which Danilo made us aware of, is the tradition of cooperation between social movements and Action Research, as represented by Fals Borda and others. See Alfonso Torres Carillo's paper *"Another social research is possible. From the cooperation between researchers and social movements" (IJAR 16* (1), 2020: 23–39.

Also the tradition of the biannual IJAR symposiums was a field to which Danilo contributed important initiatives and activities. These conferences have taken place since 2010, alternately in Europe and in Latin America. Apart from the latest (virtual) symposium in 2020 in the Basque Country/Spain, especially the Latin American conferences in Porto Alegre/ Brazil 2011 and in Bogotá/Columbia 2015 were highlights in shaping and strengthening IJAR's identity and public perception beyond the AR community. In all these events, Danilo played a prominent role far beyond his organisational activities. The next IJAR symposium will be in Istanbul. We hope that the well established European-Latin American connection will continue for many years, as an important characteristic of IJAR's international orientation. This tradition is important, especially concerning the relationship between AR and social movements: establishing and intensifying this was an essential intention of Björn Gustavsen, the founder of IJAR in the 1990s.

These are three important examples of IJAR widening the scope during the past 12 years, which we owe to Danilo Streck. In addition, he has succeeded in bringing authors from all five continents together within the covers of our journal. These efforts have been guided by his vigilant eye on the needs for further development of action research internationally, by doing action research around the globe. "*The journal's intention*", he wrote in his editorial to IJAR 16 (2), 2020: 85 "*has been to provide a platform for building bridges among consolidated traditions, and to open space for the generation of new initiatives in the field, also welcoming new authors. The collaborators in this issue come from Norway, Vietnam, Indonesia, Chile and Brazil. Let us welcome all of them!"*

Approaching the end of his editorship, Danilo organised the transition process very carefully to the next editor-in-chief. He chose as his successor Miren Larrea from Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness (Spain). Miren brought with her two female colleagues from Canada, who will join the editorial board. We are very grateful, that the new members of the editorial board, initiated by Danilo, will be female. As IJAR was right from its start in 1996, with only one brief exception in the early 2000s, exclusively edited by men, it was high time to decide on this female turn. Øyvind welcomed Miren as the new editor-in-chief by saying: "*I was always convinced that IJAR would get a female editor-in-chief before the US would have a female president*". Øyvind is right, and we all have to thank Danilo for his choice.

See below the former editorial board:

editorial board meeting 7. 12. 2012 in Berlin, drinking Mate[1] tea
Left to right: Øyvind, Werner, Danilo, Richard

In addition to his intellectual engagement with our journal, we have to thank Danilo for his steady and always patient style of editing, especially his cooperation and leadership with the editorial board. Danilo never complained, but sometimes he mentioned, in his modest style, that editing can be a lonely job. The remaining male members of the editorial board promised to be more pro-active in supporting the new editor-in-chief than they have been before.

*Olav Eikeland*
*Richard Ennals*
*Werner Fricke*
*Miren Larrea*
*Øyvind Palshaugen*
*Emil Albert Sobottka*

1 Danilo's family is of German origin. Brunke is according to him an ancient German word for bowl, not in use in Germany any more.

# On Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research

Werner Fricke, Davydd J. Greenwood, Miren Larrea and Danilo Streck[1]

**Abstract:** The paper addresses some of the consequences of neoliberalism in our societies and argues that the phenomena that is being discussed under the label of *surveillance capitalism* has deep implications regarding action research. It fractures individuals into apolitical wants and needs, neutralising the core of action research which is the integrity of the individual and the social fabric. But this can be a two-way relationship, and action research can contribute to counteracting these trends by recreating the citizen actor and integrating individuals in society. To discuss how this can be done in practice, the paper shares some positive deviants, which are positive examples that emerge under unfavorable conditions. Through their discussion the paper poses future-oriented perspectives on action research.

**Keywords:** action research, neoliberalism, surveillance capitalism, individual and social resistance

**Sobre la productividad social y perspectivas de futuro de la investigación acción**

**Resumen:** El artículo analiza algunas de las consecuencias del neoliberalismo en nuestras sociedades y argumenta que el fenómeno que se está discutiendo bajo la etiqueta de *capitalismo de vigilancia* tiene implicaciones profundas en relación con la investigación acción. Las tiene porque fractura a los individuos en una serie de deseos y necesidades apolíticos, neutralizando el núcleo central de la investigación acción, que es la integridad de los individuos y del tejido social. Pero esta puede ser una relación bidireccional, y la investigación acción puede contraponerse a estas tendencias recreando a la ciudadanía como actor e integrando a los individuos en la sociedad. Para ver cómo esto puede hacerse en la práctica, se presentan una serie de desviaciones positivas, que son positivos casos que emergen en condiciones desfavorables. A través de su discusión, el artículo comparte algunas perspectivas de futuro de la investigación acción.

**Palabras claves:** Investigación acción, neoliberalismo, capitalismo de vigilancia, resistencia individual y social

1 This article is the result of an extended online collaboration initiated and orchestrated by Werner Fricke to pose the emergent challenges for action research in the face of the multiple global crises and problems humanity and our planet face. Four colleagues with very different work experiences from different parts of the globe, and operating in different organisational environments worked to find a way to develop a coherent argument without hiding our differences and diverse priorities. Through a considerable variety of video conferences and manuscript drafts, we believe we have come together with an article that manifests ways of making our differences count. We were gratified by the process, because it shows how our shared commitment to action research enabled us to derive strength and clarity from differences, and find a shared way forward toward a better and fairer future. Action research cannot speak with one voice because our differences can become our strengths, enabling us to deal better with the complexity of an increasingly threatened world.

## 1. Introduction

A century has gone by since Kurt Lewin's studies in the 1920s. Looking back on these 100 years of action research (AR), we realise that the world has changed considerably and is changing with increasing speed. Capitalism, especially in its uncontrolled, disembedded forms that have emerged with the rise of neo-liberalism and the "new public management" since the 1970s, is the main force revealing this change. It is accompanied by imminent environmental disaster, created by uncontrolled capitalist pillaging of planetary resources for profit and unprecedented levels of global and societal inequality. The new forms of capitalism, among which we focus on disaster capitalism and surveillance capitalism, alienate work and convert individuals into internet clicks to be sold to advertisers without respect for their privacy, personal integrity, the conditions of production of goods and services, and often for the rule of law.

To address these challenges, action researchers need to situate our practices clearly in the global neoliberal capitalist context. Neoliberalism is the most recent attempt to force the world to conform to the profoundly antisocial model of society as a collectivity of individuals guided entirely by selfish rational choice. Despite the inhumane beauty of the ideal rational choice model, putting it into practice yet again as Reagan and Thatcher tried, ran into lots of powerful opposition.

Their first step in trying to impose a free market (already a fundamental conceptual contradiction) was what is now called the "New Public Management" (Behn, 2001). This is a public management model based entirely on the "audit culture". It distrusts any and all institutions, and the integrity of individuals to behave appropriately unless held to account quantitatively for the economic consequences of their actions, and punished for failure to meet the goals set for them by the neoliberals. "New public management" is the instrumentalisation of the neoliberal model in transport, healthcare, education, social services, conservation, science, etc.

The second step is disaster capitalism. Even armed with the New Public Management, the neoliberals were not satisfied by their efforts at "freeing up" the market. So, Milton Friedman and the Chicago Boys hit on taking advantage of major social disruptions to impose neoliberal discipline. Even this, however, did not produce the free-market utopia because even people as horrible as Augusto Pinochet recoiled at the harshness of the measures demanded by the Chicago Boys" (Klein, 2007).

Step three is surveillance capitalism. Rather than confronting the social forces "holding back" the free market head-on (because they continually failed to achieve their goals), the neoliberals have moved to surveillance capitalism. Here the imposition of neoliberal practices can be carried on mainly out of sight, without setting off reactions to stop the practices. Action researchers now have to understand that any AR project anywhere has to face such forces consciously and deal with them, not just by collaborative AR processes to help rebuild or re-create the integrity of the individual, but also by addressing the questions of power and contention for power directly.

The division of labour is extreme in this platform economy. Workers and many service organisations are suffering from a re-birth of Taylorism, particularly through globally de-centralised supply chains and worker precarity. Employees are isolated from each other and their coherence as individuals is undermined, as factories and other work organisations that

once could be treated as places where workers could talk, cooperate and organise work are more and more replaced by internet platforms, big data algorithms, and management by numbers, for the benefit of big investors rather than employees and customers. Accordingly social life and society have undergone a deep transformation: people are living their lives less as individuals and are being treated as bundles of wants and needs to be satisfied externally. The erosion of social norms and values that necessarily support a civic orientation or serve as a base for social engagement is clear. This undermines democratic institutions and democratic processes. Consciousness of living in a class structure is replaced by a sense of loss of control and a feeling of always being on the losing end of all transactions. This is an ideal hotbed for both radical rightwing and for Stalinist organising.

Unlike the neoliberal ideology that tried to make people believe that all individuals are autonomous rational actors, responsible for him/herself and his/her profit and individual success, the new forms of capitalism fracture even the rational individualist into an incoherent and apolitical array of wants and needs. In this context, action research, relying as it does on the integrity of the individual and the social fabric, is challenged to adapt and find new formulas to face these emerging forms of capitalism.

To explore the possibilities of developing new action research approaches, we first go back to the early concepts and merits of AR, and complement these with some current examples of positive outcomes emerging from processes where alternative paths are being explored. We then go more deeply into a few of these cases, most of them related to workplace and territorial development, to understand in more detail how they are being developed. We do this as a defence and development of action research. Based on previous AR frameworks and practical experiences, we take up three main issues to address how action research can support positive developments that rebuild democratisation of society (including the economy) under the conditions of contemporary capitalism. We articulate processes that go beyond single cases. The exposition begins with the ways some recent positive examples of AR show a capacity to address some of the worst trends in contemporary capitalism. In this context, we address the challenges the action research community faces in dealing with the enormous variety of AR practices, ideologies, and locations, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. We close with the relation between research and both local and global citizenship. We ask what the limits of our responsibilities and possibilities are, and what AR can do to strengthen individual and social resistance against neoliberal ideology, disaster capitalism, and surveillance capitalism.

The paper, and the writing process we have engaged in, are an example of how different streams of practices, ideologies and locations within AR can be bridged to build common ground in the face of radically anti-social forms of capitalism. By sharing our thoughts and experiences with the readers, we want to initiate a discussion forum in this journal and invite more contributors showing how diverse practices, ideologies and locations can continue developing this response to the current global crises.

## 2. Surveillance Capitalism's Impact on Society-Action Research in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism

The origins of Action Research (AR) reach back to Kurt Lewin's studies in the 1920s. Since those days, AR has compiled a great variety of experiences. Different concepts from systems thinking to intervention, PAR, democratic participation in local and regional development processes, and many others, have been developed and practiced in different socio-political contexts. AR engaged in experiments to promote industrial democracy, organisational development, and initiated community and regional development processes. Participative Action Research (PAR) included social reform as well as participatory rural development projects especially in Latin America and Africa (for details see section 4.2).

Action research was and is about values, including democratic participation, industrial democracy, and civic engagement in a vision of societies built on trust and reciprocity. AR now has experienced the rise of neo-liberalism, and is currently confronted with capitalism in its latest most powerful and anti-social forms: disaster and surveillance capitalism, which have led to an enduring sequence of eco-economic crises over the past decades.

Surveillance capitalism was invented by Google at the beginning of 21st century. Shoshana Zuboff formulated Google's basic principles of surveillance capitalism as a declaration of power: "We claim human experience as raw material free for the taking. On the basis of this claim we can ignore considerations of individuals' rights, interests, awareness or comprehension. On the basis of our claim we assert the right to take an individual's experience for translation into behavioural data". (Zuboff, 2019: 189) This means: surveillance capitalism started with Google's decision to expropriate and exploit all human experience, and to transform it into billions of data points, which are used as a resource to generate billions USD of profits by using algorithms to develop personalised advertisements. This is a strategy to manipulate consumer behaviour and to increase consumption in global capitalism′s growth machine. While disaster capitalism regarded Nature as a freely accessible resource to feed unlimited economic growth and to generate huge profits, surveillance capitalism appropriates the right to exploit human experience in work and life. Both expropriation and exploitation strategies caused, and are causing, disasters and immense costs, which the profiteering capitalists are unwilling to pay for. Resulting from these strategies are the enduring ecological crisis and the growing crisis of democracy worldwide. Karl Polanyi's vision of the dangerous consequences of misusing Nature and Labour (we now have to add human experience in this concept) as "fictitious commodities" is accomplished by surveillance and disaster capitalism. Essential to these types of capitalism is a reconstruction of the human individual as an atomised passive consumer. Pacifying the moral and political individual is a key move in the process decimating the social fabric, just as Polanyi predicted in 1944 (Polanyi, 2011) that it would be.

Capitalism in its contemporary forms manages to externalise the tremendous costs it causes; it makes individuals and society pay for the damage it does to Nature and Society as it pursues profit to exclusion of all else. In the case of surveillance capitalism, individuals are reduced to being data providers and to consumers, manipulated by algorithms fed with their own data. The self-conscious citizen with his/her desire and capacity to live a self-determined life, and to participate actively in the organisation of his work, is endangered and suppressed; people are alienated from their work and lives. With the exception of some minor examples

(see section 4.2) few are able to resist the expropriation and exploitation of his/her personal data. Shoshana Zuboff enumerates a great variety of strategies and products which Google uses for data extraction, such as smartphones, search engines, telematic instruments, and smart homes.

Surveillance capitalism uses algorithms as instruments to transform expropriated human experiences into forecast models of consumer behaviour, the raw material for developing targeted advertisement strategies. Via platforms, the "big data" concerns sell their targeted advertisement strategies to interested market partners, so-called users. Algorithms are the very heart of this strategy; they are based on complex mathematic calculations elaborated by small expert teams, whose results in the form of big data are treated as their corporate secrets. A recent exposé by a whistleblower who left Facebook with thousands of internal documents shows that this company is aware that rumours, negative emotions, and anger cause viewers to spend more time and clicks on particular sites. Despite the negative personal and social effects of which they are aware, they have opted to optimise their income rather than the welfare of their subscribers, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Lx5VmAdZSI). Given the immense impact of these algorithms on society and on individual consumer behaviour, their use should be subject to co-determination and democratic discussion. To organise the construction of algorithms as participative and democratic processes in cooperation with experts could well become a new field for action research in the future.[2]

The following example demonstrates how targeting advertising strategies functions: During his annual vacation a German priest is travelling to England. He is crossing the Channel by ship. Just before arriving at Dover, he receives a message on his smartphone, which informs him about the exact address of a London shop selling cassocks. This little story, one that really has happened, reveals Google's expropriation strategy: Google not only knows where a certain person is at a certain time, it is also informed about his destination (London), about his profession and probable interests. Moreover, we understand that Google collects data not only from the priests' information activities on Google's own platforms (services) e. g. Google maps for planning the route, but also from other businesses' platforms, e. g. a travel agency to book a place on the Channel ferry, a hotel room in London etc. (so called cross expropriation, Zuboff 2019). Moreover, Google extracts all these data not only without peoples' permission, but also by ignoring any legal rights, including even all other businesses' property rights, which is in fact remarkable: private property rights are the foundation on which prior capitalist societies and economies were built. Google has sufficient power to ignore these rights and to act according to its own rules, and to buy the politicians needed to protect their system (Zuboff, op. cit., 455–457).

This means we are living in a society of mass pseudo-individualism articulated by neoliberalism as the dominant ideology. Surveillance capitalism succeeds in expropriating citizens' civil rights as well as their capacities to participate in deliberative democracy and to live their lives according to their individual preferences. Surveillance capitalism thus attacks democracy at its very roots. The coexistence of capitalism and democracy comes to its end; Polanyi's chilling prophecy of emergent fascism becomes more and more real. The effects of surveillance capitalism for individuals both at work and in society are disastrous.

Work organisation via platforms and in global value creation chains causes a trend towards atomised work in which employers take little or no responsibility for employees,

2 We will come back to this actual Facebook case at the end of our paper.

communities, or the environment. As a result, the centrality of work as a source of social integration (Antonio Gramsci) is weakened. Atomised work can no longer shape the structure of society in the sense of establishing a social and moral order (Emile Durkheim 1992). To the contrary, the atomisation of work contributes to the destruction of existing social structures.

Action researchers must be aware of the present socio-economic situation, its multi-dimensional social, ecological and economic crises, as well as of its continuing transformation. Whether and how this awareness may lead AR to new horizons, methods and approaches is the question that guides this paper. We start this consideration with a brief review and appreciation of the early concepts and merits of action research.

## *3.* The early concepts and merits of AR – AR's origins in democracy and participation

In academia, AR had two strikes against it: it is driven by democratic civic values, and it believes that social science only learns by acting in context, not as a "spectator" activity. The academic social sciences were not just "taylorised" but also forced by powerful social and political interests to not to engage with social reform. The alternative to AR that developed was "applied social research", a conservative expert-consultant, low-academic status practice. As a result, AR ended up being developed largely outside academia, the Northern industrial variety at Tavistock and in Norway, and the Southern PAR variety in Catholic Action and social movements in Latin America, Africa, as well as in impoverished regions of the "North". AR work in all places proved that democratic social and work reform with stakeholder participation is not only possible but successful, as the work in Norway, the Antigonish Movement, and the Highlander Centre, Paolo Freire′s work in Brazil and beyond, and Fals Borda′s work in Colombian hinterlands show.

Given this, AR was not a successful academic movement, having been attacked by academic social researchers and having been nearly crushed by Reagan/Thatcher neo-liberalism. The social results of the failure of AR to influence the direction of history are clear: AR has not counteracted the worst levels of inequality and environmental destruction known to history, and emerging capitalisms so resolutely antisocial as disaster and surveillance capitalism. What can AR do under these conditions?

If we turn back to the key thinkers in the beginning of AR and revisit them with an eye to the future, we can see that Karl Polanyi, Eric Trist, Phillip Herbst, William Foote Whyte, Paolo Freire, and Orlando Fals Borda form a genealogy. Polanyi argued that labour is a fictitious commodity and that treating labour as separable from the social life of the laborer tears the social fabric. Tearing of the fabric causes counter-movements that can either move in a liberating direction or, more likely, toward fascism. Trist, Herbst, and Whyte took these ideas into the workplace in the aftermath of World War II and demonstrated through AR projects that a "joint optimisation" of efficiency, social solidarity, and safety in work was possible across class lines in a wide variety of organisations. Freire and Fals Borda took them into both national institutions and the hinterlands and favelas to promote democratic social movements.

## 4. Does AR have the tools to deal with such broad societal challenges?

### 4.1. Re-creating the citizen-actor

The current challenges to existing AR approaches of disaster and surveillance capitalism are profound. AR unquestionably was built on the premise of integral individuals with personal integrity as actors. Treating workers as stakeholders in industrial democracy, and treating landless peasants or oppressed rural black people as actors with important capabilities and rights, was axiomatic. Now disaster and surveillance capitalism challenge the very notion of the individual by atomising individuals into an infinite number of preferences, wants, and actions, each one facing a free market of its own in the face of global supply chains.

In AR, we have yet to come to terms with this decimation of labour into shards and the delocalisation of capitalist firms. Since AR cannot assume the integral individual as a point of departure, we have to develop strategies to support the re-development of the integral individual as a social and civic actor. This adds a dimension of complexity to AR, one that has been faced successfully in a few cases such as Belenky et al.′s brilliant Women′s Ways of Knowing (1997), Augusto Boal′s "theater of the oppressed" (2013) and a few others. Now the whole AR community has to take on these challenges if it is to survive.

### 4.2. Possible AR Strategies to integrate individuals in society

After presenting our perspective on the impact of surveillance capitalism and action research as a process to create positive outcomes, we now share more detailed descriptions of action research processes that we consider are helpful for the later discussion of how action research can be articulated to go beyond specific cases, towards movements that will gain scope to create alternative developments.

Radical, community-based action research builds on the work of generations of activists whose accomplishments "in the belly of the beast" continue. Starting with people like Jane Addams, the founder of the "settlement house" movement in Chicago and collaborator of John Dewey, these pro-social movements are a constant though certainly not recognised or supported by academic institutions. Some impressive examples follow:

The work of Patricia Maguire, beginning with her classic book on participatory feminism and followed by her collaborations with Mary Brydon-Miller and Alice MacIntyre, centres both on feminist liberation and education for oppressed native communities. See https://patriciamaguire.net/index.html

Mary Field Belenky and her collaborators working in the impoverished, uneducated rural and racially-oppressed regions of the US began with listening, then interacting, then creating communities in which oppressed rural women had voice and learned about their power. This work eventually resulted in significant support for the civil rights movement, for voter registration, and female activism. (See Women′s Ways of Knowing, 1997 and A Tradition that Has No Name, 1999).

The Highlander Research and Education Centre https://highlandercenter.org/ was founded by Myles Horton. It was and remains active in adult education to overcome the exploitation of Appalachia by predatory mining companies, civil rights, anti-racism, and community development. Highlander was first destroyed by the FBI, and more recently

burned down by opponents of civil rights. A narrative of its efforts is found in Myles Horton′s, The Long Haul (Horton, Kohl and Kohl, 1997). An example of the work of Highlander is given in John Gaventa′s, Power and Powerlessness (Gaventa, 1982) and the spoken book that Gaventa organised to capture the conversations between Myles Horton and Paolo Friere at Highlander, We Make the Road by Walking (Horton, Freire et al, 1990).

Many other examples in diverse subject areas exist from participatory municipal budgeting to client-driven architectural design. Projects like urban community development in vacant lots in the midst of low-income housing projects. An example is the "community gardens" movements, documented by Laura Saldívar-Tanaka (2002), which exist in many venues. Thohahoken Michael Doxtater, a Mohawk Iroquois educator, writer and filmmaker, teaches action research for the recovery and improvement of conditions of life for First Nations in Canada through what he calls "Indigenology" (Doxtater, 2001). He argues we are all indigenous to this planet, and must eat from the same dish. Through this, he argues for a renewed commitment to care for the earth.

These efforts take their place alongside the long history of action research by Marija Lisa Swantz, Budd Hall, Rajesh Tandon, L. David Brown, Robert Chambers, Paolo Freire, Augusto Boal, and Orlando Fals Borda, forming a tapestry of approaches to the difficult problems of colonialism, power/powerlessness, racism, sexism, inequality, and environmental damage.

What these practices reveal, in addition to the very different conditions under which AR is practiced in different parts of the world and under diverse political-economic and social conditions, is that AR is ultimately about changing power relationships. AR′s claims to enhance human flourishing, to create more "democratic" organisations, communities, or societies clearly have to go well beyond providing conditions under which the local stakeholders are able to participate and have an impact on their own conditions. AR is about power-sharing and mutual respect in any and all cases. To pretend that it is just about improving internal organisational processes, or about redressing inequalities in the distribution of resources or about improving the environmental sustainability of human arrangements, is to reduce its meaning and democratic ambitions. AR ultimately exists to enhance the capacity of everyone to play a significant role in determining the conditions of their own lives. Unless we take on this broader challenge, disaster and surveillance capitalism will continue to be hegemonic.

## 5. Examples of AR strategies to meet the challenges preceding surveillance capitalism

In this section, we share what we have called "positive deviants" in the efforts to face challenges that we consider are part of the trends that today lead our social and economic systems towards extremely destructive forms of capitalism. "Positive deviants" (Shekar, 1990) is a statistical concept that refers to cases on a normal curve that are a number of standard deviations from the mean, but in a desirable direction. This refers to exceptionally positive cases that appear under generally unfavourable conditions.

AR has focused on such cases repeatedly throughout its history: successful participatory and democratic enterprises in Norway, Mondragón, successful AR civil rights initiatives in the US Southern states, overcoming mining companies in Appalachia, overcoming exploitative electric companies in the Colombian hinterland, and many others.

AR knows that these are not exceptions to some self-serving capitalist universal rule. They are successful examples that work in current environments, to the benefit of people who otherwise are exploited and oppressed by a rapacious and destructive system of power and inequality. They may be positive deviants, but they are possible, and no one can argue that more like them are not possible or necessary. Positive deviants do not occur in isolation, one case at a time. For them to come into being and to persist requires a surrounding environment and set of value commitments that provide resources to stabilise and support these efforts. As Davydd Greenwood′s late colleague at Cornell University, Alan McAdams quipped "If it is happening somewhere, it must be possible."

AR must also rise intellectually to challenge the self-serving "orthodoxy" that claims that positive deviants are "exceptions" and that because they are exceptions, they can be ignored. Such cases may be statistically exceptional, but they demonstrate that a much better and more humane system of socio-political-economic relations is possible, but only if the avarice of current powerholders and monopolists can be confronted and brought under democratic control. For that to happen, strategies often associated with AR in the Global South, and in the civil rights and race struggles in the US and in South Africa, have to be brought into play as well.

These are a few examples of "positive deviants":

Norwegian Socio-technical Systems Design:
Emerging initially from Einar Thorsrud′s willingness and ability to test the ideas in practice, the concepts of socio-technical systems design were put into practice in Norway, initially in an experimental ship-manning project. The ship in question was an oil tanker, and it was built to embody the principles of socio-technical systems design including joint optimisation of the relationship between work organisation and technology, to enhance safety and quality of life onboard, and to minimise status differences among the different levels of the organisation.

For this to be implemented required an agreement between the government, the unions, and the employer federation. This kind of agreement became a model for future collaborations called thereafter the "social partners". This partnership exists to this day and is now written into law. It does not mean that every company takes advantage of it and produces a participatory workplace, but those that want to do this find ample levers in the national system to be able to proceed. (Ravn and Øyum, 2020).

"Action and Research Programme for the Humanization of Working Life":
The German "Action and Research Programme for the Humanisation of Working Life" (HdA) was an experiment to introduce democratic participation processes in working life: The HdA programme was part of the social-democratic inspired social change movement in the early 1970s. Similar to the Norwegian programme on "Industrial democracy", it was supported by a reform coalition of employer's associations, trade unions and the state. However, differently from the Norwegian experiences, the German reform coalition was only temporary; it was broken up five years after its start by the employer association, because they feared democratisation processes moving beyond the co-determining institutions: "No expansion of co-

determination" was their slogan (Fricke 2004). The programme continued, but its character was changed: democratic experiments were no longer possible. Nevertheless, the temporary existence of the reform coalition enabled a group of five experimental projects to demonstrate that industrial democracy, i. e., introducing democratic participation as a path to economic democracy, was and is possible, if supported by social reform coalitions.

The most radical experiment was the AR project "Participation and Qualification". Forty-seven so called "unskilled" workers, male and female, migrants and Germans, working in a screw factory cooperated with five action researchers for four years. In processes of joint reflection and action, they demonstrated that workers are interested in, and capable of engaging in participative action research processes resulting in better working conditions (a moderate wage increase, better and safer work), and reducing the Tayloristic division of work. The distribution of power was slightly changed between workers, lower management, and experts and the workers learned to have a voice in dialogues and change processes.

Public spaces for reflection and dialogue (Pålshaugen 2002) were introduced after negotiations with local top management and works council. Democratic participation was practiced for another three years after the end of the project, and after the researchers had left it. The screw factory was later sold to another company. Although democratic participation was practiced only for seven years, this experiment should not be regarded a failure. Like many other social experiments in history, it contributes to the experience and expectations in societies that economic democracy can be realized step-by-step. The moving force in this historical process is the immense creativity of the workforce and their skills and experiences. On a small scale this force became visible during the participation process.

For example, fifteen years before their trade union accepted and implemented it generally, the workers designed a new wage system as an alternative to piecework wages. From this perspective all social experiments guided by the vision of industrial democracy are important, because they confirm the human expectation of a future society built by associations of self-determining citizens.

The Mondragón labour-managed cooperative system:
This is one of the largest and most successful systems of worker cooperatives in the world. It calls itself an "ecosystem". In addition to the individual structures of the co-operatives, already well described in the literature, the system includes overarching general statutes that all co-operatives must follow, a General Assembly, a bank, and a co-operative healthcare and retirement system. There are producer co-operatives, sales co-operatives, research and development co-operatives, consulting co-operatives, and a co-operative university in the system. When an individual co-operative faces a challenge, there is an option for "inter-co-operation" meaning either financial help, accepting workers idled by a downturn, or both. Within such an ecosystem, the development of new co-operatives or the restructuring of a co-operative is facilitated by the surrounding structures. It is no guarantee of the survival of an individual co-operative, and some major ones have failed or have converted to private businesses, but it creates a context in which success is possible (Imaz and Eizaguire, 2020; Whyte and Whyte, 1991).

Territorial development in Rafaela, Argentina:
The city of Rafaela, in the Province of Santa Fe, constitutes an interesting experience of territorial economic development in Argentina, characterised by a high degree of economic-

productive dynamism that is based, in part, on the response capacity generated at the local level. It is a territory with an SME network that has positioned itself efficiently not only in the domestic market but also in foreign markets. It works in conjunction with a strong local state and a social and educational environment with diverse characteristics. One of these characteristics is the continued dialogue between economic actors, many of whom have conflicting perspectives on development. This has enabled distinctive employment strategies in the face of the economic crises that Argentina has gone through. It is not a territory without problems, but it is a territory in which there is a greater capacity to work together to solve problems. That capacity is not the result of markets: it is the product of a process of social and political construction, especially after the nineties of the last century.

Action Research for Territorial Development:

Another example of a positive deviant is Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) practiced by Orkestra- The Basque Institute of Competitiveness in the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain. In Gipuzkoa, one of the three provinces of the autonomous community, action research has helped generate the spaces where territorial development has been discussed as a process to counteract progressive individualism and the weakening of historic forms of community development in the face of increasingly radical versions of globalisation. This has resulted in some small transformations in specific policy processes.

The rationale of ARTD as practiced in Gipuzkoa is threefold: (a) the development of collective capabilities by a territory can increase its capacity to face global trends; (b) politics and policy can be vehicles to develop such collective capabilities and (c) action research can be the methodology to construct collective capabilities through politics and policy. Territory can thus be a subject to counteract global trends by strengthening territorial (local, regional) identities and spaces for socioeconomic development. Territory in the context of ARTD is "the actors who live in a place with their social, economic and political organisation, their culture and institutions, as well as the physical environment they are part of".

The aim of the definition was to discard interpretations of territory as a physical container, and underline the agency of the inhabitants in each place. Territorial development was then defined as "the process of mobilisation and participation of different actors (public and private) in which they discuss and agree on the strategies that can guide individual as well as collective behaviour". These definitions aim at inspiring processes where local and regional communities can maximise their capacity to decide their own socio-economic future. To do so and combined with deliberative policy analysis (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018; Griggs, Norval, and Wagenaar, eds, 2014), ARTD has been described as exercising soft resistance in policy and politics (Arrona and Larrea, 2018) while developing action research in contexts of conflict (Larrea and Arrona, 2019).

One of the core features of ARTD, despite the diversity of positions of politicians and policy makers participating, is that the main parties in the territory agreed on the need to explore new patterns of relationship of the government with territorial actors, with more participatory and community-oriented economic models in mind. The main issue in achieving this is one of legitimacy. Which actors a government decides to mobilise, and with whom they decide to participate to discuss and agree on the strategies for the territory is a deeply controversial and ideological decision. This means that the agreement to create framework programmes and explore alternative approaches, despite the differences and conflicting positions on the specific paths to be explored, is a challenge that cannot be underestimated. This

agreement has been the basic condition for action research to develop uninterruptedly in policy processes for more than a decade.

One of the main examples of this basic agreement to continue exploring new patterns of relationship of the government with territorial actors is a thinktank initiated in 2020. The following is the rationale that inspires its activity: "The main features of the predominant political culture can be synthesised into two fundamental ideas: political disaffection and the lack of capability of public structures to respond to the economic, social and political challenges of globalisation" "We live in an increasingly individualistic society where the dimensions of communitarian and public life lose relevance". "The lack of democratic control over a relevant part of the economic system, and the lack of institutions that could counteract the new realities generated by globalisation, are creating a crisis of representation in our institutional system".[3]

The question that now emerges is how AR processes conducted in a small territory like Gipuzkoa can affect trends such as surveillance capitalism, ARTD focuses on transforming the existing situations, not by providing alternative discourses, but by transforming ingrained habits of policymakers. These habits can, in a process, generate small transformations in policy that, like a cascade, further transform politics, policy and territorial development. One of the lessons learned by action researchers in this context is that the process was initially discouraging, as they went through a transition from the "big words" of politicians to the "small transformation of ingrained habits". But they learned that persistence could eventually result in important tangible results.

## 6. Discussion

What does all this mean for Action Research, and what can AR do to strengthen individual and social resistance against surveillance capitalism?

### 6.1. What does all this mean for Action Research?

Roughly speaking one can distinguish two fields of AR activities among the examples we have provided: Action research in working life and organisations, and AR for Territorial Development (ARTD, see section 5). Both are guided by visions: democratisation of work or industrial democracy and democratic organisation of community/regional development. Both approaches are more or less limited in time and space: especially, despite networking efforts, most work-related AR projects have ended up being single case approaches. Until now, action researchers have not succeeded in organising sustainable, continuing change processes in working life[4]

In their final research report, Emery and Thorsrud complained about the Norwegian Trade Unions who refused to organize a nationwide process of democratisation in working life:

3 Source: Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank, Deliberation Group for a New Political Culture, working document nº1.

4 This seems to be more likely within community or regional development processes. Emery and Thorsrud's industrial democracy programme in Norway as well as Gustavsen's LOM programme in Sweden are prominent examples of the difficulty in initiating continuous change processes through work-related action research.

instead the interests of these actors concentrated on health and safety in work issues (Emery, Thorsrud 1982). A similar fate occurred to Gustavsen's LOM programme (Leadership, Organisation, *Medbestämmande*), which was centred around the concept of democratic dialogue. In contrast to the institutional approach of the Norwegian programme, the LOM was process-oriented: the idea was to practice democratisation by continuing democratic dialogues between employees and management within a firm or among several participating enterprises. Gustavsen developed the Swedish process approach because he was interested in initiating ongoing change processes leading to a democratic social movement. In this respect he also failed.

Both Scandinavian programmes however resulted in a series of very impressive examples of industrial democracy regarding democratic participation processes. Despite their limitations in time and space, these examples are important, because they demonstrate future possibilities (Widerschein des Morgen, Bloch 1960: I, 151; Möglichkeitsanalyse, Fricke and Fricke 1977: 99; 104) to practice democracy in working life and economy as an alternative to the actually prevailing hierarchical and profit-oriented work organisation.

Moreover, both Scandinavian programmes were based on social partnership models. Social partnership however turned out to be limited; all attempts to introduce processes or institutions of industrial democracy were stopped as soon as they exceeded the scope of a single enterprise, a small cluster, or: in the Swedish case, clusters of enterprises in a special region (Qvale 2008). Despite its limitations social partnership had positive outcomes: both programmes practiced joint optimisation of efficiency, safety in work, quality of work with the perspective of creating social solidarity. At first glance this joint optimisation strategy was very successful: As usual, efficiency increased considerably alongside with increased participation, and so did safety in work and, to a certain extent, also quality of work.

Why then did all attempts to introduce an industry-wide process of democratisation and democratic participation fail? Our thesis is that because of participation and democratszing processes, employees' demands for democratic participation as well as on a fair share from greater efficiency and growth exceeded the social partners' expectations and wishes. Trade unions as well as, though for different reasons, employers and management remained reluctant to accept open processes of democratic participation, because they never knew where such processes might end someday and feared losing their own power in the system.

The actual concentration of income in all societies around the world demonstrates that capital is not interested in fair income distribution. It denies the fair distribution of the results of efficiency growth and rising work productivity by, for example, fair wages, reduction of working time, accepting trade union demands to introduce a four-day-working week, etc. German employers' associations were even more restrictive. They stopped experiments in practicing democratic participation in selected enterprises, financed by the state program "Humanisation of Working Life" only five years after the programme had started. Their argument was: "No expansion of co-determination financed by public funds."

As a counter strategy against increasing demands for democratisation processes, capitalists introduced new management concepts as of the 1990as, which replaced, simply speaking, the existing command and control work organisation with methods of "indirect steering and control". This new management concept grants the employees limited spaces of self-regulation at work, while the conditions of work such as time budget, personal and financial equipment are excluded from any kind of participatory decisions. When these concepts are applied, resulting from the usual cost cutting strategies, work intensity and stress

increase to a point where the quality of work cannot be guaranteed anymore by the employees (see especially healthcare working conditions in hospitals as well as in ambulatory scenarios). Consequently, employees are alienated from their work. They can no longer identify themselves with their work, there is no possibility left to be proud and satisfied with good work quality and useful products.

We could learn from past experiences, and the positive deviant cases we have presented, to reflect on how the action research community might now react in the face of surveillance capitalism.

## 6.2. What can AR do to strengthen individual and social resistance against surveillance capitalism?

All capitalist strategies to intensify work, to resist democratisation demands, to constantly generate unequal income distribution, and to increase the social difference between rich and poor weaken the citizens' capacities and desires to lead a satisfying personal and social life. They result in the loss of the ability of workers to influence the conditions of their work. In addition, the exploitation and expropriation strategies of surveillance capitalism reduce the citizens to data providers and manipulated consumers, who function to maintain the constant growth of capitalism. The environmental destruction these systems generate is amply documented.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that human capacities to live a self-determined life, to practice democratic participation in working life and society have not been destroyed. They certainly have been suppressed, hidden under experiences of defeat, social isolation and lack of voice at work and in society, but they will survive as an essential human characteristic (Fricke 1983). It is action research's first and most important task to revitalise these innovative capabilities, and to recreate the citizen-actor. To this end, many participative strategies have been developed by AR in the past.

To generate the energy necessary to recreate the citizen-actor in the era of surveillance capitalism, inspiring visions of an alternative society are needed as well as a reaffirmation of the non-negotiable value of democracy itself. Action research has always worked with collaborative moral and political worldviews, such as industrial democracy, democratic participation, autonomy at work, participatory and community oriented economic models

In this context, we want to draw attention to Marcel Mauss' vision of a "society of gift" (Mauss 1924/1975) built on peoples' trust and reciprocity, their common decency. There is empirical evidence that peoples' common decency, as well as their innovative qualifications may survive the destructive effects of surveillance capitalism. According to Marcel Mauss, peoples' common decency and the economy of the gift are the bases on which our societies are built. Mauss was aware of the risk we are witnessing today, that contemporary social relations will increasingly follow the model of exchange and contract, precisely as has happened. AR has to intensify its efforts to stop this development and to demonstrate by experiments that alternatives are possible.

If this all sounds like a "pipe dream", one only has to read the books of Hiro Miyazaki, The Method of Hope and Arbitraging Japan and Anna Tsing′s The Mushroom at the End of the World to know that complex webs of reciprocities, mutual care, and unexpected solidarities occur in places where they are least expected. Miyazaki and Richard Swedberg have

published a compendium of such examples in their The Economy of Hope. (See Miyazaki, 2004; Miyazaki, 2013; Miyazaki, 2014; Miyazaki and Swedberg, 2017; Tsing, 2015).

Another problem is AR's understanding and relationship to power in all its different aspects as social, economic, and personal power. In every project or programme, action research is confronted with one or another kind of power: social partnership, a basic element of the Scandinavian AR programmes is characterised by the unequal distribution of power between the different partners: indeed, this was the main cause for the programmes′ failure to initiate social movements for industrial democracy in Norway or Sweden. Gustavsen's democratic dialogue may be understood as an exercise for employees to strengthen their self-consciousness in dialogues with management. But none of the Scandinavian programmes/ projects succeeded in mobilising the necessary power resources for its broader purposes. There was always a distance between action researchers and structural or personal power, a distance ranging from hostility to fear of getting *mani pulite.*

The Basque experience showed this connection to power too. In the Freirean perspective, which inspires it, it is not only a matter of conquering power or sharing it as something that one owns. It means rehearsing alternative ways of exercising power in the process of knowledge production in the direction of more democracy, fairness, and sustainability. To better understand power in these contexts, we use some contributions by Paulo Freire, who in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972), identified humanisation as being in those times an "inescapable concern". Since the writing of the book at the end of the 1960 s, this concern has not vanished. It has nevertheless taken on different forms given the dynamics of history. This, in turn, requires recreating ways of reading and transforming reality.

Considering history as a process open to human agency, policy and politics are indispensable tools for promoting change within a given territory. AR has an important role in enabling subjects and their associations and networks to speak their truth, which for Freire is always word-in-action. This means, among other things, becoming aware of one's own immersion within a given culture and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Still, according to Paulo Freire, the oppressor is not just "out there" with the "other". Also, the oppressed and those who stand and struggle on their side host features of the oppressor that need to be overcome through emancipatory, critical, and solidary praxis, a process that combines action and reflection dialectically.

From this perspective, action research is necessarily a political endeavour, as recognised in the narrative of ARTD. There are ethical-political options to be chosen from the definition of the problem to the way and to whom the results are communicated. While being inherently political, research inevitably must deal with the issue of power. Besides, when someone speaks to power, there needs to be someone that listens too. ARTD shows how action research can be conducted with those in power as stakeholders, offering, at the same time, resistance and a helping hand and generating the conditions where power listens. Learning in this case is intertwined with a continuous process of negotiation.

Regarding the present social situation, the time has come for AR to reflect and to change its relation to power. Throughout the 100-year history of action research, capitalism has tolerated action research concepts and practices if they were restricted to single cases or temporary action research programmes. These restrictions can no longer be accepted, because they prevent AR from becoming a relevant opponent to extreme forms of neoliberal capitalism. The only way to overcome our present political and social irrelevance would be for action researchers in different streams of practice, ideologies and locations within AR to come

together (see, as an example, the AR+ initiative led by Hilary Bradbury) and to look for allies. These might include social movements like Fridays for Future, Black Lives Matter, Not One More and, under certain conditions, trade unions and/or communities or regional authorities (see section 5) involving the cession of political power to citizens in communities and territories).

We will also have to analyse the experiences from more radical social reform projects led by Orlando Fals Borda, Paulo Freire and others. Of great interest is also a current trend in Colombia where social movements leading an alliance with academic and non-academic research groups and networks including AR are centres of research processes. (Carrillo 2020, p. 36) Carrillo reports that "social mobilisation keeps growing and widening its motivations: alongside of traditional civil rights, working class and rural claims, new topics [emerge] like the defense of traditional territories and ecosystems against transnational extractivism, the claim of a dialogued end of the civil war in Colombia and the requirement of protection for social leaders being systematically killed." These topics indicate that AR is increasingly confronting and engaged with political and power issues by its co-operation with current socio-political movements such as in Colombia.

Recreating the citizen-actor; activating his/her innovative qualifications; orienting the daily research work towards a vision; trying to promote industrial democracy and democratic participation; enabling territories to act as a collective subject, to maximise their capacity to decide on their own socio- economic future, and to become spaces to counteract global trends; rethinking the relation to socio-political power: these are the big challenges for AR to become a relevant opponent to neoliberal capitalism by protecting societies and individuals of its disastrous consequences and making the technology work for people rather than working on them.

This sounds very general and utopian. We do think that such perspectives are necessary to guide action research. But there are also opportunities and possibilities to undertake concrete activities and first steps as an action researcher, or call them social experiments, to approach a desired future. The actual turbulences around Facebook open a window of opportunities for such AR activities:

An exposé by whistleblower Frances Haugen, mentioned briefly earlier, a former employee of Facebook who left the company with thousands of internal documents, presents another challenge for action researchers to consider. The documents she took show that the company is aware that rumours, negative emotions, anger, and conspiracy theories cause viewers to spend more time and clicks on particular sites, making those clicks more valuable to advertisers and thus more profitable to the company. According to Facebook′s own research, they know these dynamics are destructive for many individuals and are socially polarising. But despite these negative personal and social effects, they are opting to optimise their income rather than the welfare of their subscribers, (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Lx5VmAdZSI). In her interview with CBS News, Haugen encouraged federal regulation of Facebook to prevent them from doing this (https://www.cbsnews.com/news/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-60-minutes-polarizing-divisive-content/). Importantly, she reported that employees from the "civic integrity department" within Facebook changed an algorithm to reduce the publication of hate speech but that another department foiled this intervention.

The implications for AR are considerable because Haugen asserts that not all employees of Facebook accept the current corporate practices. Rather than opposing or trying to shut

Facebook down, action researchers could work to surface the diversity of positions among the employees of the company, and make it necessary for different categories of stakeholders to explain their positions and actions in public forums. If these diverse viewpoints were brought to the surface skilfully, a result could be using public pressure to shift the balance toward the redesign of the algorithms to lessen the harms they cause. Alternatively, AR could support both citizen and insider initiatives to define which federal regulations are really necessary to achieve such a goal. Or action researchers could help citizens find/develop ways to resist the reach of these so-called "social media" giants in their lives.

From the perspective of AR, the immense impact of these algorithms on society, and on individual consumer behaviour, means that their use should be subject to co-determination and democratic discussion. To organise the construction of algorithms as participative and democratic processes in co-operation with experts could well become a new field for action research in the future.

## Dialogue Forum "Future Perspectives of Action Research"

It is our intention to stimulate a discussion about the questions raised. Regarding the actual and historical strengths and weaknesses of Action Research on one side and the social and economic changes that have occurred since the times of Kurt Lewin and Karl Polanyi, which continuously take place with growing speed and intensity on the other, we think the time has come to reflect on whether and how Action Research can meet the challenges of the more and more aggressive and destructive forms of modern capitalism, which have been developed under the umbrella of neo-liberalism.

It is interesting to trace the upswing of neo-liberal forms of capitalism back to some initiatives right after the end of World War II. In 1946 a group of prominent European and US American economists and philosophers met in Switzerland and founded the Mont Pelerin Society; its purpose was the promotion of neo-liberalism in "Western" economy and society and later worldwide. Participants were among others Friedrich A. Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, Karl Popper, Milton Friedman. Although the foundation of the group and its existence were hardly noticed by the public, its activities became highly influential. In cooperation with the Chicago School (Milton Friedman and his Chicago Boys) they designed the principles of a "free" competitive and global market economy, based on private property rights, competition and disembedded from social or state regulations. One may say that together with the Chicago School, the Mont Pelerin Society marks the origin of neoliberal economic and social practice, unleashing modern capitalism.

We cannot make these authors directly responsible for the emergence of neoliberal politics and economy with their disastrous practices over the past 75 years. Still their ideas attracted powerful political and economic actors like Reagan and Thatcher plus Big Data, financial capital and speculation which created and enforced socio-economic processes, resulting in worldwide practices of disastrous and surveillance capitalism as mentioned above.

In contrast we insist in action researchers' responsibility to foster and to build on the integrity and common decency of the individual, to enable active citizens to self-determination at work and to create democratic societies. Action research is about democratic and

participative values, which are the essence of its social responsibility very much in contrast to that of neoliberal scholars.

We have demonstrated in our text that AR has been very successful, in innumerable AR research initiatives, in applying its values in co-operation with a great variety of practitioners and practitioner organisations. What is missing so far are powerful social and political actors who are able to make AR values guide social practice beyond a series of single cases or projects limited in time and space. The crucial question is how AR may reach social impact beyond these limitations. One way may be coalitions between action research and social movements in different forms: Action Research creating social movements, as the late Björn Gustavsen, one of the founders of this journal, tried to establish: "The idea is not to replace the single case with a number of cases but to create or support social movements" (Gustavsen 2003: 95). Another option is action research organised by social movements (Carrillo 2020). A third possibility may be to engage in co-operation between AR and social movements such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter etc.

We want to stimulate a dialogue among action researchers on these issues, visions and research practices, and on how to enable Action Research to contribute to or create social movements against the destructive tendencies of modern capitalism. For this purpose we will establish, starting with issue 1/2022, a dialogue forum on future perspectives of AR as part of the International Journal of Action Research. Any ideas based on your experiences will be welcome as part of an open dialogue.

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# Discussion paper: When the Cinderellas unite[1]

Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga

In the practice of action research, it is important to get things right with a good analysis of reality. Tools such as sociograms (Ganuza, 2010) allow us to define the formal and informal spaces that underlie a problem, the capitals of the actors involved, their level of access or exclusion from power, and the density or absence of their relationships. From a global perspective, at the beginning of the text that heads this section, Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck (2022) focus on delimiting the position of individuals in the sociogram of our societies, which are marked by the neoliberal revolution, disaster capitalism and vigilance: the raw material with which AR works (citizens) is a broken individual, adrift, "incoherent and apolitical in their desires and needs" (2022: 10).

This crude definition is not unknown to those of us who work with local communities, and it can be seen as the result of two complementary processes. On the one hand, the breakdown of community networks, resulting from material changes that promote the importance of the self in our societies. Needless to say, this argument has been exacerbated by undermining caused by the neoliberal individualist ideology. On the other hand, since 2008 the erosion of community networks has had the rupture of the individual added to it. The accelerated context of uncertainty and objective or subjective precariousness in which we are immersed, aggravated by Covid, has dashed the hopes of thousands of people who cannot find comfort in an "outside" marked by the weakening of community and identity networks. Thus, if we look at the analysis of reality, we must be aware that we work in cracked territories, in a barren land where community ties have been broken, and dozens of broken dolls survive adrift on the currents (Mirowski, 2009).

Perhaps for this reason, in my practical work energising local communities with Participatory Action Research processes, the metaphor of Cinderella emerges strongly. This symbol embodies those sectors I work with to change the sociogram of reality and access new forms of power. Ultimately, I understand that we work with (and like) Cinderellas, seeking to change the story of their (our) lives. Deep down, I believe that the objective of AR is none other than to change the story, as a metaphor for a change in reality needed by vulnerable people more accustomed to scrubbing floors (like Cinderella), than dancing in luxurious salons (like stepmothers).

In my two decades of research and community participatory action, when I go out into the neighbourhood, I detect a growing isolation of people increasingly traversed by not only objective, but increasingly subjective vulnerabilities and exclusions. Asking oneself, as Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck propose, about the role that action research should play in these times means, in my opinion, accepting that in the face of the utopian dimension of modernity, the victory of neoliberalism is increasingly diagnosed by people in a depoliticised way (Dardot & Laval, 2013; Mirowski, 2013). It is increasingly difficult for people to understand that their situation of vulnerability, marked by an inability to pay their mortgage, take care of their dependent children, get papers, or find affordable housing is not down to their bad

1 This paper is written in response to the article "On Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research" published in this issue of International Journal of Action Research.

luck. Moreover, it is even more difficult for them to see that their situation corresponds to the interests of stepmothers and stepsisters, who, like the interest groups that structure disaster and surveillance capitalism, compete fiercely with each other, but collaborate to subdue the Cinderellas and prevent them from accessing the prince. Now more than ever, the Cinderellas of our country seem convinced that their destiny is to scrub floors… unless magic appears, or rage in the form of homeopathic substitutes that do not cure but offer fake security.

Homeopathy does not mix well with AR, but magic does. In PAR, the reason for developing a sociogram is to not only recognise *what is* in society at the time of the intervention, showing the relationships between powerful and subordinate in the community, between formal and informal groups. The aim is not to draw pictures to understand reality, but to change it. In the PAR, the sociogram of the real, as with our transforming, utopian intentions, is followed by the sociogram of the ideal, which points towards what *ought to be*, as the first step to explore how and with whom to achieve it. As stressed by the authors of the text we are discussing, "AR exists to enhance each person's ability to play a significant role in determining the conditions of their own lives" (Fricke, Greenwood, Lawea & Streck, 2022: 15). This role is never, under any circumstances, to assume that a person's highest aspiration was scrubbing floors.

Therefore, if our practice could be exemplified by this tale, our goal would be for Cinderella to throw off the yoke of those who condemn her to prostration, allowing her to rise up to recreate new forms of power. This fits in with AR, because as the authors recall, to specify its political vocation, it "must address the question of power" in a continuous process of negotiation. In our metaphor, Cinderella would dance with the prince (who could be a princess, or even a frog), perhaps, to create a new public body of citizen actors. In fact, the text we draw on is a clear example of the various types of dances with power via which AR has got Cinderellas involved over many decades: some shorter, others more intense, some with abrupt ends and others that are still going on.

However, we have not dealt with the key to the story, its perverse essence. For the story to have a happy ending, Cinderella must wait for the magic to work. However, in these liquid societies, as Bauman (2010) comments, the magic is in a person's luck: it is in that kind of big bang that allows some people to go from an anodyne, if not vulnerable life, to success (whether affective, economic, academic, material or subjective). This success, like musical chairs, is the kind where only one person wins: the fastest, the strongest. Thus, the game of life, in a good fight with neoliberal dystopia, becomes a kind of unbridled dance for survival in which only one person is left dancing at the end… on the wreckage of the rest. To be able to participate in this cruel game, one must first teach people to accept the rules, that "there is no alternative", whether *X Factor*, *Hunger Games*, or *Squid Game.* Here, the ontology defined by neoliberalism and based on a concept that naturalises egoism is key (Ahedo, 2021; Bollier & Hellfrich, 2019): the person only survives by competing and, in addition, must be attentive, must be responsible, must do whatever it takes to not miss the train that can change their life (Friedrich, 2018), because there will be no more opportunities. Thus, if someone does not take advantage when the train (magic) passes their station, they will be responsible for remaining vulnerable, so it only remains to wait for luck or grab it. End of story. Sweet dreams. For whoever can sleep.

However, from an AR point of view, there are two certainties. First, there is no magic out there: no fairy godmothers, no pumpkins or mice. Second, there is work, effort, intelligence, determination for people to become agents, actors, owners of their lives. That is the magic of

society. AR knows that reality does not magically change; it emerges from difficulty, vulnerability and injustice and raises a utopian horizon that moves away from idealism to the problems of reality. Therefore, the reference text is a wake-up call, a self-critical invitation to adapt to times when AR is more necessary than ever, an invitation for the centrality of the practice to regain its political character. We would say that the magic of AR, the central vector that will allow the story of our lives to change, is to recover the deep meaning of the political sphere.

As the authors point out, the reconstruction of the citizen-actor must be the first of AR's tasks, since it is not possible to build a community structure on disconnected, isolated broken dolls. However, practical AR must be aware of context. The current context is defined by a process of depoliticisation that subverts the sense of modernity, creating the conditions of possibility for the neoliberal dystopia to take hold. As the authors recall, current capitalism, which calls democracy itself into question, anchors its roots in the project designed in 1947 by Hayek in Mont Pelerín. Neoliberalism is associated with the breakdown of the public from two perspectives: the material, characterised by cuts in social services and the ideological, defined by rabid individualism. The problem is that, in addition, neoliberalism (also) is a government art, displaying governmentality in which the political is no longer valued for its ability to structure the common good, but based on a rationality measured in terms of effectiveness, profitability, efficiency and impact in accordance with the New Public Management mandates. Thus, this new rationale (Dardot & Laval, 2013) focuses on guaranteeing the progress of the economy measured in real time in indicators of efficiency, effectiveness, and cost/benefit. Meanwhile, the management of life is subordinated to citizenship, which is made responsible for finding solutions. Politics is therefore stripped of any public responsibility towards the collective that may have nothing to do with the management of the market. Politics, the management of the common sphere, is privatised, with calls for individual citizen responsibility that are not accompanied by political co-responsibility and the activation of collective structuring mechanisms. This means inverting the logic of advancement in which modernity has settled. If modernity was the transition from private to public, the neoliberal revolution privatises and displaces the sense of the political from the individual.

However, we must emphasise that in its deepest dimension, which fits in with the epistemology of AR, the political emerges out of the transition from the private consideration of a problem to the assumption that its root is public; therefore it must be managed collectively to guarantee outlets for those who lack particular resources to face a vulnerability that is not the result of chance, but of inequality. Politics, seen as the collective search for public and community instruments to manage problems previously considered private, arises from our own contradictory nature of human beings with unlimited aspirations and scarce resources.

A privileged mind endowed with illusions in a fragile body and a finite world explains the ability of humans to evolve from collaboration, co-ordination and empathy. This has allowed complex scarcity management systems to emerge in our species, to standardise behaviours, to regulate behaviours, preventing the human being from governed by the law of the jungle (Damasio, 2010). Thus, politics is "the art of making the impossible possible" because its essence is to resolve the contradiction between unlimited desires and limited resources, precipitating the collective search for solutions to problems, previously considered private, that have their origins in public roots. Revealing the structural meaning of inequalities allows people to stop considering that their situation is explained by chance, guilt or bad luck. The visibility of vulnerability as a reality that, far from being private, affects thousands of people,

allows the awareness of the need for public responses to emerge which come together into mandatory regulations. Ultimately, the magic of the Cinderella story is in the fact that she looks up from the ground and sees that she is not alone; there are thousands, millions of Cinderellas who privately perceive themselves as condemned to scrubbing floors.

This is for me the keystone of Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck's text, as they call for the recreation of integral individuals endowed with agency, in search of a change in power relationships as a nodal point of the various traditions of Action Research. As in Cinderella, the key to the story that inspires a sense of AR for me is that whoever believed themselves condemned to scrub floors in isolation, can stop being a broken doll without agency, and rise up and assume that self-awareness that prompted Borda and Freire to aspire to new forms of power, and even to the public sphere. To do this, we have resources: a pumpkin turned into a chest of tools, techniques, instruments in constant renewal and experimentation: magazines such as the *International Journal of Action Research* or *Action Research Journal*, bedside books, anthologies, web resources, even cookery books such as *Cooking with Action Research: Stories and Resources for Self and Community Transformations.* They offer a wealth of resources to weave Cinderellas, to empower, deliberate and reflect, adapting our practice to the knowledge, cultures and plural positions of rich and complex societies, which we must structure in search of a collective meaning. A pumpkin thrown by some wise mice that treasure the memory of the victories and defeats that the authors identify in their text, exemplifying the permanent test in the search for alternative forms of power that underlie AR in Norway, the Basque Country, Latin America, in the workplace and in all lands.

Consequently, the first of the challenges that AR must face is to recover the political sense of community action. Now, if we look at the reality, we could suggest some parallel aspects to reconsider.

- If politics needs a demos, we must start from the premise that the current context is defined by an individualistic logic characterised by the art of neoliberal (self) government. Precisely for this reason, the politicisation of Cinderellas is not enough; strategies that seek community articulation must be implemented. I know it must rebuild the demos that neoliberalism is breaking down. We must start from the bottom, firstly by managing to make AR rebuild the self. To do so, pain must be incarnated and politicised, but this approach to the private sphere must be the excuse for structuring pain in a reasoning that starts with "what about me", but ends in "what about us" (Ahedo, 2021).
- In this context, the effort to attract political power to the rationale of community structure should be doubled, starting from the premise that the substratum that unites liberal institutions and AR is the irredeemable defence of democracy, although it must go beyond mere institutional or partisan expressions to incorporate conflict (Ibarra, 2010) and work, as highlighted in this text.
- However, in this game we must consider how powerful identities of resistance (Castells, 1997) opposing the status quo emerge in the face of the legitimising identities that govern liberal democracies with increasing difficulties. Some settle on the structuring of plural networks, building bridges, uniting Cinderellas; others, increasingly powerful, are committed to building trenches and walls, and undermining liberal democracy and any aspiration for justice and equality. Moreover, AR must convince the legitimating identities that there is no sense in client participatory dynamics that make "what about me" end up as lots of new "what about me"s, because in addition to not politicising created subjects, these

arguments do not create demos either, and at best create frustration which they then feed exclusionary identities with. However, it is also necessary to work so that progressive actors who face the status quo abandon maximalist arguments that begin with "what about us", obviating the previous need to politicize pains that in this context are seen in private terms. In both cases, there is a risk that people will be discussed but without the people: in the first case from patronage; in the second from purism.

– Consequently, it would seem that the challenge, whenever possible, is to convince the actors with power, and the disempowered, to structure autonomous interconnected participation processes which seek to politicise from the public sphere, activating those who are absent (not only the elites or the sectors who are convinced and already mobilised) to convert absences into affinity, using organisational forms in which there are "many people doing little things".
– Thus, AR faces a Herculean challenge to politicise from the periphery, from vectors that break the self, showing that loneliness, frustration, fear, inequality, sexual violence, contempt for sexual identity and skin colour are not private but public issues. It is a challenge that can turn into a wonderful, magical opportunity to see that when Cinderellas unite, they can change the story.

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# How is Action Research Being Used in Computer Science? A Review

Liliam Maria Orquiza, Laura Sánchez García and Bruno Gabriel Costelini

**Abstract:** A literature review showcasing what specialists who work and publish scientific papers, involving action research in the field of computer science, think and do. It includes the 97 most cited (ten times or more) Computer Science papers that deal with action research, published between 2010 and 2019, and retrieved from *Scopus* and *Web of Science* databases. Specialists in information systems are using action research in various research capabilities, not only in the construction of artifacts, but mainly to improve their communication capacities with users and vice versa.

**Keywords:** Action research; computer; literature review; research methods

**¿Cómo se utiliza la investigación-acción en informática? Una revisión**

**Resumen** Revisión de la literatura que muestra lo que piensan y hacen los especialistas que trabajan y publican artículos científicos relacionados con la investigación-acción en el campo de las ciencias de la computación. Incluye los 97 artículos de informática mas citados (diez veces o más) que tratan sobre investigación-acción, publicados entre 2010 y 2019, y recuperados de las bases de datos Scopus y Web of Science. Los especialistas en sistemas de información están utilizando la investigación acción en diversas capacidades de investigación, no solo en la construcción de artefactos, sino principalmente para mejorar sus capacidades de comunicación con los usuarios y viceversa.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación-acción; computadora; revisión de literatura; Métodos de búsqueda

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of a scientific paper is to enhance access to knowledge and, among all types of scientific publishing, it is the fastest formal way of sharing new discoveries of scientists and researchers. Scientific journals, in their turn, beyond fostering the publication of papers, stand also as historical records of the advances in the various fields of knowledge, ensuring a scientific memory of all completed research.

The earliest scientific journals appeared in 1665: *Philosophical Transactions* and the *Journal des Sçavans* (Banks, 2010). Now, 350 years later, *Ulrich's Periodicals Directory:* one of the largest such directories in the world, accounts for over 70 thousand refereed and peer-reviewed journals, 50 thousand of which are available online. Papers published in peer-reviewed journals are generally more respected and recognised, inasmuch as they are eval-

uated beforehand, ensuring some minimal standards of what is published, not only in form but mainly in content (Day & Gastel, 2017).

Such a high volume of journals likewise leads to thousands of papers being published simultaneously, even when one looks at a specific field of human knowledge, it is impossible to access everything that is available. This problem demands some advanced organisational, storing, retrieving and reviewing techniques to manage this mass of knowledge and information that is being produced.

We propose then a discussion of the current state of action research academic publishing, since it is widely known that this is a methodology that lends itself more to actual intervention rather than scientific publishing per se. Also, given the authors involvement with the fields of education, computer science and information technology, our challenge is to figure out how action research is being used in the field of Computer Science. We then seek to identify what are the focus, purposes and results that are being showcased in scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals, in a timeframe that reaches back over the past ten years.

Although there is no consensus on who came up with the concept of action research, "it has been developed differently for different applications" (Tripp, 2005, p. 445). According to Tripp (2005, p. 445), action research has been used as a general term for four different methodologies: diagnostic research, participant research, empirical research and experimental research. For Tripp, at the end of the 20th century, Deshler and Ewart (1995) identified six main kinds developed in different fields of application, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** – Fields and applications of action research over time

| Field and application | Precursor |
|---|---|
| In administration | Collier |
| Community development | Lewin (1946) |
| Organisational change | Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958) |
| Teaching | Corey (1949, 1953) in the late 1940 s and early 1950 s |
| Political change, conscientization and empowerment | Freire (1972, 1982) |
| In national development in agriculture soon thereafter | Fals-Borda (1985, 1991) |
| And most recently in banking, health and technology generation | via the World Bank and others such as Hart and Bond (1997) |

Source: Tripp, 2005, p. 445.

Social and human sciences have, traditionally, been the ones that started out using action research. Exact sciences, which used to be removed from it, have since incorporated its use more and more. Our research has revealed that Computer Science, in particular, has increasingly been making use of action research, focusing not only on product development, but also various other functions. We point out that action research has been used, not only in an instrumental fashion but also in a theoretical one, over the past few years, allowing for experts

to develop, each time more socially relevant, collaborative and engaging research (Hayes, 2011, p. 15).

Our concept of *action research* is grounded not only in authors who work with the methodology itself, but also in computer science authors directly involved in action research, be it in a theoretical or in a practical fashion.

*The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* defines action research as a term that "is used to describe a global family of related approaches that integrate theory and action with the goal of addressing important organisational, community and social issues together with those who experience them" (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. xxv). In an ongoing cycle of co-generative knowledge, action research allows for collaborative learning and the design, enactment and evaluation of liberating actions through combining action and reflection (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. xxv).

This definition presents the three main characteristics of action research: integration between theory and practice in an action/reflection cycle; inclusion of the subjects of the research as actors of the research themselves, turning them into co-researchers; and, as a consequence, a collective creation of knowledge. Reason and Bradbury (2008) corroborate that definition, stating that action research assumes a participatory process focused on the development of practical knowledge, mindful of human values. In the words of these authors, action research "seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4).

Authors such as Baskerville & Wood-Harper (1998), Davison, Martinsons & Kock (2004), Kock (2007), Suchman (2007), Hayes (2011), Rogers (2012), Papas, O'Keefe & Seltsikas (2012), Mathiassen, Chiasson & Germonprez (2012), Dombrowski, Harmon & Fox (2016) and Staron (2020), among others, are unanimous in pointing out the urgency of carrying out a social reflection on professional practice in the field of Computer Science.

Computer Science professionals must be aware of the social impacts of their profession, seeking to act as transformative agents of society. The issue of digital inclusion is directly linked to social inclusion, hence the need for a transdisciplinary approach when we tackle the matter, integrating Social Sciences and Computer systems, which are inherently tied to Exact Sciences logics. Bridging both fields of knowledge is essential for including technological and social aspects. And action research, as we see it, has the necessary components for the Computer Science professional to direct his practice towards making up a more just society.

Rogers (2012, p. 65–66) draws our attention to studies directed to address human values,

> getting to grips with life goals (cf. to user's goals), such as how people can pursue healthier, more meaningful and enjoyable lifestyles; and probing technology's underbelly as it becomes more insidious; including looking at how governments and organisations have become more reliant on computer technology to control society while individuals have started to use it in more criminal ways, making people worry more about what information is tracked, analysed and stored about them.

Rogers (2012) ponders that it is possible to be a participant and a researcher at the same time, collecting ethnographic materials for publishing and coming up with the theoretical construction, and at once looking to making the world a better place. The author posits there ought to be a balance between research and development, and "new theories should be viewed in the wider context of the researcher's social responsibility*"* (Rogers, 2012, p. 67).

Hayes (2011), in a paper titled *The Relationship of Action Research to Human-Computer Interaction*, posits action research is an explicitly democratic, collaborative, interdisciplinary process. For this computer science scholar "the focus when conducting AR is to create research efforts 'with' people experiencing real problems in their everyday lives not 'for', 'about', or 'focused on' them". She concludes by stating that the action research methodology "focuses on highly contextualised, localised solutions with a greater emphasis on transferability than generalisability" (Hayes, 2011, p. 17).

Staron (2020), in his book *"Action Research in Software Engineering"* highlights that, while the focus of other research methodologies is turned toward observation, learning and evaluating, action research, besides strongly considering learning, focuses more on intervention and in the context. Staron (2020, p. 16) compares action research, experiments and case studies, and concludes that action research can be dimensioned for problems larger than those of experiments, introducing "changes to its context and at the same time contribute to theory-building" (Staron, 2020, p. 16).

Rogers (2012, p. 66), again, in his book on Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), a recent field within Computer Science developed from the early 2000 s, defines action research as "one such socially responsible approach that is being promoted in HCI", for allowing it to tackle "the empirical, philosophical and moral investigation of technology", opening the way "for a different kind of value-driven agenda".

Hence, the designer's toolbox is then complemented by the implicit knowledge of people who are being impacted by the proposed changes. A project is thus built based on the interaction with the public and, just like in action research, they are furnished with resources that allow them to act in face of any current issues. Kock (2007, p. 20), furthermore, points out that researchers in the Information Systems community have started to show interest in the potential of action research as a tool for Computer Science.

The authors of the 97 papers under discussion here, who have approached action research as their main theme or as a methodology, argue that action research, as a critical approach, allows for research that seeks to improve the practice and realities where such practice takes place.

As highlighted by the authors under review, action research poses a challenge to the conventional wisdom of academia, as it proposes a critical participation which, as mentioned, engages those who might have been subjects to the research (target audiences) as co-researchers. Action research, as a manner of doing research, contradicts practices of unequal and nondemocratic political economic and social systems, challenging the statement of a positivist view of science and promoting the idea of socially built knowledge (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & Maguire, 2003), starting from a position of change *with* others (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The stages to be followed in action research draw a spiral, going through cycles of action and reflection, in a systematic manner. During the action cycles, researchers collect evidence, watch and take note of practices. During reflection cycles, everything that makes sense to the collective is registered and systematised, and from there the next actions are planned. In this way, action and reflection make up the knowledge of the whole which is built in a collaborative and representative way (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

We believe that, by describing what authors are writing, by charting and identifying tendencies, this paper may serve as a contribution to the discussions on the position of Computer Science in relation to the new fields where action research is now emerging, show

whether it is concerned with how to address multiple challenges emerging across fields committed to transformative change (Wittmayer, Bartels, & Larrea, 2021).

With this in mind, we seek to answer how the field of computer science has been making use of action research, with which purposes, goals and to what degree, by analysing a set of recent scientific papers, from the past ten years, which deal with action research in the field of computer science, seeking to find out who is publishing, where, with what focus and with which goals and results.

## 2. Methodological Procedures

The keyword "action research" was searched in two databases of scientific and technical information: *Scopus* and *Web of Science* (WoS). Through an exhaustive search in both databases, we sought to determine the reach of papers, as well as to visualise distinctive characteristics and trends in the field. As delimiting criteria, we chose to retrieve papers that were cited ten or more times, between the years of 2010 and 2019. The search strategy was the same for both databases, and can be described thus: 1 – applying the English keyword, under quotes: "*Action Research"*; 2 – In *Scopus*, searching through "*Keywords"* (which looks at keywords provided by both the author and the indexes), and on *Web of Science* searching for "*Topic"* (which allows for searching both the title and abstract, as well as the keyword provided by authors and indexes); 3 – Filtering by the following timespan: from 2010 to 2019, ten years in all; 4 – Filtering by document type: papers only; 5 – Filtering by field of knowledge: computer science; 6 – The results retrieved so far were the reordered, from top cited to less cited, excluding those with less than 10 citations; 7 – Reference date for retrieval was 7 August, 2020.

The search strategy on *Scopus* resulted in the following sentence: [KEY ("Action Research") AND DOCTYPE (ar) AND PUBYEAR >2009 AND PUBYEAR <2020 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "COMP"))].

On *Web of Science* the resulting sentence was: [TÓPICO: ("action research") / Refinado por: TIPOS DE DOCUMENTO: (ARTICLE) AND CATEGORIAS (computer science cybernetics; computer science information systems; computer science interdisciplinary applications; computer science software engineering; computer science theory methods) / Tempo estipulado: 2010–2019].

It is important to note that on *Web of Science* the field of computer science presents subcategories beyond the five mentioned above. Those five correspond to the ones that the indexing database returned results for in this time span of 10 years that was searched.

In Table 2 it is possible to verify the number of retrieved objects at each stage, in each of the databases, *Scopus* and *Web of Science*, on 7 August, 2020. The following set of papers was identified: 80 papers retrieved by *Scopus*, plus 59 retrieved by *Web of Science*, totalling 139 scientific papers.

However, when the results were compared, it turned out 31 papers appeared on both databases, reducing thus the final count to 108 papers.

**Table 2** – Quantitative Results of Action Research Review / Computer Science, on 7 August 2020, through *Scopus* and *Web of Science* Databases

| STEPS | SCOPUS | WEB OF SCIENCE |
|---|---|---|
| (1º) Search for "Action Research" on "Keywords" field (Scopus) and on "Tópico" (Web of Science) | 9.128 | 15.068 |
| (2º) Search filtered for timespan: 2010 a 2019 | 6.033 | 10.562 |
| (3º) Search filtered for material type: papers only | 4.545 | 7.943 |
| (4º) Search filtered for field of knowledge: Computer Science papers only, ordered from top cited to less cited | 281 | 176 |
| (5º) Total papers retrieved, excluding those with less than ten citation | 80 | 59 |

Source: Research data.

Following this, all papers were retrieved, downloaded, read, analysed and their metadata organised and systematised. Reading the papers allowed us to realise 11 of them did not fit our selection criteria because either they did not belong to the field of computer science, or they only made use of the "action research" keyword without really substantially dealing with the subject. Excluding those 11 papers, the final set of papers was down to 97.

Using a spreadsheet, each paper was catalogued, drawing not only the metadata, but also the following information: research problem, objectives, methodology and results/conclusions from authors. Then, each paper was categorised according to the following contexts of action research application: (1) applied to education/learning, (2) applied to health, (3) applied to businesses/enterprises, (4) action research applied in communities and (5) action research applied to the public administration (either at municipal, state or federal levels). Papers that exclusively theorised action research were gathered in a sixth category: (6) theorising action research.

The comparative analysis of the papers allowed for identifying compatibilities, convergences, as well as trends among specialists who publish papers related to action research in the field of computer science.

Following the search protocol described in Table 3 (presented below), in brief we retrieved the following numbers: 97 papers were cited ten times or more (all on them in English), involving 257 authors, representing 139 institutions from 35 countries. The 97 papers were published in 58 journals. Although the analysis was extended from 2010 to 2019, the year 2019 did not return any paper with ten or more citations.

**Table 3** – Data Retrieval and Analysis Protocol

| PROTOCOL | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **Main objective** | To analyse a set of recent scientific papers, published in the past ten years, involving action research in the field of computer science, looking to find out who is publishing, where, with what focus and with which objectives and results. |
| **Databases** | ·*Scopus.*<br>·Web of Science (WoS). |
| **Types of materials** | Peer-reviewed scientific papers only. |
| **Timespan** | Papers published between 2010 and 2019. |
| **Keyword** | "Action Research". |
| **Retrieval date** | 7 August, 2020. |
| **Exclusion criteria** | ·Papers that do not substantially engage with action research;<br>·Papers which do not belong to the field of computer science;<br>.Papers with less than ten citations in the timespan of ten years. |
| **Search fields** | ·On *Scopus: "Keywords"*.<br>·On *Web of Science (WoS)*: "Tópico". |
| **Selection procedure** | Reading through the whole paper. |
| **Cataloguing of selected papers** | Besides identifying metadata, for each paper the following summary information was gathered in a spreadsheet: research problem, objectives, methodology, results and authors' conclusions. |
| **Paper classification after reading and analysing** | Each paper was classified according to the context where action research was applied:<br>1) applied to education/learning;<br>2) applied to health issues;<br>3) applies to businesses/companies;<br>4) action research applied to communities;<br>5) action research applied to public administration; and,<br>6) theorizing on action research. |
| **Analysis procedure** | Identifying concepts, definitions of action research and their application to the field of computer science. |

Source: The authors.

# 3. Data Results and Analysis

## 3.1 Top cited papers

The paper titled *"Action Design Research"*, by authors Maung K. Sein, Ola Henfridsson, Sandeep Purao, Matti Rossi and Rikard Lindgren, published in 2011, counted at the time of this retrieval, 7 August, 2020, 753 citations on *Scopus* and 371 on *Web of Science.*

In their paper, Sein, Henfridsson, Purao, Rossi & Lindgren (2011) argue that, when it comes to design research in information technology (IT), the issue is the focus. According to those authors, IT design researchers turned themselves to artifacts, ignoring the fundamental component that is the organisational analysis in which the artifact is contained, drawing attention to the fact that every IT design project emerges from an interaction with their organisational context. To solve this problem, the authors propose *design action research* as a new research method for their field, placing the organisational intervention at the center. For the authors, a solution to this issue requires a design research method that seeks to come up with IT artifacts in an organisational context and, at the same time, to learn with the intervention by approaching a problematic situation. The design action research emphasises the influence of the relevance cycle resulting from an explicit orientation to combine the construction, intervention and evaluation of a conjoined research effort. In their paper, the authors, besides justifying the need for a new design research method, also describe their principles and stages.

Table 4 presents the top 10 cited papers, by number of citations.

**Table 4** – Number of Citations for the top ten cited Papers dealing with Action Research in the field of Computer Science. Data retrieve 7 August, 2020, via *Scopus* and *Web of Science* Databases

| PAPER | Scopus | WoS |
|---|---|---|
| Sein, M. K., Henfridsson, O., Purao, S., Rossi, M., & Lindgren, R. (2011). Action Design Research. *MIS Quarterly:* Management Information Systems, *35(1)*, 37 – 56. | 753 | 371 |
| Chatti, M. A., Dyckhoff, A. L., Schroeder, U., & Thüs, H. (2012). A reference model for learning analytics. *International Journal of Technology Enhanced Learning*, *4(*5 – 6), 318 – 331. | 273 | — |
| Sedlmair, M., Meyer, M., & Munzner, T. (2012). Design study methodology: reflections from the trenches and the stacks. *IEEE Transactions on visualization and Computer Graphics*, *18(12)*, 2431 – 2440. | — | 203 |
| Kohler, T., Fueller, J., Matzler, K. & Stieger, D. (2011). CO-creation in virtual worlds: the design of the user experience. *MIS Quarterly:* Management Information Systems, *35(3)*, 773 – 788. | 214 | 140 |
| Puhakainen, P., & Siponen, M. (2010). Improving employees' compliance through information systems security training: an action research study. *MIS Quarterly:* Management Information Systems, *34(4)*, 757 – 778. | — | 168 |
| Hayes, G. R. (2011). The relationship of action research to human-computer interaction. *ACM Transactions on Computer-Human Interaction*, *18(3)*, 15 – 20. | 191 | 98 |

| PAPER | Scopus | WoS |
|---|---|---|
| Bengtsson, F., & Agerfalk, P. J. (2011). Information technology as a change actant in sustainability innovation: insights from Uppsala. *Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 20, 96 – 112. | 122 | 60 |
| Cochrane, T. D. (2010). Exploring mobile learning success factors. *ALT-J, Research in Learning Technology*, *18(2)*, 133 – 148. | 83 | — |
| LeRouge, C., Ma, J., Sneha, S., & Tolle, K. (2013). User profiles and personas in the design and development of consumer health technologies. *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, *82(11)*, e251-e268. | — | 97 |
| Smith, S., Winchester, D., Bunker, D., & Jamieson, R. (2010). Circuits of Power. *MIS Quarterly:* Management Information Systems, *34(3)*, 463 – 486. | 77 | 43 |

Source: Research data.

We must first point out that not all the papers are indexed by both databases.

Why does Stein et al. (2011) stand out so much above all the other papers in citation numbers?

The main topic must probably be taken into account as we search as answer to this question, given Stein et al. (2011) present a valid discussion on the implications of this research method to information systems (IS), stating that action research tries to combine theory with an intervention by the researcher, seeking to connect theory to practice, and thinking to doing, in an iterative process based on refining working hypothesis through repeated cycles of investigation. On the other hand, other factors may have contributed to this large lead, for instance the exposure period of the paper ahead of others, since it was published at the beginning of the timespan of this review, 2011.

Another point that may have made a significant difference in the number of citations is the multinationality of the authors, and the great number of institutions represented. Supporting the publication of this paper are seven distinct institutions from four different countries: Norway, Sweden, United States and Finland, elevating the scope of the communication networks and, consequently, the spread of the paper.

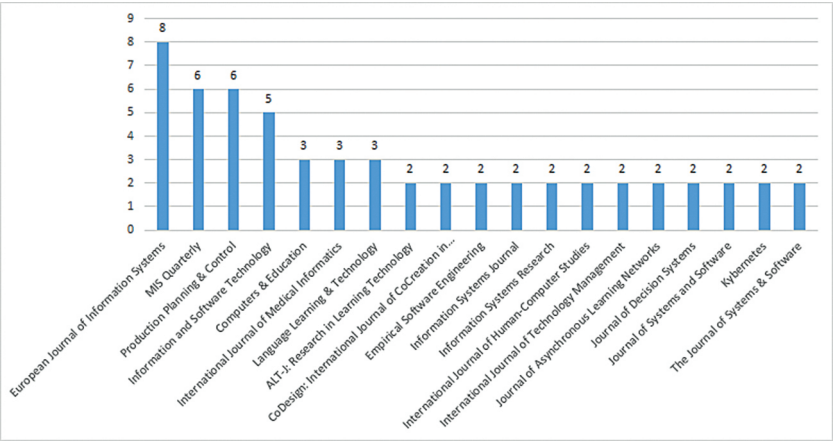
## 3.2 Top authors and journals

Our 97 papers under analysis were authored by 257 researchers. In terms of authors per paper, we identified that 25% of the papers were written by four authors. Those 97 papers with 10 or more citations, the amount of co-authored papers is much larger than those authored individually, since 79% were co-authored, and only 21% had only one author.

As to authors who have penned multiple papers involving action research in the field of computer science in the decade between 2010 and 2019, only Lars Mathiassen, from Georgia University, in the United States, wrote three papers. It turns out that of the 257 authors involved in the production of those 97 papers under discussion, only 13 others appear in two papers, which comes down to 5% of the total. The other 243 authors, 94% of the total, have produced a single paper.

19 journals that have published two papers or more (58 papers) are presented in Chart 1. 39 other journals were responsible for publishing a single paper, among those top-cited ones.

**Chart 1** – Scientific Journals by Number of Papers published involving Action Research in the field of Computer Science, retrieved from *Scopus* and *Web of Science* Databases, 7 August, 2020.




Source: Research data.

Taking into account the scientific journals that are most represented in this literature review, we identified the *European Journal of Information Systems* as top publisher in the field, with eight papers in all.

From Chart 1 it is also possible to identify a core number of scientific journals in the field of computer science responsible for a large number of papers (five or more) involving action research: *European Journal of Operational Research*; *MIS Quarterly; Production Planning and Control* and *Information and Software Technology.*

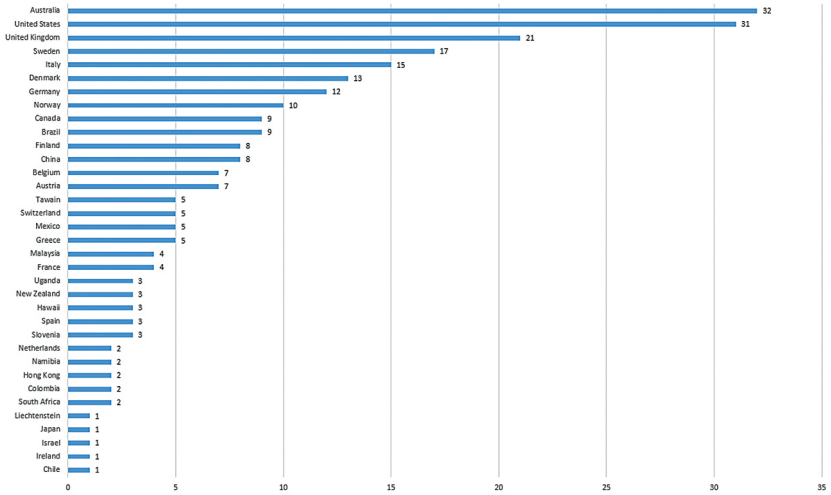
Although *MIS Quarterly* is responsible for four of the top ten most cited papers in this literature review (see Table 4), including Stein et al. (2011), the top cited one, the other three journals, *European Journal of Operational Research*, *Production Planning and Control* and *Information and Software Technology*, stand out due to their continuity and regularity in yearly publishing throughout the decade.

## 3.3 Top countries

From this set of papers under review we identified the origins of each author, coming up with 35 represented states. Australia, United States, United Kingdom, Sweden and Italy are the top countries among the 257 authors from the 97 papers under analysis. Australia and the United States, with 32 and 31 authors respectively, stand well above third place, the United Kingdom, with 21 authors. Sweden and Italy, in their turn, occupy fourth and fifth positions, with 17 and 15 authors, respectively. Three other countries, with ten or more authors are also worthy of a mention: Denmark and Germany, with 13 and 12 authors respectively, and Norway, with 10 authors total.

Brazil appears tied with Canada, both with nine authors. China and Finland are right behind, with eight authors each, right ahead of Austria and Belgium, with seven authors each. The final score for all countries can be glimpsed from the data tabulated in Chart 2.

**Chart 2** – Number of Authors per Country




Source: Research data.

Regarding the fact that the United States appears second place in our ranking, we highlight this quote by Kock (2007, p. xxi), revealing that in that country "estimates suggest that action research accounts for less than one percent of all IS research. The lion's share goes to experimental, survey, and case research".

In the preface of his book *Information Systems Action Research*, the editor draws attention to the fact that often "action research is seen as a research approach that has been originated outside the United States, that has little to do with the American research tradition, and that is largely unrelated to the development and funding of research in the United States" (Kock, 2007, p. xx). According to him, the US has a research tradition more epistemologically geared towards positivism.

Kock (2007, p. xx) states also that "in fact, in a number of disciplines (including information systems), action research finds a lot more acceptance in academic circles outside the United States than within. Some notable examples are England, Scandinavia, and Australasia".

This last statement ratifies the data we found, since our top countries come from those regions, Scandinavia, Australasia, both represented in our ranking of authors' origins, with Australia occupying the top spot.

On the other hand, Kock himself (2007, xx) notes that although "action research" was coined by a German researcher, Kurt Lewin, Lewin actually moved to the United States in 1933, after obtaining his PhD in Berlin, working for years at the University of Iowa, and then

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, becoming a pioneer of action research in that country also.

Kock (2007, p xx) in a text written at the dawn of the 21st century, states that researchers in the IS scientific community began showing more interest in the potential of action research as tool for their field, highlighting the name of Richard Baskerville, who Kock deems "perhaps the most prominent figure in the IS action research community today".

Based on Kock's statement, it is possible to infer that, in these 14 years that separate his book's release from today, clearly the use of action research within the computer science field has increased in the United States.

## 3.4 Top institutions

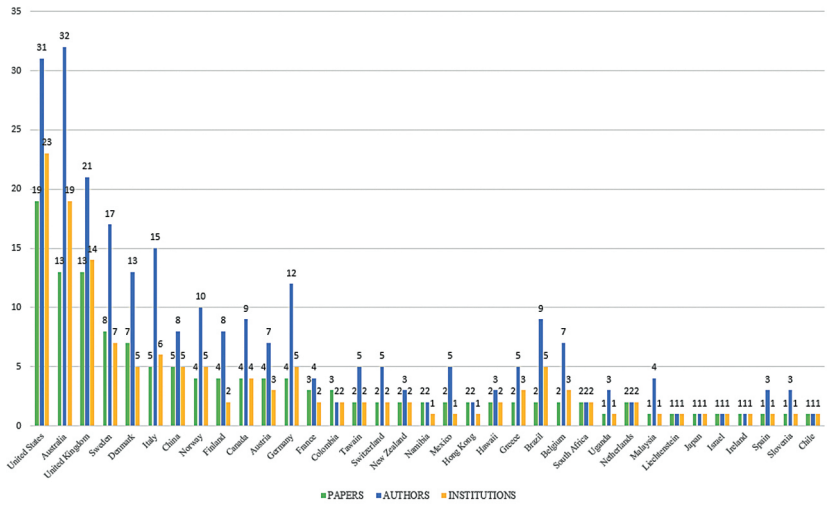
Regarding the institutions to which authors belong to, we also find some clusters of action research in the field of computer science. Of the 139 institutions authors affiliate themselves with, 14 count four or more authors, making up 10% of the total. A single institution counted seven authors, the Blekinge Institute of Technology, Sweden, across three different papers

The intersection between countries and institutions behind the action research papers in the field of computer science shows that Australia and the United States lead quantitatively, with 21 institutions each. They are followed by the United Kingdom, with 13, Sweden and Germany, both with eight, and Denmark, Italy and Norway, each with six institutions.

As is the case of the most cited paper, by Sein et al. (2011), we must point out that a single paper may be associated with authors from various countries and institutions.

Chart 3 presents cross-section between number of papers, authors, institutions and countries of origin.

**Chart 3** – Cross-Section between Number of Papers, Authors, Institutions and Countries of Origin

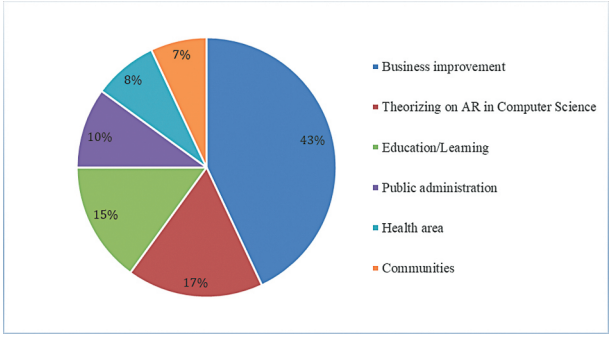



Source: Research data.

### 3.5 Paper distribution according to the applications of action research

Regarding our classification of papers according to the contexts of application of action research in computer science, results from in order of application are the following: 43% of papers used action research to improve business; 17% theorised about action research in computer science; 15% described action research being used for education/learning; 10% applied action research to public administration; 8% applied it to the health area; and 7% described action research applied to communities, as shown in Chart 4.

**Chart 4** – Share of Papers per Application




Source: Research data.

In the set of papers under review, the majority of types of application of action research are associated with improving information systems, software or processes within businesses and industry. We highlight the following topics: "co-creation experience of avatars in virtual worlds", "improving employees' compliance through information systems security training", "'IT Conflict-Resistance Theory': action research during IT pre-implementation", "adoption and implementation of lean thinking in food supply chains", "business-IT alignment and software architecture analysis techniques supporting the engineering of enterprise-wide service-oriented systems", "SPI implementation mechanisms", "risk calculations in the manufacturing technology selection process", "developing trust in virtual software development teams", "forecasting defect backlog in large streamline software development projects and its industrial evaluation", "implementation of the business, system and technology models of the Zachman framework", "eliciting user requirements using Appreciative inquiry", "knowledge management through Enterprise Content Management (ECM) platforms", among others.

Another data point worth highlighting from our set of papers is the 17% index of those emphasising a theoretical approach on the issue of action research in the field of computer science. All of these papers assume that the action research methodology, regardless of the peculiarities in procedures or denominations, is in fact an effective method for computer science professionals.

The application of action research to communities, although present in a smaller rate of 7% of papers, deserves to be highlighted as well for grasping the emancipatory role of this type of research, which assumes changes in behaviour and attitude. Social contexts assume

social actors who are embedded in environments with particular values and sociocultural habits, which must be respected when developing, utilising and/or accepting ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). Among the seven papers identified as part of this category, one deserves to be singled out, "*Altering participation through interactions and reflections in design*", by authors Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell and Blake (2012).

In his paper they relate an action research carried out in a rural community of Southern Africa, reviewing the existing concepts of participatory design to finally propose what they call "transcultural design", aiming to better serve cultural diversity. The authors mention that, in the aforementioned community, participatory practices are already deeply culturally rooted, even though they are in a technologically disadvantaged position. They then sthe indigenous rational structures, such as those of Southern Africa, "require" the comprehension that the discourse is rooted in as paradigm of complete connection of all, expressed in their saying that *a person is a person among other people*" (Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell, & Blake, 2012, p.167). This paradigm is based in a type of African philosophical tradition (Bantu), identified as Ubuntu, meaning *humanity.*

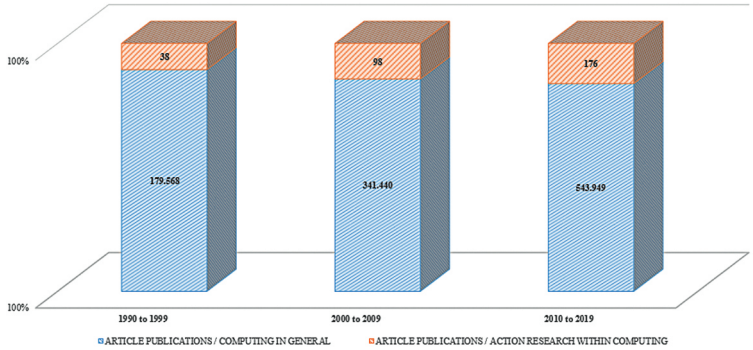
They highlight also that the main thing to understand the African view is to recognise their point of view, embedded in the collective thinking that "I am because we are; and once we are, therefore, I am […]. Thus, Ubuntu is in itself a critical discourse that builds personality through collectivism and, generally, recognises relationships with ancestors inside the collective" (Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell, & Blake, 2012, p.167).

The authors are alert that, by rigorously adhering to the set of methods of Participatory Design, one may erroneously believe that participants share a common understanding of participation, and of the roles of participants. One must however recognise the complexity of the connections, and take into consideration local values and sociocultural habits the guide interaction protocols. If such a posture is not adopted, significant underlying tensions will remain regarding relations between democracy, empowerment and participation. Democracy, they postulate, is an explicit goal in the development agenda and, with few exceptions, is associated with specific communication protocols and methods to allow local acceptance, property and domestication of ICTs (Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell, & Blake, 2012, p.167).

## 3.6 Amount of research papers on Action Research

Looking into the past three decades we are able to ratify the fact that indexed papers in the field of Computer Science using the keyword "action research" have been surging. Even if still incipient, there is a clear jump in the number of publications between the 1990 s and 2010 s, as shown in Chart 5.

**Chart 5** – Appearances of "Action Research" keyword in Computer Science papers indexed by *Web of Science:* comparison of the past three decades:




Source: Research data.

However, as identified by Avison, Davison, & Malaurent (2017, p. 1) in their paper (which is one of the 97 under review here), in the last few years the number of papers has been beneath the expectations. And just as they highlight, we are not discussing here "the relevance of action research as a research method in the information systems (IS) discipline is not disputed" (Avison, Davison, & Malaurent, 2017, p. 1), but the number of action research papers, especially when compared to the total amount of papers in Computer Science.

They suggest some myths and barriers associated with publishing action research within Computer Science, e.g.: action research is difficult to publish in leading IS journals; action research requires a lot of time and resource investment; action research is inappropriate for Ph.D. students; and, action research is considered to be less scientific than other methods.

As alternatives to help overcome those issues, Avison, Davison, & Malaurent (2017) suggest promoting action research as an appropriate approach within Information Systems, by emphasising the qualities of this methodology, highlighting that it can and must be carried out with scientific rigour, that it has "potential for theory building and testing", as well as being pertinent for graduate-level research. "Divorce from practice is not a desirable outcome in an era where the practical relevance of research is increasingly being recognised, appreciated, and indeed expected" (Avison, Davison, & Malaurent, 2017, p. 7).

## 4. Discussion and Conclusions

Regarding the number of papers published in the past ten years (2010–2019) and indexed by *Scopus* and *Web of Science*, we conclude that the production of action research in the field of Computer Science is still not expressive, but shows a growing tendency, which is rising.

The authors under review highlight that action research is being carried out in different types of investigation, not only as an aid to the construction of artifacts, but mainly to improve their communication ability with users and vice versa. The focus of action research, in-

variably, leaves the artifact behind and locks in the user and their context, hence the fact that Human-Computer Interaction appears with such strength in the papers under review.

As to the number of papers published by each author, our review identified only one author with three publications. Regarding the countries with most papers, Australia and the United States appear in a virtual tie in terms of the proportion of authors doing action research in computer science, which puts Australia in a position of a scientific hub in the field.

In the initial phase of this literature review, after identifying the databases and doing our first reading of the selected papers, we found out that some of the papers did not have enough characteristics to be classified as research action papers, even if the authors themselves used it as a keyword. This fact raises the possibility that there is still room for discussing what is and what is not considered action research in CS. Perhaps a further enquiry of those authors could reveal other understandings and point new directions and novel approaches. On the other hand, we suspect many researchers who in fact use action research methodologies may have been left behind in our searches for not evidencing their use of the term, thus losing the potential of being read by their peers.

The theories and practices related in the 97 papers under review show the broad range of possibilities for employing this method, be it in isolation or associated to other interpretative types of research methodologies. We believe that, once further reviews identify, evaluate, approximate, compare and solidify the behaviour of researchers/actors, a consistent basis will be built, in order to advance scientific knowledge and, therefore, the number of publications.

This research sought to find out how action research has been incorporated into the field of computer science. The idea was to shine a light on what is being published in terms of scientific papers in the area, looking to support better decision-making and investment in research, besides allowing for a broader view of the efforts of the scientific activity in this theme, highlighting which aspects are more or less explored.

Regarding action research in the field of computer science, theory and practices showcased in the 97 papers under review evidenced the range of possibilities in employing such a method, either by itself or associated with other methods of interpretive research. We believe that as more literature reviews continue to identify, evaluate, compare and contrast, consolidating the behavior of researchers/actors, a consistent basis will be built, contributing to the advancement of scientific knowledge. Such was our purpose in this paper.

Among the authors under review, the application of action research within communities deserves to be highlighted, as it approximates the emancipatory eyes of action research towards changing behaviours and attitudes, as pointed out earlier in this paper.

Rohde, Brödner, Stevens, Betz, & Wulf (2017, p. 166), in their paper titled "*Grounded Design – a praxeological IS research perspective*", argue that human actions and social contexts are moved by complex expectations and interpretations, making their results contingent, unpredictable and nondeterministic. They add that ITCs artifacts, such as algorithm machines are incapable of dealing with that.

Suchman (2007, p. 179), on his turn, highlights that humans make use of an ample set of "linguistic resources, nonverbal and inferential, to find intelligibility in actions and events, to make their own actions sensible and to administer issues of comprehension that inevitably come up".

The aforementioned authors highlight the fact that social contexts are not stable or fixed. Rather the opposite: social actors build and rebuild their social contexts through their own actions and social practices. (Rohde, Brödner, Stevens, Betz, & Wulf, 2017; Suchman, 2007).

In sum, social contexts assume social actors who are embedded in environments with local values and sociocultural habits, which must be respected when developing, using and/or accepting ITCs. Action research, as seen thus far, takes all of this into consideration, showing itself thus as an invaluable tool to help advancing and developing a more effective and just field within Computer Science.

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# Articulating inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development

Malida Mooken

**Abstract** This paper discusses the inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development. The discussion is framed around three dimensions: 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time; 2) contextual-temporal qualities of the process; and 3) reflecting-acting on what we have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens. The conceptualisation builds on theoretical influences, most notably the writings of John Dewey and action research for territorial development, and my own practice. Two cases are discussed. One is about a Knowledge Transfer Partnership in Scotland, and the other is with regards to on-going work in the wine-producing territory of British Columbia, Canada.

**Keywords:** action research, territorial development, inherent values, Dewey

**Una articulación de los valores inherentes de la investigación acción para quienes se aproximan a ella por primera vez desde el desarrollo territorial**

**Resumen** Este artículo debate los valores inherentes de la investigación acción para aquellas personas que se aproximan a esta forma de investigación por primera vez y desde el campo del desarrollo territorial. La discusión se plantea en torno a tres dimensiones: 1) la investigación realizada sobre situaciones problemáticas en tiempo real; 2) las cualidades contextuales-temporales del proceso y 3) la reflexión-acción sobre las razones para valorar ciertos modos de ser y de hacer de las personas investigadoras, participantes, actores facilitadores y la ciudadanía. La conceptualización está basada, además de en mi propia experiencia, en una serie de influencias teóricas, entre las que destacan John Dewey y la investigación acción para el desarrollo territorial. Se discuten, además, dos casos. Uno vinculado a la entidad denominada Knowledge Transfer Partnership en Escocia, y el otro conectado al trabajo en curso en el territorio productor de vino en la Columbia Británica, Canadá.

**Palabras claves:** Investigación acción, desarrollo territorial, valores inherentes, Dewey

## 1. Introduction

Amidst complex cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political dynamics, organisations and territories face increasing challenges, not least related to concerns like climate change, and inequalities. Universities as territorial actors with local and global knowledge capabilities are called upon to help address those challenges (Benneworth, 2013; Geschwind, Kekäle, Pinheiro, & Sorensen, 2019). This expectation of universities to meet societal needs is

not new. What has become clearer is that more collaborative and proactive approaches to research are needed.

The importance of knowledge co-creation and change through "action, co-ordination and collaboration across knowledge domains, sectors and types of organisations" is highlighted in policy and managerial circles (Geschwind et al., 2019, p.13). In responding to policy and societal demand, universities are directing more attention to the so-called third mission of societal engagement (Laredo, 2007; Uyarra, 2010; Karlsen & Larrea 2019). An implication is that university researchers are having to reimagine and reframe how they think about and approach research. To avoid a divisive approach to research, teaching and societal engagement, a balancing act of pursuing research that matters to society, in a way that is conducive to both good (and better) research, and practical outcomes, is desirable.

For many researchers, especially those who have been trained in traditional approaches, it may not be straightforward to change how they conduct research. Action research characterised by an integrative approach to action, research and participation in real-time offers meaningful perspectives in that regard. With that in mind, the paper explores the question: what are inherent values of action research that may appeal to those researchers who need to break away from hegemonic practices, and do research differently? By 'inherent values', I refer to what is valuable in and of the inquiry process itself. Inherent values are not external to the inquiry; they are at its core and define it.

Practical insights about the inherent values of action research are offered through two case presentations. One case is about a project between a university and an arts centre in Scotland, and the other concerns on-going work of a university in a wine-producing territory in Canada. Recognising that it is not possible to cover all the valuable aspects of action research in this paper, the discussion is framed around three dimensions: 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time; 2) contextual-temporal qualities of the process; and 3) reflecting, and acting on what people have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens. The framework is a result of connecting theoretical influences with my practice in the cases in the field of territorial development.

The paper is pertinent to newcomers to action research coming from the field of territorial development, where there are pressures to engage in third mission activities and deliver productive outcomes on various fronts (Aranguren, M. J., Guibert, J. M., Valdaliso, J. M., & Wilson, 2016). For example, by producing knowledge that is relevant to society and advances academic debates, *and* demonstrates the impact generated through those processes through academic reflection, writing and publications (Aranguren, Canto-Farachala & Wilson, 2021). The discussion may also resonate with researchers from other fields experiencing similar trends.

The paper is organised as follows. First, the rationale for the paper, its main focus and objective, and the interplay between first-person and second-person inquiry are articulated. Thereafter, concepts used in the case discussions, and which inform the framing of inherent values, are introduced. The two cases are subsequently introduced. Drawing on theoretical concepts and my learning from the cases, I develop the arguments about the three valuable dimensions to action research. The cases are discussed before concluding with final reflections.

## 2. Underlying rationale for the paper

Despite its widespread acceptance in certain fields, action research remains under-explored in others. In the introduction to the Special Issue of the International Journal of Action Research on Action Research, Policy and Politics, Wittmayer, Bartels & Larrea (2021) point out how action research remains at the margin of mainstream policy analysis (which still uses a "rationalist-empiricist framework"), sustainability transition research, and territorial development (which takes as its base local and regional economic development studies). A small number of researchers practice action research in those fields. Similar views have been expressed about business and management (Shani & Coghlan, 2019) and regional economic development more broadly (Larrea, Estensoro, & Sisti, 2018).

The paper is principally directed to researchers in the above-mentioned fields, encouraging them to explore action research. Those in territorial development might especially relate to the discussion, as explicit references are made to existing literature, especially action research for territorial development, and as mentioned earlier, the two cases in this paper relate to that field.

Action research is predominantly discussed in terms of producing actionable knowledge and social transformation. Much less is written about the inherent values of the process of inquiry itself. However, as observed by Eikeland (2007), mainstream researchers are not typically interested in changing things. A question that arises is: why would researchers, whose primary concern may not be to create change, say to a particular context, adopt action research? Arguments about enhancing the research process: its quality, including what and how we know, can be spelled out for those who are beginning to explore action research, and are still indecisive about it. This is why the paper focuses on providing insights about the inherent values of action research. In doing so, the paper contributes to making "research-intrinsic arguments" about action research more explicit (Eikeland, 2007, p.50).

In writing the discussion, I weave in accounts of first-person, and second-person inquiry. This interplay allows me to express my own voice, and to balance it with perspectives developed with participants. This reflects my actual practice of action research, where both first-person and second-person inquiry play a critical part.

First-person inquiry involves developing the capabilities to be aware of one's own thoughts, emotions, actions, and impact in and on the process, and continuously asking ourselves while acting and post-acting: what is really going on (Larrea, 2020). Experience, acting responsibly, and understanding how one comes to know and forms judgment, are central to this process of self-inquiry (Coghlan & Shani, 2021). Second-person inquiry begins with "interpersonal dialogue and includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning organizations" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.xxvi). This typically takes place in small groups, composed of researchers and collaborators inquiring on common areas of concern, and sharing their experience, understanding, inter-subjectivities and possible courses of action (Coghlan & Shahani, 2021).

## 3. Conceptual Discussion

Across its various strands, action research is well-known for being value-oriented, socially-engaged, action-oriented, context-sensitive, dialogical, participatory, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary (Elden & Levin, 1991; Greenwood & Levin, 2001; Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003; Olsen & Lindøe, 2004; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Coghlan, 2016). In this section, I focus on specific concepts that are relevant to understanding the subsequent arguments around three valuables aspects of action research, and the case discussions.

I introduce key concepts from the writings of John Dewey that inspired my reflections about the inherent values of inquiry. His work on approaching questions of knowledge from a practical perspective resonated with me when I was explicitly looking to find answers about how I could do relevant and rigorous research in the context of the first case: the project between a university and an arts centre in Scotland.

Then, I address key notions from contemporary action research literature in the field of territorial development, which are useful to understand the inquiry process in the context of the wine-producing territory of British Columbia.

### 3.1 Influence of John Dewey

John Dewey, one of the founders of the philosophical pragmatist tradition, is an important inspiration for action research (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). His theory of inquiry is especially relevant. Dewey is concerned with the practical consequences of action (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). Tied in to that concern is an appreciation of what other people know and what people learn through experience (Randall, 1953). In that sense, knowledge is gained through lived experience, and reflective activity (Hickman & Alexander, 2009). An appreciation of inquiry through these notions led me to better engage with others and what they know, and to reflect and learn concurrently from my own lived experience through self-inquiry. This practice has in turn shaped my thinking about the inherent values of action research, and is linked to the earlier discussion on first-person and second-person inquiry.

As written by Geiger (1958, p.63), "the situation in which knowledge is born, according to Dewey, is a problematic one". A **problematic situation** is indeterminate, uncertain, doubtful, and obscure (Dewey, 1938). It poses difficulty, and though one knows that *something* has to be done, it is not clear: "what sort of action the situation demands" or "how the situation should be dealt with" (ibid., p.161). Out of this unsettled situation grows the question that has to be answered, and thus inquiry begins.

Dewey rejects dualism, for example of object and subject, mind and matter, man and nature, individuals and the social world, action and thought. In his view, there should be a "wider and freer range in inquiry" that is not constrained by a predetermined fixed "framework of reference" set by external forces (1947, p. 381). There is a rejection of the hierarchical division between theory and practice, that typically characterises mainstream academic work, wherein theory is considered the highest form of knowledge. Theory and action are deemed

inseparable. In action research, such concerns are reflected through concepts like praxis (Freire, 1996; Eikeland, 2012), and reflection-in-action (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014).

Central to Dewey's philosophical approach is the transaction between living organisms and their environment through which knowledge is constructed. Our environments impact us. Our beings and doings also have an impact on our environments, and we in turn undergo the consequences in the process of inter-action. There is a transactional process, which is relational and temporal involving adaptation and continuous readjustment over time. Linking this to research more explicitly, in the "act of knowing: and hence in research, both the knower and what is to be known are changed by the transaction between them" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p.12).

Understanding inquiry in terms of a transactional process, highlights its **contextual and temporal qualities.** Consider the following: the "'settlement' of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion will always remain settled [. . .] the criterion of what is taken to be settled, or to be knowledge, is being so settled that it is available as a resource in further inquiry; not being settled in such a way as not to be subject to revision in further inquiry" (Dewey 1938, p. 8–9). Inquiry is contextual, and yet there is some sort of continuity that transcends situations in our process of thinking, action, and transformation.

**Values** "assumes an ineludible explicit character" in action research (Streck, 2018, p.9). For Dewey, no inquiry is value-neutral (Ralston, 2010). Values, which give enriched meaning to choices, behaviours, and actions become more explicit through the transactional process of inquiry. When faced with a doubtful or an unsettled situation, reflection and action are triggered by the environing conditions, and what people have reason to value being and doing in that context.

The significance of "problematic situation", "contextual and temporal qualities", and "values" have been introduced and positioned within a broader discussion of inquiry. Key takeaways are: the need to understand a problematic situation contextually and temporally, and allowing an inquiry to unfold without imposing pre-determined fixed frameworks that constrain reflective activity about what people, including action researchers, have reason to value being and doing, and the resulting transformation.

The concepts set the foundation for discussing the inherent values of action research in territorial development, and the cases. They do not exist in silos, but are rooted in a rich conceptualisation that knowledge is generated through a process of lived experience and reflective activity.

## 3.2 Action research for territorial development (ARTD)

The other significant influence in conceiving the inherent values is action research for territorial development (ARTD; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). In ARTD, action researchers combine knowledge in regional and local economic development with action research (Larrea, 2019), and emphasise the joint participation of researchers and other actors in territorial development. Unlike other approaches in territorial development, ARTD shows the value of reflecting on the role of action researchers, and changes that occur within researchers, other participants and the overall process. This provides a reference point for undertaking a different approach, in

contrast to mainstream ones, when thinking about and doing research in the context of territorial development.

For the purpose of the discussion in this paper, I focus on four inter-related notions of ARTD: co-generation, conflict as natural, collective knowing, and action researchers as facilitative actors for territorial development. As co-generators, action researchers in territorial development are privy to the unfolding process, including issues like decision-making, conflict, and consensus in real-time, not only as observers, but also as participants and facilitative actors (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014, 2018). As facilitative actors, researchers generate the conditions for dialogue, reflection and action (Larrea, 2019). They also facilitate questioning, which helps to get to the source and definition of problems. Long-term collective knowing is also developed in the territory, i.e. "a capability, a learned pattern of collective action, where the actors systematically modify their actions over time through a dialogue and learning process" (Arrona & Larrea, 2018, p. 139).

Conflicts and differences between action researchers and other territorial actors, arising from "different values, experiences, interests, resources and approaches to a given situation" are normalised as they enrich the discussion and outcomes (Larrea, 2019). This is a rarely discussed aspect to territorial development and action research. Writings about research processes often tend to present a more sanitised version, concealing the realities/complexities involved.

ARTD supported my conceptualisation of inherent values of action research by reinforcing: 1) the importance of being aware of my own change process through the transactional nature of inquiry; 2) the need to make these changes explicit so that the quality of the inquiry process, including what we do as researchers, facilitative actors, and co-generators of knowledge can be improved.

Embracing the notion that action researchers are not outsiders or third parties and that they have a role as stakeholders in territorial development processes (Larrea, 2019) helped in positioning the work that I undertake with colleagues in the case of the wine-producing territory in British Columbia (Pesme, Sugden, Mooken, Valania & Buschert, 2021). It informed reflections on what I had reason to value being and doing as an academic, but also as someone working/living in the territory.

## 4. Presentation of the two cases

Two cases through which I developed a core appreciation of the value of action research are introduced here. Together, they provide insights about my journey with action research, including adjustments and learnings. They also set the context for the subsequent discussion on the inherent values of action research that justify its adoption for inquiries in territorial development.

The first case is related to when I first started exploring action research for an inquiry in real-time. It is about a Knowledge Transfer Partnership project, and it is in this context that key notions about inquiry first emerged. The second case reflects current practice, and is about ongoing work with actors in the wine-producing territory of British Columbia in Canada.

## 4.1 The Knowledge Transfer Partnership with an arts centre

Established in 1975, the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) is a UK-wide programme supported by the government. The programme supports a partnership formed between a company and a university/research institution, to address challenges that the company faces, and to drive innovation through the transfer of knowledge, technology and skills. Often what is "transferred" is "knowledge about how to find a solution or approach a problem rather than the solution itself" (Howlett, 2010, p.11). To do so, the partnership recruits an associate — a graduate or postgraduate to manage the project over a fixed period of time.

In 2009, the University of Stirling and an arts centre in Scotland formed a KTP. For both partners, an underlying motivation was to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to co-generate knowledge. The arts centre was particularly concerned with demonstrating the value of its activities to funders. For the university, the KTP was an opportunity to study socio-economic issues in practice and contribute to positive impact through real-time participation with other actors (the arts centre, policy-makers, professionals in the arts, and the wider community) in the territory.

The inspiration for developing an approach to inquiry in real-time and towards co-generating knowledge was action research. Though at the time, we had limited understanding of how to develop it in practice.

### Aim of the KTP, and my role

The specific aim was to enable the arts centre to assess and articulate the socio-economic impact of its activities. The university and the arts centre agreed that the KTP would focus on a newly developed and funded socio-cultural project.

The arts centre received funding from the national arts council, to run a project with the objective of inspiring young people aged twelve to seventeen years old to realise their creative potential through their engagement in the arts. Young people participated in the decision-making process of developing and delivering a multi-arts festival, through three core groups: advisory, programming and marketing.

Over a period of twenty months, I worked as the KTP Associate whilst undertaking my doctoral studies. I developed an action-oriented inquiry, enabling the arts centre to foster and embed capabilities for evaluating its socio-economic impact. As a KTP associate, I was not subject to day-to-day company tasks and pressures, and could adopt a broader critical perspective to help identify and address endemic problems in the organisation. Concomitantly with observing, listening, discussing, and reviewing documentation, I engaged with various literature to help shape analytical perspectives and foci.

## 4.2 The wine-producing territory of British Columbia

The wine sector significantly impacts the development of British Columbia (BC), a province in Western Canada. This is perhaps most felt and visible in the Okanagan Valley, where an overwhelming majority of vineyards and wineries are located. The valley has a history of fruit farming as the region was settled over 100 years ago, and the recent growth of the wine industry contributes to the on-going transformation of the territory (Sugden & Sugden, 2019;

Pesme et al., 2021). The wine industry has been hailed for its economic contribution, most notably through the generation of employment and tourism-related revenues. However, there are particular concerns about how, alongside other land developments, the wine sector is affecting the eco-system (Poitras & Getz, 2006; Wagner, 2008). These have serious implications for all those who live in the territory, and more especially indigenous people.

A group at the Okanagan campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC) has been actively engaging with winery owners, grape growers, industry organisations, and policy-makers, to understand the needs, interests, and development of the wine-producing territory, since 2012. Their work focuses on supporting the wine industry to enhance its competitiveness, and critically understanding the wider impact on territorial development.

### A particular focus of UBC's engagement and my role

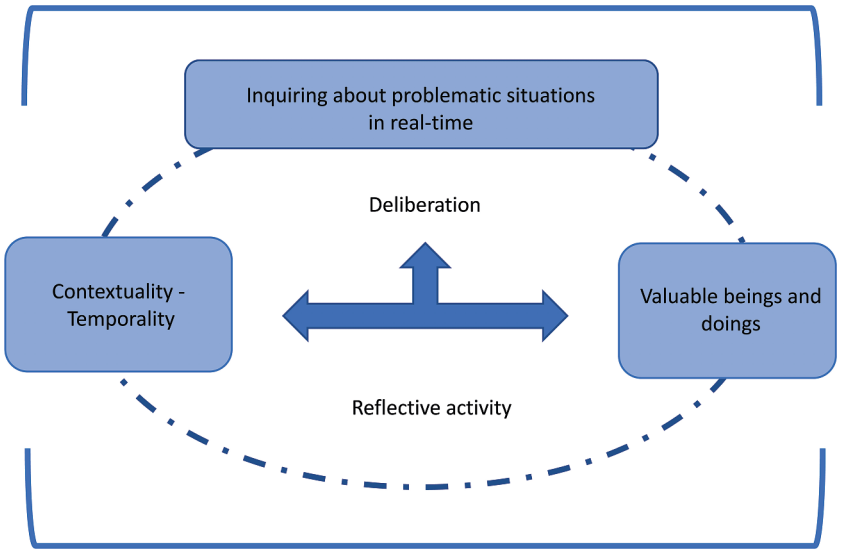
At the early stages of engaging with the industry, observations about tensions and lack of collaboration in the industry, and between the industry and university, led to the idea of creating safe spaces for discussion. In 2014, the UBC group started to organise and facilitate an annual Wine Leaders Forum, a retreat-style space, where various winery owners congregate to identify and address their strategic concerns. Various workshops across the province are also organised to ensure inclusion of diverse voices, and to address specific concerns, for example around the identity of the wine-producing territory and strategic investments in research and development (Pesme et al., 2021; Pesme, Mooken, Valania & Sugden, 2020).

In November 2015, I joined UBC as a postdoctoral research fellow, working alongside four other core members of the group engaging with the wine industry. An explicit role that I took on is to foster an action-oriented approach to inquiry, stimulating reflections, and contributing to the creation of conducive spaces for dialogue among various actors in the wine industry and the wider territory.

## 5. Inherent values of action research in the context of territorial development

This section is guided by the introductory question: what are inherent values of action research that may appeal to researchers who want to challenge hegemonic practices and do research differently? The resulting framework, depicted in Figure 1, is based on the concepts of problematic situation, contextuality-temporality, and values, and my action research practice in the two cases. The case discussions in Section 6 reflect this combination of theoretical knowledge and practice.

Figure 1: A framework for inherent values of action research in territorial development




## 5.1 Inquiring about problematic situations in real-time

A valuable aspect of action research in territorial development is that we learn and analyse problematic situations in real-time. There might be many contributing factors to a problematic situation, or more than one problem and solution. Hence, certain operations in an inquiry are crucial to determine the problems and related solutions, and to identify which ones to focus on at a particular point in time. Observations, deliberation, and reflection in real-time contribute to determining the conditions that constitute a problematic situation. This is in sharp contrast to mainstream research approaches that pre-determine what the problem is, and start with applying prescriptive solutions.

It is important to first understand a problematic situation. Why? How a problematic situation is determined sets the course of inquiry: "what specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected and which rejected", determining the "relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures" (Hickman & Alexander, 2009, p.173). Action taken during inquiry to seek and find answers in relation to the problematic situation alters the situation itself.

Inquiry involves directed activity, and "doing something which varies the conditions under which objects are observed and directly had and by instituting new arrangements among them. Things perceived suggest to us (originally just evoke or stimulate) certain ways of responding to them, of treating them" (Dewey, 1929, p.123). A problematic situation is settled through justified changes as a consequence of inquiry. We shape our reasoning, understanding, and how the problematic situation is resolved through a process, where "theoretical knowledge and concrete practical application reciprocally support each other" (Dewey, 2012, p.284).

## 5.2 Contextual-temporal qualities of the process

We know of the grand challenges facing societies at large, but these can play out in particular ways in different contexts and times. Local environing conditions may vary, and depending on a number of factors such as habits, values, resources, policies, and capabilities, people may respond differently to a problem. In understanding and transforming a problematic situation, it is important to situate knowledge in that particular context, and inquire with those who experience the problem, and are most affected by it.

However, the "'settlement of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion will always remain settled" (Dewey 1938, p. 8–9). Conclusions drawn from an inquiry are not finite; over time they may be further tested, reaffirmed, deepened, revised, or lead to other inquiries in the same context (at a different point in time) or in other contexts (Tiles, 1988). Although knowledge is contextual and each problematic situation requires particular actions for its resolution at a given point in time, there are learnings that stay and are shared, which may be used subsequently.

Inquiry and the transformation of a problematic situation is thus temporal. The past, present and future are connected, contextualizing values, actions, and development paths.

## 5.3 Reflecting, and acting on what we have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens.

In conducting an inquiry, values matter: implicitly or explicitly. They have an effect on our choices and judgments in the inquiry. At the core of an action research process is the practice of democratic participation in response to socially problematic situations (Fricke, 2018). This implies valuing the conduct of research *with* people, rather than treating them as objects or subjects of study. Nevertheless, scientific-technical approaches to action research tend to ignore value orientations and questions of meaning and purpose (Maurer and Githens, 2010).

I argue that values need to be spelled out, and also the underlying reasoning. For example: What are the valuable reasons that we have to do an inquiry? What really matters to us and others in the process? Who are our co-inquirers or collaborators, and what do they value in the process? What are the roles and responsibilities that we have, and why? What sort of relational dynamics exist or are we working towards? What are we aiming for, in terms of change, and why?

I use the phrase "have reason to value being and doing", borrowed from Amartya Sen, and in line with Dewey's philosophy, to indicate that values are formed and expressed through a dynamic process, rooted in reasoning, deliberation and judgments.[1] In this process, different viewpoints are tolerated, and learning with others is valued (Sen, 2006).

Certain values become more explicit during the transactional process of inquiry. When faced with a doubtful or an unsettled situation, reflections are triggered, not only about the external environing conditions, but also about what we have reason to value being and doing as researchers, participants, citizens, etc. This often happens when there is tension or conflict, for example about what action to take, within ourselves and with others. In those situations, what we have reason to value tend to surface and help to ground decisions and actions.

1 'Have reason to value being and doing' is used by Amartya Sen and others in the context of studies on human development and the capability approach.

The case discussions below highlight the pertinence of these three dimensions of inherent values.

## 6. Case discussions

The cases show how inquiries rooted in action research can be inherently valuable in situations, characterised by territorial complexity where there are uncertainty and interdependency with no one having the sole power or resources to direct others and solve challenges (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). There are insights about why the adoption of action research in these cases of territorial development is justified.

### 6.1 Inquiry in the Knowledge Transfer Partnership

The starting point for the inquiry was to investigate what the young people aspired to, and how the project might enable them to realise those aspirations. However, the situation was problematic. There were no initiatives from the project management team to find out what the young people might aspire to, or how they might be enabled to explore, and realise their "creative potential and ambition" (which was the core aim of the socio-cultural project). Interacting with the participants in real-time and being part of the context, I felt growing tension within the environment. The precise source for those tensions was initially unclear.

To understand what was problematic, I had more regular interactions with participants. I spent about two to three days every week in organisational meetings, which lasted for two to three hours at the arts centre. For occasional workshops or artistic events, I spent half a day or a full day with participants. I initiated one-to-one dialogues with the young people, listening to them, and encouraging reflective activity. I observed them developing new experiences — attending and discussing artistic performances, participating in meetings and workshops, overcoming conflicts, and interacting with mentors working in the Scottish creative industries. Below are examples of what the young people expressed when I asked about their aspirations.

"Well, see I don't know, I'd quite like to do something that's quite interesting, you know, something…like, not necessarily as a job but, at some point, be part of something that most people wouldn't be part of, I'm not really sure what that was, what it could be."

"I am about to start a higher national certificate in illustration…I just hope to go with the flow really. I've been to a lot of festivals in Greece and Italy and I just thought it would be interesting to see how they manage to make them all work actually … to get behind the scenes view really."

As the inquiry evolved, new questions emerged. The focus moved from what the young people aspired to as a career, to include other questions. What were their broader life aspirations? Do they all have developed capacities to aspire? Were there real opportunities for them to do and be what they have reasons to value through the project and beyond? Those questions arose through the interplay of theory and practice, and helped calibrate the course of the inquiry, so that it was more aligned with the contextual and temporal realities.

Interestingly, whilst the focus was on the young people, issues with the project management team also surfaced. Those issues related to their own career aspirations, group

dynamics, and organisational pressures/constraints, which contributed to the problematic situation. The narrative that unfolded showed that their experience in the project, including their respective action-thinking, had an effect on each other, and on their beings and doings. In the process of inquiry, they were growing more aware of the consequences of their actions. Consider the following from a member of the project management team:

"My creativity has suffered, I have done things that I wouldn't have done elsewhere. And that's one of the reasons I got annoyed, no not annoyed but defensive when you asked me about outreach [and its aims in terms of] quality vs. quantity [of the activities and], in-depth impact vs. wider impact. The questions you asked then, I would have asked myself these but in this environment, I overlooked them."

The above indicated that there might be deeper issues with the organisation that in turn affected the overall process of engaging with the young people. Other members of the management team expressed related concerns. For example:

"Like anything in the project, you come with a good idea, you say it and they [senior management] go, oh that sounds great and nothing is ever actioned on it."

In retrospect, I realise that there was a relational aspect to the inquiry based on trust, dialogue, and respect that allowed sensitive insights to be shared.

There are three key points that I retained from the inquiry. A balance needs to be struck between: not having the inquiry "so controlled by a conceptual framework fixed in advance that the very things which are genuinely decisive in the problem in hand and its solution, are completely overlooked", and carrying out endless observations that create more confusion and does not allow the inquiry to progress (Dewey, 1938, p.70). Initially, we focused the question of aspirations on career aspirations, and we had not considered that the young people may not have well-defined career aspirations, or had other life aspirations. This was a misguided approach. Problems and inquiries are context-bound. Research questions and concepts are more precise when determined in real-time with others. In this case, new understanding was uncovered, for example through the exploration of notions such as the *capacity to aspire* (Appadurai, 2004), and considering aspirations in a more holistic way.

Essentially, we had to change how we approached research. We had to open up our perspectives, and understand the motivations and realities of the people actually involved in the project. By determining the problem in real time with those concerned, the narrative unfolds during the process of inquiry "where data shift as a consequence of intervention and where it is not possible to predict or to control what takes place" (Coghlan 2011, p.54). The focus is on real issues taking place in the context, rather than concerns such as filling a gap in the literature. More nuanced contextual and temporal perspectives are revealed.

Reflecting on my role and responsibilities as an academic researcher and KTP associate, what I had reason to value being and doing, and the substance of, and limits to my participation was central to developing the inquiry. Reflections were in part triggered by the lived experience, and comments from university colleagues about whether I was not afraid that I will "contaminate the data". I could not take for granted that everyone understood or remembered what I was doing through the inquiry. It is useful to provide clarifications throughout the process, and an understanding of the inherent values of action research can help position ourselves and the collaborative work.

## 6.2 Inquiry in the wine-producing territory of BC

When the UBC group started to inquire, by visiting wineries, speaking to industry actors, and reviewing documentation, one thing stood out: the lack of territorial cohesion, where actors in a defined geographical area share a set of practices, strategies and institutions, and draw on common quality standards and values that contribute to greater coordination and a strong identity (Pesme et al., 2021). This problematic situation was linked to high industry fragmentation, significant geographical distance between regions in the province, and significant mistrust from various wineries in industry associations (Hira & Bwenge 2011; Cartier, 2014).

The creation of safe spaces became central to providing the conditions for industry actors and others to understand problematic situations, build trust, learn collectively, express themselves openly, and address issues of common interest. Conflicts and consensus are made explicit through dialogue, sometimes across spaces and time. This accords with the notions of contextuality-and temporality in inquiry. Knowledge that is settled is available as a resource in further inquiry; it is not settled in such a way as not to be subject to discussion and revision in further inquiry. Below is an overview of key spaces/activities led/facilitated by the group at UBC:

**Wine Leaders Forum (WLF):** British Columbia winery owners, principals, and other stakeholders participate in a retreat-style setting, to reflect, strategize and set agendas to address strategic challenges facing the wine territory, since 2014.

**Task force on Labelling and Presentation:** Set up in November 2015. The task force engaged with industry stakeholders to provide recommendations about wine labelling and label architecture. Findings were used for discussion with policy-makers about desirable regulatory changes.

**Identity Workshops:** Participatory workshops with wine industry actors, in different locations in BC in 2017 and 2018. A short film, two complementary reports, and a peer-reviewed article were produced to disseminate the work on the identity of the BC wine territory.

**Exhibition & public talks:** An eight-month exhibition, and public talks held across BC in 2017 to encourage dialogue about the development of the wine industry and its impact on the territory. The exhibition was displayed in seven wineries across the territory, in a regional library, and a museum.

**Survey & Workshops with the BC Wine Grape Council:** Guiding strategic decision-making on R&D investments in the BC wine and grape industry between July 2019 and November 2020 through a survey, series of workshops and reports.

In the first Wine Leaders Forum (WLF), industry actors and academic researchers identified identity, quality and collaboration as strategic to the development of the wine industry. That discussion, together with initial visits in the territory informed our understanding of the problematic situation in the territory. As mentioned before, it is important to situate knowledge in a particular context, and inquire with those who experience the problem. By inquiring with people in the context of the BC wine territory, we had a deeper appreciation of what was going on, and the local environing conditions. The participants are not considered simply as sources of data, but as people who have particular knowledge and understanding, and who can address issues that affect their lives. They are co-generators of knowledge, not objects or

subjects of research, in the process of inquiry. A participant who has attended the WLF expressed the following:

"This is the fifth one [WLF] that I have attended, and I remember the early ones where we said that issue will never be resolved . . . We have actually addressed that issue and there is real action and change that came out of it. So, I believe in the process. It's exciting, it's essential."

The interactions that took place over the years through these spaces and activities have helped us and industry actors to learn about each other, and get a better appreciation of what each has reason to value being and doing. The long-term engagement in the BC wine-producing territory has revealed more nuanced perspectives of the social, economic, political and environmental issues in the territory.

Inquiring over a long period of time provides a temporal quality, which enhances understanding of the territory and collective knowing in a consistent, and timely manner. The relational dynamic between the wine industry and university has enabled the sharing of critical perspectives on complex issues like working conditions in the industry, and debates about the use of carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic substances for pest and disease control in many wine regions of the world. Such issues are addressed in the spirit of open inquiry, based on sensitivity to the quality of the situation, and reasoning.

The basis for the inquiry is not to collect data per se, but to educate, co-generate knowledge and action, and help transform problematic situations. This ties in to the discussion of ARTD on action researchers having different roles, for example, acting as facilitative actors for territorial development, and co-generators of knowledge. Building on the conceptualisation of Karlsen & Larrea (2014), we have been more explicit in situating our engagement at the intersection of action research and territorial development (Pesme et al., 2021).

We approach questions of knowledge from a practical perspective — connecting theory-practice, knowing-action. Co-generative knowledge processes are developed in which experience, reflection, knowing, and action are inter-connected (Greenwood, 2007; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). This sort of processes has been central to building collective capabilities that help to identify and resolve complex problematic situations, and in developing appropriate methods and concepts. For example, industry actors mostly associated identity with branding, and territorial reputation. They used terms such as "supernatural BC" and "pristine". In the identity workshops, we introduced conceptual ideas relating to terroir and territorial cohesion, and encouraged industry actors to identify and value commonalities and differences, and coalesce around shared interests and challenges. The deliberation has led to the emergence of a more meaningful narrative, reflecting the systematic interaction between natural and human factors.

Participants also shared that a limited percentage of people in the East of Canada know about the valley, and that a lot of time and money is required to share the story of the various wine regions in BC, and the territory as a whole. In their view, the diversity of the narrative gets diluted when it comes from a top-down approach, and there should be different entities telling the story rather than one governing body.

Overall a multi-dimensional perspective of identity, which industry actors can draw on in developing strategies for their businesses and the industry, was co-generated. From our perspective, participating in this process enabled us to gain a better appreciation of how certain factors play out in practice, shaping our conceptualisation of identity, and how to engage an industry on such issues. Being able to bring enhanced awareness of the "human"

and the "socio-economic" aspects of territorial identity in ways that were not obvious in the industry before is also valuable. It may trigger continuous reflection amongst industry actors on what they are doing and how in the territory.

Initially, the UBC group described the 'safe spaces' as being neutral. This was probably phrased in response to conflicts that prevailed within the wine industry, and to indicate that the university would not take sides. According to conventional research approaches, researchers are supposed to be neutral, and values should not influence the process of inquiry. I was uncomfortable with the use of the term "neutral". It did not accurately reflect our positions. My thinking on the matter was shaped by my experience in the KTP, observations of interactions between UBC and industry actors, and writings in the ARTD literature.

Citing Freire (2008), "we cannot study the world without engagement as if suddenly, mysteriously, we had nothing to do with it" (Karlsen and Larrea, 2014, p.158). Every choice made in an inquiry (starting from why we do it, to choosing a method and concepts, and interpreting findings) is intrinsically linked to what we have reason to value. We make value judgments informed by observations, reasoning, and analytical reflection. Accordingly, we influence the process. This is done in ways that are congruent with what we have reason to value, shaped by our worldviews, and experience (including feelings).

We now refrain from using the word "neutral", and are more explicit in explaining our positions, and why we are engaging with the wine industry in BC. Our concern is fundamentally rooted in educational values: providing opportunities for territorial actors to learn, deliberate, and act on shared interests without being controlled by the agenda of dominant groups. Also, as mentioned earlier, the wine industry is an integral part of the province, and its impact on the development of the university's host territory is of interest to us. We are exploring ways to include non-industry actors more systematically in discussions about territorial impact.

## 7. Concluding reflections: the journey ahead

A fundamental reason for embracing action research is its inherent values: what it brings to the research process itself. I have addressed the question of inherent values conceptually and by providing practical illustrations through two cases in territorial development. Insights about my journey with action research, and how it is valuable in 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time, 2) understanding contextual-temporal qualities of the process, and 3) reflecting, and acting on what I have reasons to value being and doing are shared. The framework and learnings from the cases may not be applicable to all action research projects but I hope they stimulate others to realise and further discuss the inherent values of action research.

In earlier work, I put much emphasis on *pursuing the spirit of the truth* (Mooken and Sugden, 2014). Whilst it remains central to my approach, it is not the end purpose of why I inquire with others. Through a better appreciation of action research, and reflection about what I value as a person: not separating who I am from what I do, I am now more conscious and explicit about seeking to contribute to transformative action in society.

Although features of action research were discussed with participants in the two cases, none of them was formally set up as action research projects. In part, this is because action research remains marginalised in certain disciplines, and many researchers are not familiar with its diverse approaches. Much work remains to be done within the academic community to educate about action research, cutting across disciplinary boundaries. One of the things that I look forward to is including action research in the courses that I coordinate and teach in a Master of Management programme at UBC, and developing action research projects wherein students and faculty can engage with practitioners, and wider communities to address problematic situations in real-time.

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Book Review

# Surveil and Control: A critical review of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism"

Jan J. Zygmuntowski

*The most profound technologies are those that disappear.*
*They weave themselves into the fabric of everyday life*
*until they are indistinguishable from it.*
Weiser, 1991
*When the whole of society is reduced to the factory,*
*the factory — as such — appears to disappear.*
Tronti, 1962

*Surveillance capitalism* has taken popular imagination by storm, and the scholarly world quickly followed. It is the *nom du jour* if one attempts to briefly describe the current regime of datafication for profit, and the power-hungry technology companies which increasingly dominate markets and societies. It serves as the intellectual backbone of Netflix's *The Social Dilemma,* and that one necessary critical reference in articles across disciplines. But having read Shoshanna Zuboff's "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism", I suspect the concept has taken a life of its own, reinterpreted, expanded beyond Zuboff's account of behavioural manipulation industry. It is a sign of a great *oeuvre* and a dazzling artist, but much less of critical accuracy.

A long-time student of managers and firms, Zuboff adopts a functionalist, positivist lens to portray the rise of a new mode of accumulation. Her narrative draws heavily from the companies' own accounts, dozens of interviews with data scientists and other accessible materials on business development. With a far from apologetic stance, the Harvard Business School professor openly admits the failings of neoliberal dogma and draws from intellectual traditions of heterodox schools. Hayek, Friedman and Jensen receive no mercy when Zuboff unpacks their political economy as in fact stripping people of agency and subduing them to the market. Instead, the book is rich with Polanyi's "fictitious commodities" and "double movement", Marx-inspired "behavioral surplus" and Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession".

Big Tech's "coup from above" (p. 463) is one of the book's excellent metaphors, clearly pointing to the stakes of the conflict *en large:* the loss of human sovereignty, a precondition for collective action and social order. Zuboff warns of this danger to democracy and free will, and the alarm has since rung true, be it in the case of algorithmically amplified genocide in Myanmar, or people unable to take sound decisions thanks to COVID-19 vaccine disinformation. The book reads essentially as a manifesto of uncertainty-as-liberty, human unpredictability and possibility of other futures, although a viable proposal of *the* better future is missing from this picture. "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" employs Arendt's ideas on free will to battle the impossible vision of perfect information and full rationality, now powering the fanaticism of fully automated smart contracts.

In creating such a feeling of urgency and unmasking (mostly American) techno-financial elites Zuboff has been successful, maybe even vital for the recent regulatory efforts such as European Union's Digital Services package. Going further from here, however, will require overriding the critique of surveillance alone, starting with understanding of the complex set of social antagonisms bred by recent developments of cognitive capitalism. In search for a coherent theory of the existing digital economy of the XXI century, we need to explore the problems that "surveillance capitalism" is in fact riddled with.

The review mirrors the book's structure, which is divided in three parts: the origin of online surveillance, expansion to real-world spaces, and transformation into a hegemonic power. Leaving aside Zuboff's great contribution to the public debate, it argues successively that:

1) the concept of surveillance capitalism is unclear, and possibly distractive from alternative problem descriptions,
2) the book misreads data as a resource (in the "data is the new oil" logic), lacking in explanation how value is produced,
3) the predictions of instrumentarian power fall in line with companies' own accounts of almost God-like technological possibilities, and downplay the ongoing deployment of platform power.

These flaws prove to be fatal when Zuboff offers individualistic *panaceas*; a retreat rather than empowerment. However, a sustainable society needs both.

## The industry exposed?

It is in the very opening of the book that we face the ambiguous definition of "surveillance capitalism": it is an "economic order" and "logic", "a rogue mutation of capitalism" and "a movement" (p. 8). Although the focus is definitely on datafied human experience and behavioural modification, Zuboff also weaves concentrated "wealth, knowledge and power" as the results of surveillance capitalism at work. Such a definition: a host of definitions, even, shows the ambition of the new theory to explain both economics and politics, business and society. The narrative convincingly portrays the milestones in the discovery and further development of the surveillance industry, with its attempt to entrench every corner of human life and turn it into surveillance assets.

As Morozov brilliantly points out in his essay, Zuboff mostly assumes that surveillance and behaviour modification is the systemic, historical gamechanger and avoids engaging with other theories that attempt to prove otherwise (Morozov, 2019). But we can entertain many different ways to periodise the development of ICT, distinguishing the user-driven Web 2.0 from static server-client communication of Web 1.0, or Software-as-a-Service business model from on-premises software sold in boxes. Notions of cognitive capitalism (Moulier-Boutang, 2011) or platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2016) draw the line differently, and as such explain the troubling developments in a larger perspective, without the universal hammer of surveillance.

Collecting "behavioral data with permission and solely as a means to product or service improvement" according to Zuboff's description is outside the realm of surveillance capi-

talism, and falls in classic capitalism (p. 28). But in fact most companies claim to use data for constant improvement e. g. of personalised ads to the benefit ("relevancy") of the consumer, thus blurring the line between the colonial declaration of *Requirimiento* and normal product development. Hence the ongoing debate on what constitutes informed consent, and whether adhesion contracts requiring surveillance to use the product should be legal. Non-behavioural data present an even larger problem, when we consider Google Maps, built in part by scanning real-world cities, and in part by people's own input on locations and facilities. Although Zuboff paints Google Maps as surveillance, apart from the most intrusive practices, it presents a much more complex case.

Zuboff also casts the Google v Gonzales case on "the right to be forgotten" as an example of the fact that "the operations of surveillance capitalism and its digital architecture are not, never were, and never would be inevitable" (p. 60). But in fact all of the data in question were posted online, not harvested from users, so their appearance in search results comes from regular crawler activity. Similarly, the stunning "Carol Brady" moment of Google search (p. 76) had little to do with behavioural data; it was about the sheer amount of queries flowing to the crucial internet node that Google has become. It is as if the systemic change were not aims or terms of acquiring data, already exploited in the past by insurance companies and credit scores, but institutions and infrastructure capturing value of data.

Therefore, other forces are at play as well, ones that cannot be explained only by behaviour modification. When Google is characterised as "the first to conduct the entire commercial surveillance symphony, integrating a wide range of mechanisms from cookies to proprietary analytics and algorithmic software capabilities" (p. 87) there is a hidden answer there: the vertical integration of value chain and opaque algorithms allows for uncompetitive behaviour, such as deceiving publishers and advertisers about true prices (Srinivasan, 2020). The variables of network effects, gatekeeping or illegal conduct might actually hold larger explanatory power than surveillance itself.

Zuboff is right to say, as the new antitrust school continues to prove, that Google Search impedes competitors "not primarily to fix prices", but is it really done to "protect the dominance of its most important supply route" (p. 131) of user behavioural data? It is ironic that in the Google and Alphabet v Commission case it was Google that claimed increase in traffic to Google Shopping was a result of greater data-driven relevance; but as the European Commission established, it was the anticompetitive practices against other comparison websites that lead to such results. Whether the motive was to get more user data, or just profit from another advertising service, should have been proved, not assumed.

Zuboff depicts Google as the first company that diverged from the "advocacy-oriented" path of Apple, and embarked on the surveillance project, soon followed by Facebook and other data harvesting companies. But why single out Apple? Although Zuboff admits the many failings of Apple, such as offshoring jobs to notorious Foxconn facility, tax avoidance or abuse of monopoly power, she insists that the company is outside the boundary of surveillance capitalism as it does not engage in behavioural manipulation. Since the misgivings of one of the largest tech companies in the world (the "A" in GAFAM) are all for the benefit of the consumer, Apple "opened the door to the possibility of a new rational capitalism able to reunite supply and demand by connecting us to what we really want in exactly the ways that we choose". Zuboff juxtaposes the individualistic modernity of Apple with neoliberal political economy, which aims to "destroy the individual urge", but little explanation is given how Apple's view of individual consumer is different from the neoliberal one.

The recent developments of Apple policy show why the concept of surveillance capitalism is not enough to describe the "wealth, knowledge and power" of contemporary tech companies. It was precisely "Apple's legacy of privacy leadership" (Apple, 2021) that led the company to introduce App Tracking Transparency, which decreased third-party data sharing: but allowed native Apple Search Ads to grow dramatically. Overall, ATT decreases surveillance, but at the same time the company increases revenue by concentrating even more gatekeeping power. Similarly, a shift of business focus from ads to cloud infrastructure: visible in the growing importance of Amazon's AWS, Google Cloud, Microsoft's Azure and the struggle over data localisation, should point to lesser interest in surveillance, but at the same time greater dependence on the largest vendors.

## Surplus without labour

Although "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism" seems to put humane values, our rights and freedoms at the very centre, the theory actually leaves little space for agency. Behavioural surplus is the "data exhaust" seen through the lens of Zuboff's political economy: the extra data that can be processed, a leftover of our online doings. She specifically defies Marx though, when she declares that "instead of labour, surveillance capitalism feeds on every aspect of every human's experience". If it is not labour, then what is it? "We are the objects", declares Zuboff "from which raw materials are extracted" (p. 93). But what really happens is we produce data by our actions, actively interacting with interfaces and sensors. We are no passive bodies to mine, but active engine of this "accumulation by dispossession", regardless if it is swiping through social media, running with wearables or setting a smart washing machine. To get more data, tech companies go as far as to addict users by preying on human brain vulnerabilities. The wealth of behavioural data comes from cognitive, informational and emotional labour, and thus it exhausts humans, effectively draining their attention and capacity to focus, or lowering social trust through technological alienation. A rich scholarship studied and supported this finding, from Autonomist Marxists' "immaterial labour" (Hardt, Negri, 2005) to Christian Fuchs "information labour" and "playbour" (2016).

It might seem like a minor theoretical difference, but it has large practical consequences. Just think about the idyllic situation of parents taking a photo of their infant child. Does the value come from the child's body, autonomically, or from the parents action of taking the picture? What if the light is too dim and the parents switch the lights on to make the photo brighter, and in the end, machine readable: – is it again a vague "human experience" of having a body that creates value, or the lights-switching photo-taking action turning to labour when monetised by a tech company? Zuboff frames humans as objects of surveillance, whereas we truly are just as much subjects of data production.

What was known to radical scholars was as well of interest to technologists and business consultants. Zuboff never engages with the notion of Web 2.0 (not a single mention in the book), which was pioneered exactly at the time of the birth of "surveillance capitalism". Web 2.0 was all about "harnessing collective intelligence" through "architecture of participation" that allows for user co-creation by lowering the barrier of entry for content generation like microblogging, uploading and interacting with others (O'Reilly, 2007). It was Web 2.0 that

invited us, the Crowd 2.0, to produce all these data. And in fact Google was the prime example O'Reilly gave to show how firms should grow with unpaid user labour.

Page and Brin, Google founders, very well knew that their search engine harvests the fruits of labour of "tens of thousands of Webmasters", as they wrote in the seminal paper (Brin & Page, 1998). The crawling search engine "involves interacting with a fair number of people" after all, some of them asking sincerely "You looked at a lot of pages from my Web site. How did you like them?". Already in 1998 Google was not just any innocent enterprise, but an apparatus capturing the value of what we deem important as collective, general intellect (Pasquinelli, 2009). Once the cognitive microlabour of hyperlinking has been exploited, and the engine consequently attracted massive network of users, the new enclosure of the commons followed. The challenge was to monetise the network, and that was achieved via fees for circumvention of sound results (advertisements) and capture of further data left by visitors.

The innovation of digital platforms is precisely this: capturing and extracting the socially produced value and by the power of network effects becoming a rentier entity (Zygmuntowski, 2018). Much like natural monopolies of the past, the platforms are the key infrastructure of social production, but not without a "cost of connection" borne by data colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). This leads to real subsumption, reshaping social relations to fit the capitalist business model. Surveillance is not a "rogue mutation" of a properly working capitalism as Zuboff claims; it is a system working as designed, commodifying new phenomena and capturing new reservoirs of value production.

What we face is a network factory, in which the surplus value comes from both sides of supply and demand, social relations and communication mediated by platforms-network overseers. The industrial factory was a mode of production in a market society of the steel and electricity era; whereas network factory is the mode of production in a market society of the information age. This mode of production is not limited to surveillance infringing personal autonomy, as Zuboff sees it, but spans an increasing array of activities including the highly platformised gig economy and platform workers. Facing algorithmic management and the regime of data-driven productivity, they truly are the ones to be "automated".

## Automate to control

When Zuboff proclaims that technology companies aim to "automate us", she mostly speaks about the disturbing behavioural science of Skinner and its novel incarnations of neoliberal nudging (Thaler) and gamification. The endpoint of behaviour modification is reduction of all uncertainty, and the means is not only surveillance but much rather conditioning. Installing behaviours makes them fully predictable, therefore better for a business model reliant on proper predictions of our actions. For the clarity of argument, imagine "Collateralised AdWords Obligations", a financial product based on online sales achieved thanks to spending on ads attracting users to an e-commerce store. If one wants such a product to persist despite unpredictability of user actions, reduction of free will-related risk is only reasonable. But the ads served to us are far from being that effective, and instead of creating "guaranteed outcomes" and unaware puppets, they might just as well lead to a bubble and its "sub-prime attention crisis" that scholars already describe (Hwang, 2020).

It is tech companies that actually project this image of "God's view", as Uber managers called their special data surveillance feature. It is the occult of mind manipulation once again, used to claim product supremacy and deflect public scrutiny. There is no better marketing than accusations of holding power to choose American presidents. What happens behind the scenes however is price-gouging by Google and Facebook, plus forgery of publisher data. Not to mean platforms have no influence: the case Zuboff evokes of nudging to vote in elections are proof enough they do, but the problem is less with the ads and intended business aims than with unintended consequences of business means. Polarisation, botnets, algorithms amplifying hate and astroturfing campaigns are the pollution and toxic waste of the dominant business model, an externality much more harmful than Skinner's supposedly perfect "conditioning".

Instrumentarian power is real I suspect, but not in the exact sense Zuboff sees it. When aiming her critique at corporate vision of turning public spaces into smart cities, she describes rentier behaviour: vendor lock-in to Google Sidewalk's systems or extraction of "maximum fees from citizens" (p. 219). Similarly, Pokemon Go describes using game popularity to force users to visit sponsored location, taking a cut from urban landscape and rents real estate owners get. These are less stories of surveillance and rather of power, dependence, control over infrastructures and thus sovereignty. What they lead to is not a subtle behaviour modification by the means of nudging, but an explicit regulatory regime of orders and bans. To what extent it shapes free will is less clear than how it shapes possibilities, processes and outcomes, regardless of the will itself.

Zuboff is right that tech capitalists think "we should be more like machines" (p. 388). It is most visible in Amazon's factories, where data-gathering serves the goal of constantly measuring and increasing the productivity of labour with means of Digital Taylorism. Surveillance is hence means to algorithmic management, which is the power to control and protect profits. Whether it is a digital platform controlling users, sellers, gig workers, or a company controlling workers, this immense power is felt and seen even if misunderstood. No wonder that state actors are in the midst of curbing Big Tech: and in response imperialist projects of virtual expansion to the fully-controlled Metaverse are declared.

## Finale: the collective future we need

In describing why surveillance capitalism was successful, Zuboff claims that "neither the pursuit of privacy regulations nor the imposition of constraints on traditional monopoly practices has so far interrupted the key mechanisms of accumulation" (p. 188). Ironically, her own calls for the "right to sanctuary" and the "right to future tense" are based on the same foundation of individualism as privacy regulations are. There is nothing inherently wrong about it: they are very much needed, but not sufficient according to her own words. Whereas the critique of antitrust is completely misguided. Rather, we have seen a decline in merger halts and lack of adequate sectoral regulation preventing the most unfair practices, not to mention zero attempts to socialise or nationalise platform infrastructure: as often happened in energy, rail or utility industries.

According to Zuboff, surveillance capitalists are masters of rapid practice, with the theory lagging behind. But the many accounts of C-level speeches and think pieces she analyses show that the theory and practice are simply disconnected; what is done is other than what is said. When idealistic visions of an optimised, AI-powered world are dreamed, the profit motive pumps money and directs business development along different lines, ones of concentration, control and dependency. Zuboff is right to call out the "puppet masters" for evoking "unavoidable actions and consequences (…) to erase the fingerprints of power and absolve it of responsibility". Inevitability of certain developments of technology – IoT, AI, web3 – is indeed a false narrative. But focusing on personal ethics of managers obfuscates that it is precisely capitalist, extractive and exploitative economic regimes that lead them to choose "automating" over "informating" speaking in the dialectics of Zuboff's theory. The forces are structural, and so even new rights and ethics are just the foundation upon which a deeper democracy has to built. To achieve this, it cannot be restricted to political, parliamentary representation, but transform ownership and decision-making from exclusive to egalitarian and inclusive.

The path paved by the platform co-operativism movement (Scholz & Schneider, 2017) leads to collective empowerment and further democratisation of the new geopolitical megastructure of the technological Stack (Bratton, 2015). Once the stakeholders are in control, the drive to surveil and algorithmically manage them(selves) will cease, and the costs of externalities will be likely to be internalised in the co-op budget. The point is to control the Fairbook Co-op together as 3 billion users, instead of coping with Facebook's control over us by retreating to "sanctuary". The quite short experiment of social economy and economic democracy has been impeded by the costs of co-ordination and low trust levels; conditions that we can overcome thanks to the very technological developments that allowed network factories to emerge. Thus, the mode of production does not automatically imply the regime of accumulation; it is a societal choice.

In Zuboff's theory of surveillance capitalism, we are mined for data, and then it is weaponised to further strip us of agency. However, she does that as well, twice in fact. The first time, by removing cognitive labour as the true source of wealth and portraying data as mere "raw material"; the second time by offering more individual rights as a viable solution while dismissing the power we have to socially engineer our own society. Once we realise that, we can reach for collective, democratic control over our own data and infrastructures. Instead of worrying that any type of social predictions or economic planning is Pentland's "social physics" and tyranny, we should leverage the planetary collective intelligence to rapidly tackle the problems of Anthropocene: climate change, loss of biodiversity, emerging biothreats, inequity and instability of our civilization which produce suffering and conflicts.

In summary, surveillance capitalism was always about having knowledge to gain power. The total equation is more complex than surveillance alone, and it is a consequence of the legacy capitalist economy and novel ICT technologies. Unless we change the former, the latter will be made in its image. In achieving that, the questions raised by Zuboff on the power to know, decide, and decide on deciding are crucial. The answers however are to be found outside "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism".

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# 40 years in 40 minutes

## Interview with Øyvind Pålshaugen

**Danilo and Miren:**
Thank you, Øyvind, for granting this interview to the *International Journal of Action Research.* After your long trajectory with AR, and also in this journal, we want to integrate your insight in the emergent discussions we propose in this issue about the future challenges of AR. Let us start by giving the reader a perspective of your trajectory. How did you come to AR? You could certainly not study it at university. And how did you come to The Work Research Institute (WRI) in Oslo?

**Øyvind:**
That is correct. Even though I started to study sociology in the hope that if I understood society better, I would be better equipped to change it. I was far from the only one with that hope. However, those examples of action research that some of the academic staff were involved in, did not attract my interest. They were exerted mostly for the sake of using scientific knowledge to reinforce action, and less for using action to reinforce scientific knowledge. Having refused to join the army after college, my interest in politics rose considerably. This was in the early seventies, and the options for jumping into political action were many: there were many white feathers on the left wing, to put it that way. However, I could not fail to notice that pretty much of the political activity of the student's at the university was much about "paroles" and that the "parliament of the streets" was in fashion. It was a politics of words, which were both written and shouted out with lots of energy, but the fate of this energy appeared to me like the steam from a safety valve: it dissolved in the air.

I turned my back on the streets and went into the libraries. At the time, also Marx was in fashion, and after having read his texts on historical materialism I acquired a Danish translation of *Das Kapital:* all three volumes (12 in Danish), to read and discuss it within a not too large group of like-minded. We read this work not in the spirit of any kind of Marxism, but in the spirit of the last sentence in Marx' foreword to *Das Kapital:* "Every opinion based on scientific criticism I welcome. As to prejudices of so-called public opinion, to which I have never made concessions, now as aforetime the maxim of the great Florentine is mine: *Segui il tuo corso, e lascia dir le genti*" [Follow your own course, and let people talk (paraphrased from Dante).

Thus, while reading Marx, it was necessary also to read Keynes and followers. To make a long story short by an understatement, it became pretty clear to me that attempts to change society, without engaging in the question of how to change the production system of society, were simply too superficial. This led me to join a group of students who were devoted to "the sociology of work and industry", and finally to a Master degree in this field in sociology. An empirical study of how economic and technological parameters conditioned the shaping of the

specific patterns of workplaces at a cable factory through the period from 1945–1975, was the outcome.

Having besides studied psychology, mostly Freud, and critical philosophy of language, I had not given much attention to what I should do for a living after having obtained my Master degree. I had heard about WRI, since the professor that was responsible for teaching on "sociology of work and industry", Ragnvald Kalleberg, had a collegial and intellectual relationship with Bjørn Gustaven, who at the time was the director of WRI. This was due to their common interest in Habermas' theories of society, communication and dialogue. My impression of WRI at the time (1981) was that it was a social-democratic milieu that in their research co-operated closely with the employers' and the employee's national organizations.

Regardless of my impression, a few months before I finished my Master degree, I was headhunted to WRI by Gustavsen, via Kalleberg, to undertake a one-year study of the work environment of the garbage collectors of Oslo city. So I did. During this year I discovered that Gustavsen had a great intellectual capacity – and appetite. In particular his ability to grasp philosophical and theoretical ideas he found exciting, and to make productive use of them in the action research he and his close colleagues were doing, was striking. By the end of this first year I wrote a 120 pages research report about the garbage collectors, which led to nothing. Per H. Engelstad, the closest colleague to Gustavsen, and the researcher at WRI who was most engaged in the renewal in the kind of conferences that came to be termed dialogue conferences, suggested to organise one, with a large contingent of garbage collectors and their management as participants. From then on, real improvements of their work environment came to be exerted. The same happened to me, albeit in a different way. I told Gustavsen that I wanted to read Habermas' book *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns,* which had been published in 1981, and write an article about it. He answered "fine". Shortly after, Engelstad invited me to join him at a dialogue conference on regional development, in Western Norway. I answered "fine". The rest is history…

**Danilo and Miren:**
What authors have been important reference points in your work? Could we say that Wittgenstein had a special influence on it?

**Øyvind:**
That would not be wrong, but if so, Wittgenstein is to be regarded *primus inter pares* with Foucault in my work with action research. With your permission, I will elaborate a little on this point.

My first publication in English on action research was written in 1987 for an international conference in Oslo, devoted to the memorial of Einar Thorsrud. The heading of the session for which I wrote my contribution, was: Can Social Science Contribute to Industrial Democracy? My article opens with a suggestion of posing this question slightly differently: Can a flow of words contribute to industrial democracy? To this question there might be many ways to answer. However, none of them can be given without using just a flow of words; but not just a free flow: Any use of words must be undertaken appropriately if the words are to be understood by others, and that what is appropriate is dependent on which kind of discourse the actual use of words is embedded in.

By opening my article in this way, I could easily remind us of the fact that within society there are many kinds of discourses, of which the discourse of social science is one. Then, I

could launch this perspective: "Applied science is an application of words to already existing discourses." Further, I referred to contemporary research on the use of applied science, which shows that non-use or abuse are as common as proper use. On this basis I put a statement: "… there seems to be a main tendency within applied social science to neglect the *discourse of the user.*"

Admittedly, an overstatement; but it worked as a rhetorical means to pave the way for my presentation of a research approach that did not neglect the discourse of the user, but rather made this discourse one main element in the very research process. Making this approach into an identifiable unity was made by a kind of "speech act", namely the title of the article: "A Norwegian Programme of Action Research for Participative Democracy".[1]

You will easily recognise some of Foucault's main perspectives on discourse in the excerpts from this article. However, you will also notice my frequent use of the phrase "use of words". This is not only a sign of the influence from Wittgenstein, it is indeed a deliberate use of the phrase. The philosophical projects of Foucault and Wittgenstein are pretty different, but to use another phrase of Wittgenstein, there is a multitude of "family resemblances".

However, as Nietzsche once remarked, it is a weak eye that only sees similarities between philosophers. And it is just by means of the differences between Foucault's perspectives on *discourse* and Wittgenstein's perspectives on *language games* that we can elaborate new perspectives that are influenced and enriched by the philosophical writings of both.

To put it bluntly, discourses may be said to be made up by language games. I do not put it this way in order to build some coherent theory of linguistic practice, from macro to micro-level, as it were. Rather, it is a way to suggest in what ways Foucault's perspectives on discourse and Wittgenstein's perspectives on language games can be relevant to understanding important aspects regarding our many different kinds of use of language; and above all, their relevance for making us more aware of all the *misunderstandings* in this respect.

The influence from Foucault, or, as I would prefer to put it, my productive use of Foucault, is also pretty apparent in my book with the subtitle: "Language as a tool in organisation development and action research"[2]. This book, which was originally published in 1991, is a monograph on an action research project that was undertaken in a Norwegian tobacco factory over three years. The research strategy was based on the use of dialogue conferences as the main means for management and employees to co-operate on enterprise development. The exercise of this strategy requires that the dialogues at these conferences are very carefully organised, that is, in ways that are conditioned by a number of parameters that have to be considered in order to make the *content* of the dialogues be of maximal relevance with regards to a number of parameters: the various kinds of interests of the various groups of employees and management; the overall purpose of the enterprise development, the need to make the experience and knowledge of all groups of employees/management be played into the process, and to make all this take place in accordance with the socio-technical conditions of this particular enterprise.

It goes without saying that it is not possible to give equal attention to all these parameters in one and the same dialogue. Thus, any dialogue conference has to be organised in sequences of parallel dialogues in groups, in a way that are in accordance with the versions of the general parameters that are specific to any enterprise. Now, to the relevance of Foucault: The organising of these dialogue conferences in the course of a 3-years project, served to create new

1 This article was first published in German, cf. Fricke, W. & Jäger, W. (Hrsg) 1988.
2 Pålshaugen 1998

kinds of discussions, conversation and communication; in short, new discourses – among the various groups of employees and management within the enterprise. Notably, it is by means of these new kinds of discourses that the generation of new ideas on what kinds of development is needed for, how this work with development tasks should be organised and exerted, and how to judge the outcome of the development work, is figured out as a collective process. In order to highlight this emphasis on organising dialogues as part of an action research strategy, and its crucial importance as a condition for succeeding in enterprise development based on broad participation, I adopted Foucault's perspectives on discourse in my interpretation of this strategy. By playing on preceding strategies for reorganising enterprises by means of action research, I coined a new phrase in order to emphasis the *differentia specifica* of this "refined" version: an action research strategy for reorganising enterprises by reorganising their discourses.

Finally, I will just mention that the perspective I have adopted in some articles on the distinction between practical and theoretical discourse as part of a strategy to undermine the common but all too simple distinction between theoreticians and practitioners, is also based on a productive use of Foucault's perspectives on discourse. Olav Eikeland has made me aware that "already Aristotle" made this distinction, but that has not been may path into it. (In parenthesis, Habermas' distinction on theoretical and practical discourse is of a quite different kind, not akin to whether Aristotle's nor Foucault's conceptualisation.)

**Danilo and Miren:**
From influential authors, we move to influential organizations. How do you evaluate WRI's impact on Norwegian society? And, to what extent has Action Research dominated the direction of research at WRI?

**Øyvind:**
The question of WRI's impact on Norwegian society is indeed an interesting one: not least to myself, for whom WRI has been my only workplace for a period of nor less than 40 years (1981–2021). However, to answer this question in some appropriate way is a task that goes far beyond what can be completed in an interview. There is no lack of viewpoints on this question, based on experiences, anecdotes and impressions of a great variety of kinds, but any serious, comprehensive study I think will never appear.

As we know, the question of the impact of the social sciences (and the humanities) has during the last decade climbed higher on the agenda in the EU: and also in Norway. Leaving aside the many oversimplified attempts to create indexes for measuring such impacts, we find that there is a growing stream of literature of social research that aims at contributing to developing both theories and methods for how to measure, and judge, the impact of social science. So far, the best parts of this literature have made good efforts in establishing empirical and theoretical analyses that forbid any quick way to jump to conclusions (cf. e. g. Lauronen 2020). What we can hope for are not prescriptions for studies that are able to give "final answers" on questions of impact, but empirically and theoretically founded ideas on what kind of constellations of different kinds of, and sources of, knowledge seem appropriate when searching for "sufficiently reasonable" answers to more specific questions on the impact of social science.

The second question is somewhat easier to answer. Since I came to WRI (1981), action research has never dominated WRI. As WRI grew larger during the 90-ies and the first decade

of the new Millennium, I believe the relative number of action researchers was diminishing. Also, when the last of the research programmes of the Norwegian Research Council about ended about 10 years ago, the financial foundation for doing action research was utterly shrinking.

Thus, the relative number of researchers mainly occupied with action research probably has been never less than today. But this information does not provide the right impression of to what extent, and in what ways it is experienced. Knowledge and competence gained by action research, and other action-oriented research at WRI, has dominated (or perhaps better, influenced) the direction of research at WRI. Today, a dominant trend is research projects that combine research on aggregate levels with research on local development work at the organisational level, where participation from "rank and file" usually is a prerequisite. This combination allows for gaining and developing new, research-based knowledge on how to make use of systematically organised development work in a number of different institutional contexts within working life. These projects are generally more or less loosely linked to some general investments in efforts of improvements and development in different fields of working life. The main fields are 1) renewal of public sector; 2) inclusive working life; 3) health-promoting work environment; 4) organisational innovation; 5) new forms of management, organisation and co-operation in networks. Practically all research projects within these fields are founded in certain democratic values, operationalised in practice by different forms of participation in the development of new organisational and other kinds of solutions to local problems that are generally experienced in the actual field of working life.

By this very general description of the kind of action-oriented research that is dominant at WRI today, we may recognize some of the main features of action research, exerted within a somewhat different framework. The two main differences might be that interventions by the researchers in the field of research are less direct, and that projects mainly devoted to enterprise development in private sector are far less frequent.

**Danilo and Miren:**
That gave us a perspective of AR in Norway, but what has been your experience of AR outside Norway? Is there something like a Scandinavian school or tradition of AR? If there is, what are its key features?

**Øyvind:**
I would definitely not claim that there is a *school*, and I am happy with that! We know from many examples of "schools" within academia, and also from attempts to shape/form "schools" within action research, that such schools tend to be less marked by excellent scholarship, than by rather restrictive and narrow-minded followers who try to teach what they think is the right doctrine of this school. It is not for nothing that many great thinkers have publicly declared that they will abandon all attempts to establish them as founders of some "school".

A *tradition* is something else: by definition it is subject to be transferred and thereby inevitably also somehow transformed. If we in the first place narrow it down to a question of a Norwegian tradition, and even narrower, a tradition in the wake of Einar Thorsrud and the industrial democracy project in the sixties, the word tradition might fit very well. Especially in the writings of B. Gustavsen we can easily read how the successive attempts to deal with and overcome the shortcomings of the action research approach of the industrial democracy project have formed their foundation for improving and renewing this approach.

To some extent we can here talk about a division of labour, in the sense that some of the researchers (at WRI) were undertaking the work in the field with developing new practical methods for workers participation in enterprise development, while others: *in casu* Gustavsen, were undertaking the work with developing new interpretations of how this field work contributed to renewal and improvement of this action research approach. Eventually more researchers were included in these theoretical and practical attempts, by which this tradition continued to exist by the attempts to improve it: also myself.

From the mid-eighties, when Gustavsen was hired to design and participate in the exertion of the Swedish so-called LOM-programme[3], the research and development programmes in working life of Norway and Sweden took on a number of similarities that made it possible to start to talk about something like a Scandinavian tradition of action research. Of course, there were many differences between these programmes, regarding both the national and regional infrastructure for these programmes and on the enterprise level where the research projects were undertaken. Nevertheless, the theoretical perspectives from within the research activities in these programmes were interpreted, had so much in common that it made sense to talk about a Scandinavian tradition, to some extent.

Or, to put it more precisely, the discourse on work life research and action research that was created on the basis of these programmes, in connection with the broader common discourse of action research, made it possible not only to *talk* about a Scandinavian tradition, but to *write* about it. This is not a play of words: well, it is, but not only. From Foucault's perspectives on discourse, we may realise that the objects and phenomena of social science are not to be considered only as social constructs; they have to be regarded also as linguistic constructs. Thus, the objects of social science: notably, as these objects are *represented* in some discourse within the scientific community, are partly constituted by this very discourse itself. This also goes for the issue we are dealing with here, the question of whether there is something like a Scandinavian tradition of action research. My answer would be: yes, there is, but this tradition has a fragile existence, due to both the fact that at the time there are neither currently very many action research projects that seem to fit neatly into the discourse on this tradition, nor are very many publications being written which take this tradition into consideration.

Consequently, as for the question of what the key features of this tradition might be, I think the best I can do is to refer to my last publication on this issue: which regrettably is not very recent.[4]

**Danilo and Miren:**
Considering the previous and other experiences, what would you highlight (positive and/or negative) from your lifelong AR practices?

**Øyvind:**
On the positive side I am happy to have been partaking in the exercise and development of the kind of action research in which the importance of *broad participation in well organised dialogues* for development and innovation has been demonstrated in so many kinds of workplaces, within both private and public sector of working life. On a more personal level, I am also happy that, as regards my interests and critical engagement in the often-un-

3 Gustavsen, B. 1991
4 Pålshaugen 2015

acknowledged potentials in our use of language, as well as the no less often unacknowledged traps: within both working life and within the scientific community in particular, my action research practice has offered great opportunities to pursue these interests, both in theory and practice. In the end, that is, today, I have to realise that the question I posed in 2004, whether we in the future might witness that the field of action research was moving "towards a linguistic turn"[5] has to be answered negatively.

However, I do of course not consider a "linguistic turn" a precondition for future improvement, enforcement and greater positive impact of action research within working life and society. I see no particular approach as univocally better fit than others, in order to succeed in those respects. Rather, I would point towards a more important issue, an enduring problem that is common for all kinds of approaches: the enduring lack of [sufficiently strong] efforts to institutionalise action research, and other kinds of intervention research, within academia, [universities/university colleges]. By and large, the community of action research is still a community of (mostly individual) "convertors". Theories and methods of action research are not commonplace in the education of future social researchers, neither on the graduate level nor on the post-graduate level. There are exceptions, many more than when I was a student, but still these are exceptions that confirm the rule: action research is a form of social research you may "convert" to when you have ended your academic education, in fact, mostly first when you have got a job as researcher.

**Danilo and Miren:**
In one of your contributions to CAT (7/2 2002)[6] you ask the question: "Has the democratisation of work come to an end?" What is your answer to this question 20 years later, regarding the many changes of working life caused by atomization of work, digitalisation, data business, surveillance and power by algorithms?

**Øyvind:**
Right you are: I asked this question, but certainly I also tried to suggest an answer that aimed at being valid within the conditions of the working life to come. I did not list exactly those keywords you mention in your question, but I touched upon some of them, formulated like this in the abstract to this article: "The concluding section presents some principal arguments as to why a strategy for discourse democracy is particularly apt today, in a working life characterised by trends like increasing knowledge industries, individualism on the personal level and globalisation on the societal level." These trends have grown stronger during the last 20 years, and they have so to speak been both enforced and supplemented by those trends you mention. In my view, all these trends have also enforced, or rather actualised, my line of arguments from 2002, on the need for pursuing what I termed "discourse democracy at work".

The backdrop for my question was that, neither in the public debate nor in the debate within and among the infrastructure and the institutions of working life, there was at the time any strong voicing of the quest for [further] democratisation of work in the Western societies: as compared to what the situation was in the 60-ies , 70-ies and to some extent also in the 80-ies. Not that such efforts were not still going on, but the quests for further reforms and intensified/increased activities in this field had not been issues that engaged the rank and file within working life, as in the preceding decades [this could also be noticed in surveys].

5 Pålshaugen 2004
6 Pålshaugen 2002

However, this did not mean that issues of democracy at work were no longer there, but they had taken on somewhat different shapes. Not least due to the fact that the conditions for co-determination and co-operation had been somewhat improved throughout these decades, regarding both the institutionalisation and the practicing of them, it was more commonly expected that democratic values were valued also within working life: at least within Northern Europe, which forms the limits of my scope. Of course, in the daily run the work had to be performed in accordance with the established (hierarchical) organisational structures and routines of any organszation. But when issues of changes were raised, that is, attempts of improvements and development regarding how the work was [to be] organised and performed, the expectance of management's adherence to democratic values, which had become increasingly common in large parts of working life, meant that those affected by these changes wanted these to happen as *democratic processes.*

Of course, there were exceptions to this rule – and there still are – but such exceptions are inevitably stigmatised as examples of "authoritarian management" (admired by some, though). So the question/issue faced by most management (and the representatives of the employees) is usually not *whether* processes of change, development and innovation should be undertaken as democratic processes. The central question is: *how to organise and perform* the actual processes in ways that can meet the requirements of both the organisational goal/purpose, the management's plans/intentions and the employees' expectations to the processes of change and development. As we know, there are many ways to do this, and there is no lack of well-intended suggestions. Your own and others experience, text-books, consultants – not to mention action researchers; but as we know, the path to failure is paved with good intentions. What is needed, is good judgement, and good judgment in working life/organisational matters is dependent on and requires good deliberations among those concerned: this is the *petito principii* of the approach I have been advocating and working on/within throughout my long trajectory with action research.

For the theoretical and practical elaboration of this approach, which we at WRI started out with calling "A Norwegian approach of action research for democracy": later to be renamed a "Scandinavian approach", I have to refer to the publications of the main protagonists of this approach, all well represented in IJAR and its forerunner CAT. As for the question I am supposed to answer, about the actuality of this approach and its potential and relevance for [strategies for] future democratisation of work, I would like to highlight one point: It can hardly be overestimated to what extent exactly [the] processes of change, development and innovation in working life are what is shaping the future of working life, both its institutions and its outcomes: which include all the people doing all the work, if we take into consideration the word of one of the "founding fathers" of the Scandinavian tradition, Philip Herbst: "The product of work is people".

Therefore, participation in development and innovation processes are of utmost importance to all people in any work organisation, relatively regardless of which branch(es): industry, trade or service, and regardless of whether the work performed is about "hard core" tangible realities or about intangible "virtual realities". In all cases the medium that is most apt to face and to grasp all kinds of realities, subjective as well as objective, imagined as well as realised matters, is – surprise: language. At the same time, language is also the medium by which we can fail to grasp exactly the kind of realities we are searching for – and perhaps longing for. Thus, the need for organizing dialogues within the institutions and organisations within working life in ways that enables our/the ability to form the future of working life in

ways that are sustainable at all levels – also on the personal level, will be as urgent in the times to come as it has ever been. My general perspectives and suggestions on how this need might be institutionalised within working life, is described in my presentation and elaboration of the concept of "public spheres in private enterprises" (which also, *mutatis mutandum*, will go for work organisations within public sector). As for the question of how to do this, there will necessarily have to be lots of ways, all of which have to be in accordance with both the specific, local context and the larger context.

**Danilo and Miren:**
Action research is very much based on case studies. What is the role of case studies in organisations? Can or should AR move beyond individual case studies?

**Øyvind:**
In action research, I think the important question is not really about single case studies or multiple case studies, or between case studies and representative surveys of different kinds. This opposition is established on a too narrow basis; it is too one-dimensional, so to speak.

The idea behind going beyond case studies usually is that this will enable action research to produce more generally valid knowledge: in short, general knowledge, that is, knowledge that by dint of the method used to produce it is regarded to be valid also beyond the selection of units that has been subject to study. There are two main motives for pursuing this idea:

1. By using research methods that allow for (statistical) generalisation, knowledge from action research may obtain the same status of unquestionable scientific knowledge that pertains to social research that apply methods by which the validity of the knowledge can be clearly stated.
2. If action research projects can be undertaken by methods by which the knowledge from the projects can claim to be general knowledge, with a more specified validity, it would be much easier to argue for the relevance and transferability of this knowledge to other actors in other contexts: in short, to disseminate the knowledge, and make it come to use in a broader spectrum of working life and society in general.

These two motives are not identical, but to some they may very well coincide. The first motive we find in particular by those who want action research to be better accepted within academia, and who [personally] are pursuing an academic career. For many of these, the second motive is not really separated from the first: by dint of its impeccable academic status, knowledge from action research would so to speak have an inherent reason to be disseminated and put into use. Dissemination in this case is regarded mainly a question of information: potential users have to be made aware that this knowledge exists: then to be used, for free!

The second motive we find by action researchers who may be neither very academically oriented personally, nor very strong believers in the impeccability of scientific methods. However, from a more pragmatic perspective they realise the advantages that may lie moving beyond case studies, in order to enhance possibilities of dissemination of, and increase the practical use of, knowledge from action research. If such efforts also increase the status of this knowledge and thus of action research within academia: well, that is fine with them.

The problem with the focus of these two motives is that they tend to overlook or underestimate that outside the scientific community, where the research knowledge is supposed to be used, that is, within and among the actors, organisations and institutions of working life,

the *content* of this knowledge is of far greater interest than its form. Whether some new knowledge is generated by action researchers, by consultants or by practitioners in other companies and organisations, is far less important than whether the knowledge is of interest with regards to the practical problem horizon of those who are assumed to be users of this knowledge. In other words, it is not the "context of discovery" but the "context of use" that is of critical importance to action research projects if they are to succeed with their ambition of generating knowledge that will come to be used in practice. Careful considerations on the "context of use" are as important to the *design of the research project* as the considerations on the scientific methods and theoretical framework of the project. These considerations and reflections on the context of use have to be undertaken in beforehand, in order to be able to generate just that kind of knowledge which by dint of its *content* will be of great interest to the supposed users. To put it on a formula: the conditions for the use of knowledge have to condition the very research design of the project.

What are the most important aspects of the conditions for use of knowledge will of course vary between contexts, but there are some common features that have to be considered more specifically by every research project/programme to be undertaken within a working life context.

First and foremost: there always already exists a lot of knowledge among the actors within that part of working life in which the research efforts are carried out. This knowledge may be of different kinds, it may be unevenly distributed among actors, and it may as well be partly tacit as it will be "out of use": but nevertheless, it is *already there.* Thus, the action research project design should comprise devices that aim at releasing the kind of knowledge already there, of relevance to local processes of development/improvement/innovation.

Secondly, on the basis of this releasing and generating of knowledge that come to use in developments that take place in the course of the project, the most important research task is to figure out: What kind of new knowledge may/might be generated which can *supplement* this already existing (and newly released) knowledge, regarding the need for research based knowledge that may support and contribute to sustain similar or corresponding efforts of development and innovation within working life – presumably based on broad participation and dialogical means in these efforts, given the kind of action research(ers) attempt to address in this interview. Figuring out the answer to this question, is identical with writing the scientific publication(s) from the research project.

As you may imagine, this strategy for generating new and useful knowledge through the process of writing is not about telling "the whole story" of the project.[7] It is about creating some knowledge that, on the basis of the researchers' close experience from the particular field where the project was undertaken, and their general overview of the kinds of knowledge and practices pertaining to these kinds of fields, may appear as new, supplementary knowledge of general interest and of general use, to those concerned. If so, who are those, and how to reach them?

The precondition for thinking about apt strategies for the use of knowledge from case studies in the way I have sketched out here, is that the answer to the question I just posed is thought of and built into the strategy for knowledge generation and dissemination of the project before it is started. Generally speaking, there are three main kinds of "contexts of use" that may surround action research projects within working life. One not very common kind is

7 Cf. Pålshaugen 1996

the kind we know from Norway, where national programmes for work life research that are formally linked to company development process have been the context for action research project, during some decades (from the mid-nineties to some years beyond 2010).

A bit more common context is the kind we know also from other Nordic countries like Sweden and Finland, and e. g. Germany, where national governmental programmes for development in working life have been launched. These programmes have created opportunities for financing research projects that are expected to partly support those programs and partly to document results and/or evaluate them, and action research projects have been welcomed as part of such nationally or regionally anchored "research portfolios". Moreover, in countries and/or in times where such programmes are not on the agenda, a third kind of "context of use" are situations or periods of time where larger parts of working life are exposed to certain kinds of common challenges or "problematics" that have to be dealt with. Recent examples may be challenges pertaining to the steady proliferation of new aspects of "digitalisation of work", challenges regarding work life policies like e. g. the quest for an "including work life", challenges pertaining to the reoccurring quests for a "more efficient public sector" etc.

The common denominator of all these kinds of "contexts for use" of knowledge from action research is that work organisations within whole sectors, branches and regions are confronted with the task of doing some development work by which they can meet these challenges and "problematics". Not only are the management and employees of the work organisations aware of this, also the institutions and actors within the infrastructure of working life are (more or less) alerted. Thus, given the, both in absolute and relative numbers, small resources allocated to work life research that are expected to provide knowledge that can be useful to working life development, there is no sustainable way to develop and exert strategies for disseminating such knowledge without co-operating with actors and institutions of the infrastructure of working life. This co-operation may comprise e. g. the use of established channels, work forms and fora for dissemination, and the creation of apt new kinds of temporary channels and fora. Without any kinds of such co-operation, there will be practically no dissemination.

In the more exceptional case where research programmes to support working life development, like the case of Norway mentioned above, facilitating such kind of co-operation between work life research and the infrastructure of working life is a so to speak self-evident issue. However, also in the above-mentioned national programmes of work life development where work life research has been a more "optional" feature, facilitating such co-operation has been prioritised.

Thereby, some important experiences of dissemination scientific knowledge have been made, and some adhering lessons have been learned, not least about what does not work. Of no less importance, some critical theoretical insight has been confirmed. I will give one example.

This example concerns the issue of the transferability of research-based knowledge. It is commonly regarded that knowledge that has proved to be generally valid by statistical methods is easier to be transferred to units outside the sample of units that have been the objects of study. This validation has so to speak "proved" that the knowledge in question will also be valid in other contexts: that is, to other organisations in more or less similar contexts. However, it turns out that for knowledge to be used in practice, it cannot be just transferred as an entity to be "put into use" some other place. Just like the content of some general knowledge has been created within one location in the first place, it has to be re-created in the

local discourse of another location, in order to appear as a locally useful knowledge. To elaborate this point, I may quote a passage from an article I wrote on the question about the use of knowledge from case studies, in which I refer to a point made by a researcher whose research was undertaken in connection with a Finnish program of work life development[8]:

"… what takes place at some local site, may create knowledge of general value and interest to enterprises at other places – not necessarily similar enterprises, but enterprises that are involved in and struggle to find their way in similar processes. In case of knowledge about enterprise development and innovation processes, we may term this kind of knowledge specific knowledge of various kinds of "good practice". And as pointed out by Alasoini (2006) and stressed by Arnkil, ""good practice" needs to be understood as *generative ideas*, rather than "ready made objects""(Arnkil 2008). For this reason, the question of how to create common arenas for practical discourses, which allow for general knowledge from some specific enterprises (single cases) to be *re-generated* as useful knowledge to other specific enterprises through this common practical discourse, is just as important as the question [of the generality of the knowledge ØP].

As already mentioned, the kind of context within which the most of my own action research has been exerted within, namely a context where the national and regional infrastructure of working life has been actively involved and engaged in promoting and disseminating knowledge from action research and related kinds of work life research, is not very common. Outside the Nordic countries, we might perhaps say Northern Europe, such contexts are rather rare. –The Basque region may be an exception that "confirms the rule". However, in most countries we will find the kind of "context of use" that I mentioned above, where larger parts of working life are exposed to certain kinds of common challenges or "problematics" that have to be dealt with.

In fact, I have myself been project leader for a kind of action research project within this latter kind of context, in the course of 2016–2019. This project was about the challenges faced by media enterprises in the global trends of digitalisation of news media. It was undertaken in co-operation with 4 small and medium sized Norwegian newspapers. One of these was particularly concerned with trying to cope with these challenges, by means of staging innovation processes that included the whole staff. Dialogue conferences and related methods of participation were applied rather successfully, and among the publications from the project there is a case study from this process. This case study verifies and illustrates a point I made above, about the way in which "democratic values" within working life today tend to appear as a quest for democratic processes and procedure: in this case, innovation processes that involved the whole staff.

In the the publication from this case we didn't try to tell "the whole story"[9]. Rather, we tried to extract and present the most relevant knowledge from the experiences with the innovation processes in a way that made it possible to grasp the *usefulness* of this knowledge, rather than its generality. Due to the particular conditions for organszing innovation processes within media enterprises, conditions we characterised with the phrase that they were obliged to "creating the new while producing the news"[10], the management could not establish one overall process of innovation that included all. Rather, they had to initiate certain more limited processes regarding various aspects of the total work processes required to produce the news: processes that were more or less interrelated, and which comprised a larger or smaller part of the total staff. This strategy took the form of what we conceptualszed as "staging a con-

8 Pålshaugen 2009
9 Pålshaugen, Ø. and Clegg (2019)
10 Pålshaugen, Ø. and Landsverk Hagen, A. (2019)

stellation of innovation processes". Such constellations neither could nor should be configured by the mangement in beforehand: this had to be done through the practical staging of the processes, by configuring them *along the way* in accordance with the specific conditions and prerequsits of the company. Like with all publications from this project, we did not present this knowledge as a kind of "general model" that can be blue-printed by other media enterprises. Rather, we presented it as an exemplary model to inspire and guide the creation of local constellations of innovation processes in accordance with the local circumstanstances: as seen from within the actual media enterprise.

Finally, I would not at all say that case studies will be sufficient to fulfil all kinds of objectives of action research. In particular, if we for example aim at documenting scientifically that some strategies and methods based on participation in development processes are more effective than other methods based on more limited participation, we should not reject research design that comprises an RCT-design. To the contrary, it is quite possible to create a research design that comprises both intervention by action research methods and an RCT [randomised controlled trial]-design that provides accurate scientific knowledge about the effects of the intervention.

**Danilo and Miren:**
AR, as social research in general, is always involved with power relations. Given that participation is a key feature of AR, what do you think about the notion/thesis "participation as enactment of power"?

**Øyvind:**
Personally, I have always considered this thesis as having a paternalistic flavor. Of course, power is always an issue of importance when you deal with development work in hierarchical organisations, which is the rule in the private as well as the public sector. Dealing with aspects of power and power relations have in the kind of action research projects I have worked on, have usually had two forms. Mainly, they have been dealt with as one of the conditions for how to organise the dialogues in ways that minimize the risk for power relations to reduce the quality of the dialogues that are to be performed. Besides, they have also been dealt with in direct conversation with people who are, or may be, particularly affected by power relations, whether on the "weak" side or the "strong" side. Such conversations have been undertaken in quite various forms, dependent on the specific situation. As a rule, such conversations have been a prerequisite for not making wrong choices and decisions regarding the design and exertion of the processes of dialogues.

To put it otherwise, I am most concerned about the possible "transformative power" of participating in dialogues on development and innovation, considered as a mean to "humanize" the work and workplaces. It is important to have in mind that democratic procedures – and democratic institutions, are important as means to deal constructively with conflicts of interest. Therefore, democratic procedures of development work should not aim primarily at obtaining some "consensus": rather, they should aim at making "compromises" in the form of creative solutions which represents something new to those who represent the various kinds of conflicting interests.

**Danilo and Miren:**

To close the interview, we would like to ask you about the *International Journal of Action Research* (IJAR). What do you see as the distinctive role of IJAR?

**Øyvind:**
Here I may give a quick and short answer: I think the former editors' appreciative thanks to the work Danilo has done, includes what kind of "tradition" Miren has to transfer and transform, in ways that I am sure she will have far better ideas on than what I can come up with. Truly!

**Danilo and Miren:**
Which are your ideas, which your wishes regarding IJAR's future development?

**Øyvind:**
My most urgent concern is that IJAR will not have to continue to exist behind a "paywall". From my own and many others' experience, I know that journals that are not part of the "grand packets" of journals by which most universities make those journals available for free to the academic staff (and the students), have very limited chances to be widely read to the extent they deserve. How to do this, I would not know: but that it ought to be done, I know.

**Danilo and Miren:**
Thanks very much, Øyvind, for your insights.

About Øyvind Pålshaugen:

Øyvind Pålshaugen is research professor emeritus at The Work Research Institute (WRI), Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo. The larger part of his research has been action research projects on enterprise development and organisational development in work organisations. The research design requires both some kind of institutionalised cooperation between management and employees, and extensive participation from all groups of employees in the dialogue-based work that form the core of the developmental work in the projects. Using critical theory for constructive practice might be an apt "label" for his work.

About the interviewers:

Miren Larrea is senior researcher in Orkestra- Basque Institute of Competitiveness and lecturer at the University of Deusto in the Basque Country, Spain. She is also associate researcher at Praxis Research Institute in Rafaela, Santa Fé, Argentina. Her research focuses on regional innovation systems, multilevel and collaborative governance, local development, and shared leadership. She is one of the proponents of action research for territorial development, practiced by a multilocal community of researchers in the Basque Country (Spain), Agder (Norway) and Santa Fé and Tierra del Fuego (Argentina).

Danilo Streck is Doctor of Education from Rutgers University. He has been a Visiting Scholar at the Latin American Center, UCLA, and at Max Plank Institute for Human Development in Berlin. Danilo is Professor at the Graduate School of Education of the University of Caxias do Sul (Brazil). His research projects focus on popular education, Latin American pedagogy, participatory social processes and research methodologies. He is author

of "A New Social Contract in a Latin American Educational Context" (Palgrave/McMillan), co-editor of "Paulo Freire Encyclopedia" (Rowman & Littlefield).

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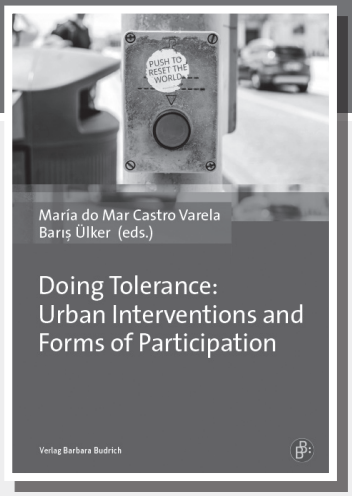


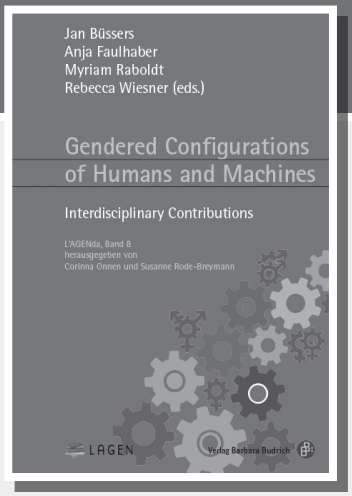

María do Mar Castro Varela,
Bariş Ülker (eds.)

## Doing Tolerance

Urban Interventions and Forms of Participation

*2020 • 276 pp. • Pb. • 33,00 € (D) • 34,00 € (A)*
*ISBN 978-3-8474-2024-8 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1586-2*

How is tolerance reflected in urban space? Which urban actors are involved in the practices and narratives of tolerance? What are the limits of tolerance? The edited volume answers these questions by considering different forms of urban in/exclusion and participatory citizenship. By drawing together disparate yet critical writings, Doing Tolerance examines the production of space, urban struggles and tactics of power from an interdisciplinary perspective. Illustrating the paradoxes within diverse interactions, the authors focus on the conflict between heterogeneous groups of the governed, on the one hand, and the governing in urban spaces, on the other.



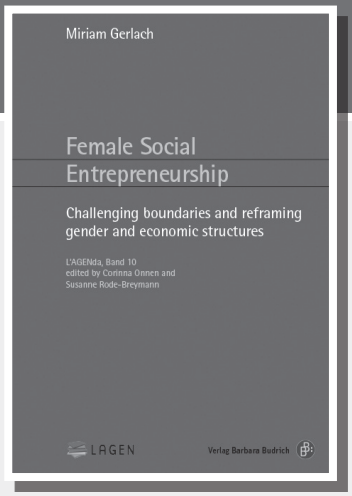

Jan Büssers, Anja Faulhaber, Myriam Raboldt, Rebecca Wiesner (eds.)

## Gendered Configurations of Humans and Machines

Interdisciplinary Contributions

*2021 • 306 pp. • Pb. • 38,00 € (D) • 39,10 € (A) • L'AGEGENda, vol. 8*
*ISBN 978-3-8474-2494-9 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1646-3*

In numerous fields of science, work, and everyday life, humans and machines have been increasingly entangled, developing an ever-growing toolbox of interactions. These entanglements affect our daily lives and pose possibilities as well as restrictions, chances as well as challenges. The contributions of this volume tackle related issues by adopting a highly interdisciplinary perspective. How do digitalization and artificial intelligence affect gender relations? How can intersectionality be newly understood in an increasingly internationally networked world? This volume is a collection of contributions deriving from the "Interdisciplinary Conference on the Relations of Humans, Machines and Gender" which took place in Braunschweig (October 16–19, 2019).



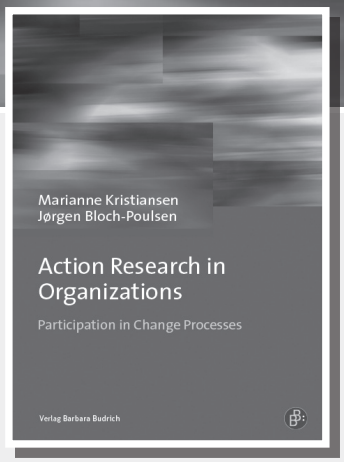

Miriam Gerlach

## Female Social Entrepreneurship

Challenging boundaries and reframing gender and economic structures

*2021 • 290 pp. • Pb. • 36,90 € (D) • 38,00 € (A) • L'AGENda, vol. 10*
*ISBN 978-3-8474-2530-4 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1678-4*

The confluence of entrepreneurship, gender, sustainability and especially the social dimension is intricate and underestimated. This book analyses social entrepreneurship through a gender lens by portraying German female social entrepreneurs and their political, social and economic contexts. Within a descriptive qualitative research design, a secondary analysis of different dimensions of the social entrepreneurship system and twenty-five in-depth interviews with social entrepreneurs and experts were conducted. The author shows that this sector entails potential to re-do gender and reframe the economy, challenging norms and borders towards systemic change.




Mariannne Kristiansen
Jørgen Bloch-Poulsen

# Action Research in Organizations

Participation in Change Processes

*2021. 328 pp. • Pb. • 39,90 € (D) • 41,10 € (A)*
*ISBN 978-3-8474-2445-1 • eISBN 978-3-8474-1663-0*

Who decides to initiate change processes in organizations? Who sets the goals? What does it mean for employees to participate in change processes? The book examines organizational change processes based on collaboration between employers, employees and action researchers in Europe and the U.S. in the later part of the 20th century. The authors offer important insights into participation and change in organizations for researchers and practitioners by identifying dilemmas and paradoxes, conflicting interests and exercising of power.

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