

# **Editorial**

## **To Our Readers – and to Werner Fricke**

Richard Ennals, Øyvind Pålshaugen, Danilo Streck

As you may already have noticed, IJAR has a new editor-in-chief, Danilo Streck. The editor-in-chief of the first five volumes of IJAR (2005-2009), Werner Fricke, has retired – or rather, he will retire. There is no point in keeping it a secret to our readers that even though Werner wanted to be the editor-in-chief of IJAR only until the end of 2009, he has nevertheless been the editor-in-charge of this first issue of IJAR in 2010. This is not because he didn't believe in Danilo Streck as the new editor, rather the opposite: Werner is so certain Danilo is the right person to be the new editor that he was willing to accept some extra workload in order to have Danilo in place from the first issue of 2010, regardless of the fact that Danilo had made it clear he had no possibility of contributing substantially to this very first issue of his period. We tell this story/anecdote just to give a glimpse of the strong commitment to IJAR that has characterised Werner throughout his whole period as an editor-in-chief. Actually, from a strict personal point of view, Werner may have wanted to retire earlier than he really did, but he did not want to do it before he knew that a new, competent editor-in-chief was in place. To obtain this, Werner has made lots of efforts in searching and relating to people. Rather early Danilo Streck turned out to be his first choice, and in the end Danilo accepted. But this is the happy end of the story; we have to start with the beginning.

Many readers will remember that IJAR is a renewed continuation of the journal *Concepts and Transformation* (CAT), which was founded in 1996 and published by John Benjamins (Amsterdam). The choice of Benjamins

was mainly due to the good relationship between the first editor of CAT, Hans van Beinum, and the Benjamins. In 2004, due to changes in the publishing policy of John Benjamins, who made the decision to terminate all book series and journals outside their core area, which was linguistics, it was necessary to find a new publisher for CAT. For a number of reasons this was not really an easy task; with no particular relations to any particular publisher, we had to approach the publishers so to speak via the market. The challenge was to make the publisher have confidence in the journal without imposing any demands that from our perspective meant ‘narrowing down’ the scope of the journal. E.g. Scandinavian publishers understandably had a certain bias towards the Scandinavian market, scholarly publishers understandably tended to have a certain bias towards ‘mainstream science’ and so on.

In this situation Werner, who (like Richard Ennals) had been member of the editorial board of CAT since 1998,<sup>1</sup> demonstrated both his commitment to the project of establishing an “International journal of action research” (which was the subtitle of CAT) and his entrepreneurial *Geist*. Among Werner’s initiatives was the relationship he created with Hampp Verlag, which eventually became our publisher. Werner’s arguments to convince Hampp were not based on a strategy of narrowing the scope of the journal. – *Im Gegenteil*, to quote one of Karl Marx’ favourite short-phrases. Werner argued in favour of *widening* the scope of the journal, both geographically and intellectually. Hampp Verlag found his argumentation sound, and the *International Journal of Action Research* was born 2005, with Werner Fricke as editor-in-chief.

We will not here repeat the arguments Werner brought forth in his dialogues with Hampp. In accordance with the ethos of action research it would be more apt to do this by taking a short glance at what came out of these arguments in practice. That is, to what extent has he succeeded in his efforts as editor-in-chief to keep the ‘promises’ made towards Hampp, and notably, towards you, the readers? Concerning the readers, below is an excerpt from what Werner wrote in his first ‘editorial’ in 2005:

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<sup>1</sup> Øyvind Pålshaugen was co-editor with Hans van Beinum from 1996.

We will maintain and further develop the best elements of the former *Concepts and Transformation*, especially

- the focus on the dialogical relationship between theory and practice,
- the dialogue on the present situation and further perspectives of action research with contributions from the leading persons in the field,
- an open un-dogmatic understanding of action research centred on the notion that organizational, regional and other forms of social development should be understood as multidimensional processes and viewed from a broad socio-ecological, participative and societal perspective.

Looking through the issues of the five volumes of IJAR that have been issued under the editorial leadership of Werner Fricke, it is not difficult to find examples which confirm that his policy declarations were more than just (his) words, they have been guidelines for his (and the co-editors) work with publishing the words of others. We will point at just a few, demonstrating the various aspects of what it means to ‘widen the scope’ instead of narrowing it down.

The very first issue was a double-issue on action research in Latin America. Werner’s engagement in publishing articles on action research from this continent is not a euro-centric question of ‘making other voices heard’: it is a question about learning from their unique experiences. He writes in his editorial: “In Latin America action research is deeply embedded in society. Hence its impact on social movements and social change is much greater than it is in Europe”. Other articles have followed, and IJAR’s new editor-in-chief is from Brazil. This is one aspect of widening the scope.

Another aspect concerns theory of science and methodology. Werner has always underlined that the question of what is good action research cannot be decoupled from the question of what are the practical results of action research projects. However, this does not mean that he is not quite aware that to obtain an appropriate understanding of how to view questions of practice in action research, reflections on theory of science, methodology and social theory in general may be helpful to avoid prejudgement and too hasty conclusions. Articles by e.g. Eikeland, Shotter, Fogh Kirkeby and Farrands docu-

ment that no particular ‘strand’ in meta-theory is given preferential treatment: it is the quality of the reasoning, not the content of the conclusion, that is decisive for the judgment of what to be published.

This notwithstanding, there can be no doubt that Werner’s preference is for interesting reflections based on well performed practice in action research projects, rather than meta-theoretical reflections. This preference is not only legitimate, it is most likely in tune with the preferences of most of IJAR’s readers. This way of approaching the relationship between theory and practice is what is aimed at with the formulation about “the dialogical relationship between theory and practice” from the editorial above. However, on the precondition that such a strong, dialogical or ‘internal’ relationship between theory and practice is established by the way action research projects are carried out, there are few preconditions regarding which field of practice and what kind of theory. This is demonstrated e.g. in the issue devoted to “the diversity in action research” (Nr. 1-2, 2007) and by lots of single articles in other issues in all volumes.

Finally, there is a certain type of article, that are centred neither on action research (of any kind or at any place) nor on methodology, that has been promoted by Werner: analyses of societal development that form much of the context and conditions for action research, e.g. developments of working life. In this area he has profited from his good relations to German social science, which comprise lots of competent researchers in this field. This also holds the other way round: Werner’s efforts to publish these kinds of analyses in IJAR have made a larger German audience take an interest in action research. This adds to the fact that the general strategy of ‘widening the scope’ of action research has made action research appear as less of a something only for the ‘especially interested’ also in Germany.

Needless to say, perhaps, is that Werner’s interest in ‘widening the scope’ is not identical with an attitude like “anything goes”. We, his co-editors, can confirm that lots of manuscripts that claim to report from action research projects have been rejected. The reasons for rejection is not that the criteria for what ‘counts’ as action research are applied too narrowly. Rather, it is the criteria for the *quality* of the written text that are decisive. It is not any pre-set standards for *what* can be argued, neither any pre-set standards for *how* to

present the arguments, but the standards that each manuscript itself claims to live up to, that set the standard for how to judge the quality of the text (above a certain minimum standard, of course). On the other hand, Werner has a good eye for the potential of a text, often better than the author, and that leads him into the efforts of making the author improve the manuscript beyond what has been recommended by the anonymous referees that are mandatory for scientific journals. For both these reasons, Werner's work with the manuscripts in dialogue with the authors has often far exceeded what is to be expected from an editor. This has been to the benefit of both IJAR and the author, and to the intellectual satisfaction of the editor.

From a personal point of view, we, his co-editors, have to say that Werner is a demanding editor. He does not only put strong quality demands on the authors, he also put demands on his co-editors as regards our contribution to the judgment about manuscripts and the response to authors. He justly expects a greater commitment to IJAR than what can be expected from anonymous referees, and the quality demands of the editor-in-chief are often stronger than those of anonymous reviewers. But as we have tried to make clear: Werner no doubt puts the strongest demands on himself, regarding both the quantity and the quality of his editorial work. IJAR would not have been what it is without the combination of the taste for big questions and the sense for details that characterise Werner's work.

As colleagues we are very happy that he will only retire from his position as editor-in-chief. Werner has agreed to continue in the role as co-editor/editor emeritus. Thus, we look forward to coming years of stimulating cooperation, and you, the readers, can look forward to coming issues of IJAR with stimulating articles!