

Editorial

“**The International Journal of Action Research** is problem driven; it is centred on the notion that organisational, regional and other forms of social development should be understood as multidimensional processes and viewed from a broad socio-ecological, participative and societal perspective.” These lines from the statement of purpose of IJAR express quite well what the reader can find in the articles published in this issue. To understand social developments from a multidimensional perspective may exceed the scope of action research, but action research cannot do without paying due attention to societal developments. Human action does not take place in a vacuum, and from the perspective of action research it is the role of research to help identifying the paths on which to walk the next steps.

Among the many changes in our times only few impact human life as much as those related to the work place. There are in this issue of IJAR three articles which are directly related to work and career. The first one, by *Klaus Dörre*, deals with developments in German trade unions since the world economic crisis of 2008/09. The author argues that, in spite of the appearances of success, there is a functional change in the role of trade unionism, mainly related to the inadequacy of the idea of unions as intermediary organisations. Of special interest for further research are the issues raised at the end of the article as a kind of agenda for research in the field: (a) to look deeper into the changes actually taking place without prejudice and indulgence; (b) to revisit and recreate the theoretical foundations to make them compatible with the observed reality and (c) to “scientifically sound out the subjective potential” still available among workers to revive trade unions.

Ingrid Artus, in a similar line of argument, maintains that within a context of increasingly de-standardised and ‘de-socialised’ forms of waged employment, the unions’ well-regulated cores seem more and more like tiny, ever-

dwindling islands of stability in an ocean of unregulated jobs. The main theme of the essay is the problem of the “cultural gap between traditional orientations of the (not only) German unions, and those employed in the expanding low-wage job sector.” The precariousness of work which affects large sectors of the labour market today is quite difficult to be understood from the perspective of the classical culture of management and negotiation of unions which grew within the economic, social and political conditions, and industrial relations of the 1970s and 1980s. The author presents as empirical data the strike of 2009-2010 when around 6000 *travailleurs sans papiers* (undocumented workers) fought for the legalisation of their status as immigrants with the support of the French union CGT. There is the need and the possibility that in this “rough sea” the inhabitants of the various islands and those adrift communicate with each other, hopefully towards the development of a new culture of solidarity.

The article by *Taylor McInnes and Charles P. Chen*, although related to work life, has its focus on career development. The authors examine personality and social factors which contribute to what they define as chronic career indecision: “Career indecision can be conceptualised most easily as one end of a continuum of decidedness, where the opposite end encompasses individuals who are confidently decided on a career.” The authors argue that action research may be an important tool for professionals to deal with chronic career indecision since it moves beyond the traditional approaches to knowledge building led by outside observers, encouraging and involving individuals and communities to take active part in planning and revising actions and decisions. Furthermore, action research can be applied in a micro and a macro level. In the first case, in an individual counselling relationship, and, in the second, through programmes, workshops, and other public initiatives and activities.

Finally, *Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva* analyses her experience of applying evaluation research in the context of social policies in Brazil. Her basic assumption is that evaluation of social policies, in order to be effective, should be participative and be understood as comprehending two inseparable dimensions: the technical and the political. In her paper the author demonstrates how the political dimension has by the time developed into a broader

approach beyond the purely technical practice of evaluation just controlling efficiency and efficacy of social programmes. Part of this broader approach is creating a process of revising ongoing programmes.¹ As such, it will be able to identify the underlying projects of society and the guiding principles and values of programmes and policies under evaluation, and play a role in framing political alternatives. Drawing on the tradition of participatory action research in Latin America, she intends to contribute to the development of effective social control of public policies.

The book review features the anthology of a leading intellectual of Latin America in the last decades. Orlando Fals Borda is known for developing IAP (*investigación acción participativa*), participatory action research, which has as a basic ingredient the commitment for social justice and the development of what he termed a *popular science*, not in opposition to modern science, but using peoples' knowledge as the matrix for understanding and changing social reality. The book is in Spanish, but many of Fals Borda's works are translated into English and other languages.

We, the editors, thank the authors for trusting their writings to the *International Journal of Action Research*, and hope that they will find good companions in the readers of the Journal.

Danilo Streck
Editor-in-chief

¹ Dealing with this question, Ozanira da Silva's paper continues in an interesting way the discussion started in IJAR 4 (1+2) 2008 about the need and possibilities of how to organize learning processes between different work life programme generations (presentation of international examples from different European countries).