

## Editorial

Action Research is by now a rather large family, assuming different names and developing a rich variety of strategies. Whether one identifies it as collaborative, dialogical, or interactive, there are nevertheless some assumptions which are more or less shared within this family. Some of them are the responsiveness to problems affecting communities or organisations; it is built on dialogue; it considers every participant as a producer of knowledge and as capable of contributing to the process; it is oriented towards emancipation and social transformation from the perspective of the underprivileged. These underlying assumptions guided the invitation to the Symposium on Action and Participatory Research which took place in Porto Alegre (Brazil), from June 20-22, 2011.<sup>1</sup> Over 50 researchers from different countries and from Brazil responded with their presence. The basic idea was to promote a space where researchers from the broad field of action research, independent of particular nuances of their practices and concepts, could meet, share and learn.

The programme was organised in three large sections which corresponded to the purposes of the symposium:

- a) *To be a space for meeting and planning*: The mornings were dedicated to discuss the creation of a permanent forum on action and participatory research, share and develop a research agenda and discuss perspectives for publications.

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<sup>1</sup> The Symposium was organised and sponsored by the Graduate School of Education of the Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of the Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, the Goethe Institute in Porto Alegre and the International Journal of Action Research.

- b) *To be a space for discussing practices and concepts*: in the afternoons, selected practices of action and participatory research were presented and discussed. It became clear in the process of planning that we should not fall into the trap of abstractly discussing concepts, but reflect on actual practice, which proved to be a very productive approach.
- c) *To establish a dialogue with other researchers and professionals*: in the evenings, there were organized panels at the Goethe Institute in Porto Alegre, where we were able to meet other professionals and students, in order to share with them our view on social research. It was also a moment of organising and systematising ideas and evaluating where we are at this point, where we are coming from, and where may be heading to.

This may be the first meeting of this type, but there is a road already travelled which can help in our search for direction and strategies. I bring to our attention the Congress on Participatory Convergence, in Cartagena (Colombia) in 1995. There Orlando Fals Borda referred to a previous symposium of 1977, and reaffirmed the necessity of participatory action research: “Old demons reappeared among us with new and more atrocious dressings.” He brought to the discussion well known researchers present in this congress, such as Budd Hall, Stephen Kemmis, Björn Gustavsen, Agnes Heller, Aníbal Quijano, Davydd Greenwood, Immanuel Wallerstein and Paulo Freire. In Cartagena, he remarked, “we did not see other alternatives as to go on with participatory *Quixotism*”.<sup>2</sup> We know of congresses in the Scandinavian countries, in Australia and in other parts of the world. To start recovering this memory and putting together the pieces could well be an item of the agenda of a series of future symposiums, the first of which we will be glad to announce soon.

This issue of the *International Journal of Action Research* publishes three papers presented and discussed at this symposium. In the first article Werner Fricke analyses an action research process carried out in the pre-cuttery department of a screw factory in North Germany from 1976 to 1979. The time span of over three decades that separates us from this experience is used

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<sup>2</sup> Fals Borda, Orlando (2009): *Una sociología sentipensante para América Latina*. Bogotá: Siglo Del Hombre Editores y CLACSO: 349.

by the author to raise fundamental questions regarding values, conditions and possibilities of action research. There is an institutional context to be considered, and there are also preconditions for employees to engage in a democratic participation processes, such as “spaces temporarily free of power”, “time”, and the development of “non-hierarchical, non dominant co-operation between workers and experts.” The article, which links today’s challenges of action research with what could be considered foundational experiences, can be recommended as a classic presentation and discussion of an action research practice.

Michel Thiollent presents elements to understand the evolution of action research and participatory research in recent decades, as well as some applications of this approach. Although taking into account international developments, his emphasis is on research experiences in Latin America, where the origin of participatory research is related to the social, religious and educational context of 1950’s and 60’s. Participatory methodologies have been largely used in educational research, in health areas (nursing, health promotion, family medicine and occupational medicine), in technological areas (among others in ergonomics and production engineering), and to a lesser degree in other social sciences. The author calls for methodological rigour, and admonishes us to resist the allures of power, in order to avoid our work becoming a procedure of convenience or a mere consulting technique.

The collective article by Danilo R. Streck, Edla Egghert, Emil Sobottka, Telmo Adams and Cheron Zanini Moretti has two intertwined objectives. The first one is to recover basic ideas about participatory budgeting and some results from the group’s research on the subject. The second one is to present the development of a research group from this original research project around “emerging themes”, such as the National Programme for Public Security and Citizenship, and the pedagogical mediations in associated work. The authors conclude their article by arguing that participatory action research should be considered at the same time as a social, a political, and a pedagogical practice.

Following the tradition of IJAR to publish relevant papers on contextual issues, Uli Brinkmann’s article discusses the concept of the internal entrepreneur, the *intrapreneur*, arguing that the shift from the entrepreneur to the

intrapreneur corresponds to the shifts in market demarcations after the breakdown of the planned economies in 1989-1991. His analysis attempts to denaturalise the teleology of the market, according to which the idea of the intrapreneur would soon become hegemonic. The author identifies a series of issues which are potential *loci* of resistance and of conflict, such as the not so voluntary character of entrepreneurial involvement; the breach between the level of information provided, and the competences and resources granted on one side, and the high risk and responsibility assignment on the other. Although not dealing directly with action research, Brinkmann's analysis is of fundamental relevance for today's participatory research methodologies within organisations.

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