

Innovatory Qualifications and Democratic Participation. Experiences and Reflexions stimulated by an Action Research Project

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This paper is about an action research project which took place from 1976 – 1979 in a screw factory in Northern Germany. This is long time ago, but the action research process has developed perspectives which are very up to date thirty five years later, in German trade unions as well as in work life in general.

Within a joint learning and development endeavour 45 workers and a group of 5 researchers (3 sociologists, 1 psychologist, 1 engineer) have co-operated in a democratic participation process. We experienced action research as dialogical, devoted to democracy as a value, enhancing all participants' innovative qualifications, and very much based on joint learning and education. One of the main results is the better knowledge of preconditions for democratic participation in work life: Democratic participation needs public spaces in organisations; it needs time to develop; changes must meet participants' interests; cooperation between participants has to be as much non-hierarchical as possible (see Gustavsen's concept of democratic dialogue: Gustavsen 1992); and there has to be a lot of learning and education incorporated into the action research process.

Key words: democratic dialogue, public space in organisations, innovatory qualifications, joint learning and change, participation in practical and theoretical discourses