

## Editorial

In this issue the *International Journal of Action Research* publishes five additional papers presented and discussed at the Symposium on Action and Participatory Research which took place in Porto Alegre, from June 20 to 22, 2011. As remarked in IJAR 7(2)2011, it was an exceptional opportunity for exchange of research practices and for theoretical advancements. Some days ago the Organising Committee still received the following message from a colleague from Rio de Janeiro (Brazil): “The symposium was the best event I have participated this year! I confess to be somewhat tired of mega events, where there is little space for exchange. Besides, you seem to foster utopia in daily work. I hope that new encounters as these will happen”. The good news for Mariana Moreira and for those who gathered in this symposium, for those who for various reasons could not make it to Porto Alegre, and for the many who will join us in future meetings is that there are under way preparations for a next symposium. Mariana’s comments about utopia grasp the sense of social research being a tool for people to transform their life and reality which pervaded the presentations and discussions.

In the opening article Werner Fricke addresses the following questions: “Which is the socio-political context enabling action research? How can action research enhance broad socio-political programmes in the field of work life reform? Under which conditions can action research contribute to social learning and development processes?” His argument is that single case studies are relevant, but that at the same time one has to consider the socio-political context in which action research takes place, or where eventually it cannot take place. Werner Fricke draws specially on the experience of Scandinavian countries and Germany, pointing out similarities and differences. Then he guides us through various programmes developed both in Norway and Sweden, identifying possibilities for the present and future of action research. Although experiences from other contexts are mentioned only in

passing, the reader has in this article a very valuable tool to find his/her way through the variety of action research practices and theoretical approaches. As a complement, I would like to direct the reader's attention to the article by Michel Thiollent, "Action Research and Participatory Research: An Overview", published in *IJAR* 7(2), 2011:160-174.

Gerhard Riemann analyses the use of "self-reflective ethnographic research" with students of social work. He calls it self-reflective, because it is about what students encounter in their learning environment, as well as within themselves. Through detailed descriptions of their field practice, which are later discussed, social work students are educated to become self-critical and more sensitive professionals. The author argues that students indeed occupy a privileged position to penetrate some places of social reality, for which the professional eye of both social workers and researchers has been blinded. Besides, by exercising the discipline of writing, students are enabled to learn to say their own word about their practice and their world. Regarding action research, the author leaves the following challenge: "I trust that readers who are at home in traditions of action and participatory research have discovered many of their own relevancies and concerns in the style of work which has been described in this paper, even though possible differences should not be obscured."

The article by Wivian Weller and Catarina Malheiros da Silva establishes a dialogue between participatory research as developed in Latin America, and the documentary method, which has its origins in Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. Although influenced by European and North American traditions of action research, participatory research in Latin America presents some peculiar characteristics due to its proximity to popular social movements in the second half of last century. The documentary method, on its turn, has developed theoretical and practical instruments which allow access to the structure of action, and enable the reconstruction of action from the perspective of the actors. There are presented two studies carried out in Brazil which illustrate the operationalisation of the documentary method, as well as revealing the advantage of pursuing this dialogue.

Elza Falchembach describes and analyses a systematisation experience with rural workers' trade unions in Brazil. After presenting the object of her

analyses, i.e., the workers' organisation and their respective training and formative programmes, the author outlines her understanding of systematisation, a widespread practice in Latin America today, which claims its origin in Orlando Fals Borda's participatory action research. In the previous issue of IJAR [7(1), 2011] Alfonso Torres Carrillo had already presented some of the conceptual and practical tendencies of systematisation, so that in this article the reader can find an actual presentation and analysis of a project carried out with this methodology. In Falkembach's detailed presentation, the subjective aspects of all stakeholders involved in the process deserve special attention.

The fifth article, by Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Paulsen, brings to the open a discussion which underlies all social research, but which gains a special relevance in action research, namely, the relationship between participation and power. The authors argue that "it is necessary to co-create a participatory epistemology to shed light on how different groups of professionals contribute to different results and knowledge production, as well as to self-critically inquire into how participation is enacted as power in the spectrum between empowerment and constraint." The article's argumentation is based on the authors' experience with action research processes, thus allowing the reader to follow the arguments and enter a fruitful discussion.

As an exercise of the discussion provoked by the article by Marianne Kristiansen and Jørgen Bloch-Paulsen, the *International Journal of Action Research* reintroduces a section which brought important contributions in the journal's history. The **Discussion Forum** provides a room for dialogue among researchers, presuming that the open discussion of ideas, referred to actual practice, is still the most appropriate way to renew action research in face of changing socio-political conditions. In this issue we have Werner Fricke's discussion based on the central concepts of power and participation. The dialogue proceeds with the authors' response, bringing in new elements and elucidating others.

We invite our readers to join us in this **Discussion Forum**.

*Danilo R. Streck*  
Editor-in-chief