

Editorial

A basic characteristic of action research is that it is part of the movement of society. It does not just produce findings to be applied to some problems, but it produces knowledge that is actionable (Gustaven, 2007), i.e., that can be fed into the processes of change. In this issue of the *International Journal of Action Research (IJAR)* we have the possibility to experience how researchers from different practical fields attempt to deal with the production of knowledge in local situations. These practices, as we will see below, include the work place, health care, education, tourism and ecology. However, the scope of use and interest goes beyond these specific practices, since one of the aims of action research is also to generate theory through involvement and dialogue. This means that the reader will find relevant methodological and theoretical insights for developing his/her own research practice. Being based on praxis, action research is not “dogmatic” and makes use of a variety of tools provided by social theories and research methodologies. Underlying all of them is the principle of participation, as will be discussed in some of the articles that make up this issue.

Furthermore, the articles also give a good picture of the geographical scope of action research and, more generally, of participatory methodologies. We understand that one of the basic roles of this journal is to provide a platform for dialogue among the various traditions of action research. In this regard, three special issues of IJAR will be of interest to the reader who wants to have a more systematic view of previous discussions: a special issue on Latin American perspectives on action and participatory research [1(1), 2005]; an issue titled “Diversity of Action Research: Experiences and Perspectives”, bringing together discussion from different theoretical and geographical backgrounds [3(1+2), 2007]; and the recent special issue on “Action Research: Different Conceptualisations, Similar or Different Approaches?” [8(1), 2012].

In the first article, *Tuomo Alasoini* discusses employee participation and the quality of working life in the context of broad-based innovation policy in Finland. He builds on the assumption that workplace development in Nordic countries has traditionally been based on some principles to which the key stakeholders are committed, and which provide the backdrop for the implementation of new programmes. The article explores two basic questions: the first one is related to the employees' participation in workplace development, and the second deals with the relationship of working life quality to corporate productivity and competitiveness. Programmes in Finland, such as *Liideri*, provide the empirical basis for the reflection. The author suggests that systematic participation in innovation and development activities at workplaces in the rapidly changing working life is probably the most sustainable way of promoting workplace democracy and quality of working life. At the same time, the author points to the fact that it is not just a matter of technical rationality, and that current developments in capitalist enterprises require attention to the ideological component. This problem calls for further systematic reflection: how to avoid participation to become just an instrument for better working life quality within an organisation, without due consideration to the power structures that set the context for managerial practices.

Hella von Unger presents a study using participatory health research with immigrant communities in Germany. The author frames the article within the broad context of participatory methodologies in action research in health studies, which have overall two basic features: a) involve patients, participants, service providers and community members as partners in the research process, and b) aim to effect change through research, empowerment and education. Her study, while attentive to the general developments in the field, refers especially to the North American experiences with community-based research. The reader can find in this article a careful description of the research process with different groups in four German cities (Berlin, Dortmund, Hamburg and Osnabrück), which represents a significant methodological challenge discussed in the project. The stage model of participation provides the tool for assessing the level and type of participation, the factors that enabled and that hindered participation. The conclusions point to the relevance of participation, for both the prevention practice regarding HIV

risks and generating knowledge on the specific subject and methodological innovations.

The next article takes us to South Brazil, where *Leandro Rogério Pinheiro* developed a study on the working conditions of trash pickers. In many Brazilian cities, thousands of men and women make their living separating solid residues for recycling. There are economical and ecological reasons that are usually used to support this activity. Pinheiro's article challenges some of these assumption, arguing that "the position taking by trash pickers is organised based on a history of precarious inclusion; what is more, transience at work and solidarity ties regarding subsistence in the field combine with scarce interest in environmental causes." Having Bourdieu as a theoretical dialogue partner, he discloses how the production of the trash pickers' narratives reveal a certain "enchanted" relation with a game that is the product of an ontological complicity relation between the mental structures and the objective structures of the social space.

Konanani Khorommbi, Willem (Willie) Coetzee, and Sue Geldenhuys take us to a journey of participatory research in the region of the Lake Fundudzi catchment, in South Africa. Four research teams were formed to involve the local community towards the determination of the types of tourism developments, by means of Participatory Action Research. Among the various important issues raised by the study, I highlight the challenge of doing participatory research with very different cultures, which in this case meant dialogue with local tribal communities and leaders. Data was collected following the four stages of participatory mapping, situational analysis, transact walks, and planning. The article explores, one by one, the tourism potential as well as the risk involved in the activities in each of the natural and cultural resources, from mountains and caves to food and rituals. In a final note the authors remark that "the sacred lake is now a national heritage site and the authors are of the opinion that the PAR of this research project empowered the communities realising the value of their culture and heritage." This is part of the "nature of action and participatory research".

Karina Becker's article on "Hybrid Participation" deals with the importance of identifying or creating instruments to fill out the gap between individual participation and institutional co-determination. Her study refers to the

German work place system, where there is statutory provision for institutionalised co-determination, but is of interest for understanding the changes in the idea and ideal of participation in today's organisations at large. Such changes as differentiation of workplace, problems of co-management, the paradoxes of professionalisation, the internalisation of control and co-ordination can be found in any organisation, with distinct nuances according to the legal framework. She argues that forms of hybrid participation can bridge the gap between participation and co-determination, while strengthening in-company democracy. Besides, they create a platform for endowing the company co-determination structure with a new legitimacy. The reader will find inspiring examples of how this tool of hybrid participation can be used and developed. Although the author refers to the workplace system, her concept of "hybrid participation" may be a relevant tool for dealing with the complexity of participation in other social contexts.

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References

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