

## Editorial

This special issue is intended as a contribution to the theme “Bridging in Action Research” to be discussed in the *V Symposium of the International Journal of Action Research* to be hosted by Orkestra, Basque Institute of Competitiveness at Deusto University, in San Sebastian (Spain), on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2020. The theme is inspired by the concept of Zubigintza, which is the name of the action research laboratory in Orkestra. In the Basque language, it means “building bridges”.

Needless to say, building bridges is a tremendous challenge at a time of walls and fences that divide communities and countries; of ideological polarisations that separate the “good” and the “bad”; of prejudices that harm mostly the ones that lack resources for defending themselves. Building bridges is a particular challenge for action research, which is committed to produce knowledge with people in order to promote changes in their lives, organisations and communities. It is a research practice driven by values of democratic participation and social justice.

The five articles presented in this special issue deal with different types of bridges, with different agents that participate in building them, and with different social, political and cultural contexts. The contributions from Europe and Latin America provide an interesting panorama of possibilities for action research or other participatory research methodologies as important tools for connecting and engaging people and institutions in producing transformative knowledge.

Patricia Canto-Farachala and Miren Estensoro propose bridging between different action research communities as a pathway to connectivity. Bridging is defined as a dialogue that takes place in spaces that bring together different action research communities, where connectivity can occur. Connectivity, in this sense, becomes a criterion for external validity of action research that focuses on the workability of new knowledge in other contexts. Based on comparative case studies, the authors present and discuss the potential of connectivity: as distinct from transferability, enhancing mutual qualification of work in two action research communities: one based in Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness, a research institute in the Basque Country (Spain) and the other in Praxis, a capacity-building research institute in Rafaela (Argentina). The authors argue that one step in the way of maximising action research potential to address the complex global challenges of our time is to strengthen ties among different action research communities.

The second article, by Alfonso Torres Carrillo, analyses the relationship between higher education institutions, researchers, and social movements in Colombia based on two experiences. The first one is the study with peasant movements from the Atlantic Coast led by Orlando Fals Borda in the 1970s and which originated Participatory Action Research. The second is a recent project conducted by a research group at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* focused on the systematisation of practices with popular organisations. According to the author there is a growing trend of collaboration between academia and social movements, sometimes fomented through the formalisation of the relationship between researchers and social organisations with the creation of observatories and networks. The article shows us that this kind of bridging is not an automatic process, but it is developed through decades within the conflictual Colombian society.

Another context of bridging is presented by Egoitz Pomares, who in his article reviews the concept of the Workplace Innovation Programmes as a public policy tool supported by research. The article analyses different approaches and strategies for policymaking, aiming at better understanding of how programmes operate. The premise is that programmes have undergone a transformation through changes in the design and implementation methods, and thus there is the need for frameworks for the identification of criteria that favour a better understanding of how they operate. The authors identifies how programmes can be useful bridges to connect, through action research in working life, a great variety of knowledge in favour of working life reform.

Oscar Jara Holliday presents *sistematización de experiencias* as a proposal for the production of knowledge about and based on educational, organisational and social and community practices. In this article he argues that *sistematización de experiencias* of University Extension can help strengthen the transforming commitment of the university work, and contribute to the production of academic knowledge fed by the wealth of economic, social, political and cultural reality in which the University is inserted. Based on the practice with the University of Costa Rica and others, there are presented concrete steps to develop *sistematización de experiencias* within the university. Jara points out that through *sistematización de experiencias* paths have been opened to achieve the always wanted inter or transdisciplinarity in academic work, and also the articulation of the dimensions of researching, teaching and extension. In other words, a complex set of bridge building processes are mobilised in this process.

The fifth article is a reprint of Bjørn Gustavsen's seminal article "Action research and the problem of the single case". The main argument is that the idea is not to replace the single case with a number of cases but to create or support social movements, i.e., a series of events that are linked to each other, and where the meaning and construction of each event is part of a broader stream of events, and not a self-sufficient element in an aggregate. In the Introduction to the paper, Richard Ennals reminds us that for Gustavsen national programmes were "waves", intended to stimulate social movements and bring about sustainable change; and that the action researcher functions as an "active particle", whether in a project or a programme.

There are bridges, as Richard Ennals provocatively reminds us when introducing Gustavsen's article, which were there all the time, and that it is up to us to use them. But as we saw in the papers in this issue, building bridges can be demanding work. Either having been

there or as projects, we are in need of bridges that connect us among ourselves as researchers and peoples, but at the same time we need bridges that connect us to a more just future, socially and environmentally. Action research, as the articles have shown, has much to contribute.

Finally, in the name of the team of editors of the *International Journal of Action Research*, we thank the contributors to this issue and invite the readers to join forces in building bridges.

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Co-editors of this special issue