Editorial

Future perspectives on action research

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This is my first editorial as editor in chief of *International Journal of Action Research* (IJAR), and I am happy to open it by referring to the first contribution in this issue, a tribute to Danilo Streck, who has preceded me serving our journal for 12 years, from 2010 to 2021. The tribute is signed by Werner Fricke, who made the initial proposal and Olav Eikeland, Richard Ennals, Øyvind Palshaugen, Emil Albert Sobottka and me, who have had the pleasure to work with Danilo in the group of editors of IJAR in recent years.

As part of the same transition process, Øyvind Palshaugen will not continue as editor in the future. It is thus a good moment to learn from his experience with action research, which we do through an interview entitled "*40 years in 40 minutes*" where Øyvind starts by sharing how he came to action research; reflects on relevant authors, organisations and traditions in his trajectory, and discusses the "use of words" and the relevance of action research cases as a mean to create knowledge of general value.

These changes in IJAR take place in a moment when humanity is dealing, among others, with a pandemic, wars, and the imminent need to react to climate change. We need, thus, to continue asking ourselves what was, what is, and what can be the contribution of action research to social challenges.

Werner Fricke, Davydd Greenwood, Danilo Streck and I have been writing about it since we met in the IJAR 2020 event. At that moment Werner Fricke posed the emergent challenges he saw for action research and invited the rest of us to develop a coherent argument about it without hiding our differences and diverse priorities. We believe we have come together with an article, "*On Social Productivity and Future Perspectives on Action Research*", that manifests ways of making our differences count.

Our exploration of common ground starts by acknowledging that the new forms of capitalism are fracturing individuals into apolitical wants and needs, neutralising the core of action research, which is the integrity of the individual and the social fabric. Based on the discussion of free market, disaster capitalism and surveillance capitalism, we have searched for positive deviants. These are action research related processes where participants aim at counteracting these trends in some way or other. Learning from these experiences, we discuss how action research can contribute to re-creating the citizen-actor, and to integrating individuals in society.

Our aim with this paper is not to provide any definite answers, but to initiate a dialogue forum in IJAR on the future perspectives of action research, stimulating a discussion about the questions raised. Regarding the actual and historical strengths and weaknesses of action research and the social and economic changes that have occurred since the times of Kurt Lewin and Karl Polanyi we think the time has come to reflect on whether and how action research can meet the challenges of the more and more aggressive and destructive forms of modern capitalism. We insist in action researchers' responsibility to foster and to build on the integrity and common decency of the individual, to enable active citizens to self-determination at work and to create democratic societies. Action research is about democratic and

participative values, which are the essence of its social responsibility very much in contrast to that of neoliberal scholars.

We argue that AR has been successful in various initiatives to practice its values in co-operation with a great variety of practitioners and practitioner organisations. What is missing so far are powerful social and political actors who are able to make AR values guide social practice beyond a series of single cases or projects limited in time and space. The crucial question is how AR may reach social impact beyond these limitations. One way may be coalitions between action research and social movements. Another option is action research organised by social movements, and a third possibility may be to engage in cooperation between action research and social movements.

We want to stimulate a dialogue among action researchers on these issues, visions and research practices, and on how to enable action research to contribute to or create social movements against the destructive tendencies of modern capitalism.

The first discussion paper integrated in this dialogue is the one by Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga in this issue. He considers that the keystone of Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck's text is their call for the recreation of integral individuals endowed with agency and in search of a change in power relationships. This is, in his opinion, a nodal point of the various traditions of action research. His discussion is entitled *"When the Cinderellas unite"*, and he uses this metaphor to address the change needed by vulnerable people more accustomed to scrubbing floors (like Cinderella), than dancing in luxurious salons (like stepmothers). He argues that the role of action researchers is to help Cinderellas to throw off the yoke of those who condemn them to prostration, allowing them to rise up to recreate new forms of power. However, he expects no fairy godmothers' magic to bring about this change. Instead, he advocates connecting work, effort, intelligence and determination of the different Cinderellas, which he names as the magic of society.

Another relevant contribution to the discussion initiated in this issue is the book review by Jan J. Zygmuntowski. Under the title *"Surveil and Control: A critical review of "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism""*, he discusses Shoshanna Zuboff's book, "The Age of Surveillance Capitalism", which is one of the main references in Fricke, Greenwood, Larrea and Streck's article. Zygmuntowski takes a critical stance and argues that this concept has taken a life of its own, becoming a sign of a great oeuvre and a dazzling artist, but much less of critical accuracy. His review mirrors the book's structure, which is divided in three parts: the origin of online surveillance, expansion to real-world spaces, and transformation into a hegemonic power.

Zygmuntowski argues that the total equation is more complex than surveillance alone, and it is a consequence of the legacy of capitalist economy and novel ICT technologies. Acknowledging such complexity is necessary to leverage the planetary collective intelligence to rapidly tackle the problems of Anthropocene: climate change, loss of biodiversity, emerging biothreats, inequity and instability of our civilization which produce suffering and conflicts.

If action research is to make a contribution to tackling these problems, it will be relevant that more researchers join this endeavour and to achieve this, we can work to make action research a feasible alternative in different fields. This is the challenge the two other articles in this issue can help address.

Liliam María Orquiza, Laura Sánchez García and Bruno Gabriel Costelini, in their article *"How is Action Research Being Used in Computer Science? A Review"* help us understand the

extent to which action research is being considered in this field, which is relevant in the face of the discussion on surveillance capitalism previously presented. The paper analyses top cited papers, authors, journals, countries and institutions that apply action research in computer science and describes how action research contradicts practices of unequal and nondemocratic political economic and social systems, challenging the statement of a positivist view of science and promoting the idea of socially built knowledge, starting from a position of change with others.

One of their conclusions is that the focus of action research in this field, invariably, leaves the artifact behind and locks in the user and their context. They also explore the idea that human actions and social contexts are moved by complex expectations and interpretations, making their results contingent, unpredictable and nondeterministic. Consequently, ITCs artifacts, such as algorithm machines are incapable of dealing with them. In this context they conclude action research can be an invaluable tool to help advancing and developing a more effective and just field within Computer Science.

On the other hand, Malida Mooken, in the article "*Articulating inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development",* explores what features of action research can be most valued by researchers in territorial development that are not nowadays using action research. This can be a reflection on how the community of action researchers can grow to gain critical mass to make action research more relevant in the face of social challenges. Mooken shares her influences in action research, John Dewey and action research for territorial development, and embarks on a self-inquiry process based on two cases where she participated as a researcher. As a result, she proposes a conceptual framework composed of the three features/values of action research that motivated her decision to adopt this approach: inquiry in real time, contextual-temporality and value orientation. Their discussion, combining conceptual influences and practical knowledge, helps understand the potential of action research.

We hope that the issue inspires action researchers to explore common ground to face social challenges and non-action researchers to consider action research as a potential path to make their research more transformative.