Articulating inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development

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Abstract This paper discusses the inherent values of action research for newcomers coming from the field of territorial development. The discussion is framed around three dimensions: 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time; 2) contextual-temporal qualities of the process; and 3) reflecting-acting on what we have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens. The conceptualisation builds on theoretical influences, most notably the writings of John Dewey and action research for territorial development, and my own practice. Two cases are discussed. One is about a Knowledge Transfer Partnership in Scotland, and the other is with regards to on-going work in the wine-producing territory of British Columbia, Canada.

Keywords: action research, territorial development, inherent values, Dewey

Una articulación de los valores inherentes de la investigación acción para quienes se aproximan a ella por primera vez desde el desarrollo territorial

Resumen Este artículo debate los valores inherentes de la investigación acción para aquellas personas que se aproximan a esta forma de investigación por primera vez y desde el campo del desarrollo territorial. La discusión se plantea en torno a tres dimensiones: 1) la investigación realizada sobre situaciones problemáticas en tiempo real; 2) las cualidades contextuales-temporales del proceso y 3) la reflexión-acción sobre las razones para valorar ciertos modos de ser y de hacer de las personas investigadoras, participantes, actores facilitadores y la ciudadanía. La conceptualización está basada, además de en mi propia experiencia, en una serie de influencias teóricas, entre las que destacan John Dewey y la investigación acción para el desarrollo territorial. Se discuten, además, dos casos. Uno vinculado a la entidad denominada Knowledge Transfer Partnership en Escocia, y el otro conectado al trabajo en curso en el territorio productor de vino en la Columbia Británica, Canadá.

Palabras claves: Investigación acción, desarrollo territorial, valores inherentes, Dewey

1. Introduction

Amidst complex cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political dynamics, organisations and territories face increasing challenges, not least related to concerns like climate change, and inequalities. Universities as territorial actors with local and global knowledge capabilities are called upon to help address those challenges (Benneworth, 2013; Geschwind, Kekäle, Pinheiro, & Sorensen, 2019). This expectation of universities to meet societal needs is

not new. What has become clearer is that more collaborative and proactive approaches to research are needed.

The importance of knowledge co-creation and change through "action, co-ordination and collaboration across knowledge domains, sectors and types of organisations" is highlighted in policy and managerial circles (Geschwind et al., 2019, p.13). In responding to policy and societal demand, universities are directing more attention to the so-called third mission of societal engagement (Laredo, 2007; Uyarra, 2010; Karlsen & Larrea 2019). An implication is that university researchers are having to reimagine and reframe how they think about and approach research. To avoid a divisive approach to research, teaching and societal engagement, a balancing act of pursuing research that matters to society, in a way that is conducive to both good (and better) research, and practical outcomes, is desirable.

For many researchers, especially those who have been trained in traditional approaches, it may not be straightforward to change how they conduct research. Action research characterised by an integrative approach to action, research and participation in real-time offers meaningful perspectives in that regard. With that in mind, the paper explores the question: what are inherent values of action research that may appeal to those researchers who need to break away from hegemonic practices, and do research differently? By 'inherent values', I refer to what is valuable in and of the inquiry process itself. Inherent values are not external to the inquiry; they are at its core and define it.

Practical insights about the inherent values of action research are offered through two case presentations. One case is about a project between a university and an arts centre in Scotland, and the other concerns on-going work of a university in a wine-producing territory in Canada. Recognising that it is not possible to cover all the valuable aspects of action research in this paper, the discussion is framed around three dimensions: 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time; 2) contextual-temporal qualities of the process; and 3) reflecting, and acting on what people have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens. The framework is a result of connecting theoretical influences with my practice in the cases in the field of territorial development.

The paper is pertinent to newcomers to action research coming from the field of territorial development, where there are pressures to engage in third mission activities and deliver productive outcomes on various fronts (Aranguren, M. J., Guibert, J. M., Valdaliso, J. M., & Wilson, 2016). For example, by producing knowledge that is relevant to society and advances academic debates, *and* demonstrates the impact generated through those processes through academic reflection, writing and publications (Aranguren, Canto-Farachala & Wilson, 2021). The discussion may also resonate with researchers from other fields experiencing similar trends.

The paper is organised as follows. First, the rationale for the paper, its main focus and objective, and the interplay between first-person and second-person inquiry are articulated. Thereafter, concepts used in the case discussions, and which inform the framing of inherent values, are introduced. The two cases are subsequently introduced. Drawing on theoretical concepts and my learning from the cases, I develop the arguments about the three valuable dimensions to action research. The cases are discussed before concluding with final reflections.

2.   Underlying rationale for the paper

Despite its widespread acceptance in certain fields, action research remains under-explored in others. In the introduction to the Special Issue of the International Journal of Action Research on Action Research, Policy and Politics, Wittmayer, Bartels & Larrea (2021) point out how action research remains at the margin of mainstream policy analysis (which still uses a "rationalist-empiricist framework"), sustainability transition research, and territorial development (which takes as its base local and regional economic development studies). A small number of researchers practice action research in those fields. Similar views have been expressed about business and management (Shani & Coghlan, 2019) and regional economic development more broadly (Larrea, Estensoro, & Sisti, 2018).

The paper is principally directed to researchers in the above-mentioned fields, encouraging them to explore action research. Those in territorial development might especially relate to the discussion, as explicit references are made to existing literature, especially action research for territorial development, and as mentioned earlier, the two cases in this paper relate to that field.

Action research is predominantly discussed in terms of producing actionable knowledge and social transformation. Much less is written about the inherent values of the process of inquiry itself. However, as observed by Eikeland (2007), mainstream researchers are not typically interested in changing things. A question that arises is: why would researchers, whose primary concern may not be to create change, say to a particular context, adopt action research? Arguments about enhancing the research process: its quality, including what and how we know, can be spelled out for those who are beginning to explore action research, and are still indecisive about it. This is why the paper focuses on providing insights about the inherent values of action research. In doing so, the paper contributes to making "research-intrinsic arguments" about action research more explicit (Eikeland, 2007, p.50).

In writing the discussion, I weave in accounts of first-person, and second-person inquiry. This interplay allows me to express my own voice, and to balance it with perspectives developed with participants. This reflects my actual practice of action research, where both first-person and second-person inquiry play a critical part.

First-person inquiry involves developing the capabilities to be aware of one's own thoughts, emotions, actions, and impact in and on the process, and continuously asking ourselves while acting and post-acting: what is really going on (Larrea, 2020). Experience, acting responsibly, and understanding how one comes to know and forms judgment, are central to this process of self-inquiry (Coghlan & Shani, 2021). Second-person inquiry begins with "interpersonal dialogue and includes the development of communities of inquiry and learning organizations" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.xxvi). This typically takes place in small groups, composed of researchers and collaborators inquiring on common areas of concern, and sharing their experience, understanding, inter-subjectivities and possible courses of action (Coghlan & Shahani, 2021).

3.   Conceptual Discussion

Across its various strands, action research is well-known for being value-oriented, socially-engaged, action-oriented, context-sensitive, dialogical, participatory, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary (Elden & Levin, 1991; Greenwood & Levin, 2001; Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003; Olsen & Lindøe, 2004; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Coghlan, 2016). In this section, I focus on specific concepts that are relevant to understanding the subsequent arguments around three valuables aspects of action research, and the case discussions.

I introduce key concepts from the writings of John Dewey that inspired my reflections about the inherent values of inquiry. His work on approaching questions of knowledge from a practical perspective resonated with me when I was explicitly looking to find answers about how I could do relevant and rigorous research in the context of the first case: the project between a university and an arts centre in Scotland.

Then, I address key notions from contemporary action research literature in the field of territorial development, which are useful to understand the inquiry process in the context of the wine-producing territory of British Columbia.

3.1   Influence of John Dewey

John Dewey, one of the founders of the philosophical pragmatist tradition, is an important inspiration for action research (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Greenwood & Levin, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). His theory of inquiry is especially relevant. Dewey is concerned with the practical consequences of action (Biesta & Burbules, 2003; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). Tied in to that concern is an appreciation of what other people know and what people learn through experience (Randall, 1953). In that sense, knowledge is gained through lived experience, and reflective activity (Hickman & Alexander, 2009). An appreciation of inquiry through these notions led me to better engage with others and what they know, and to reflect and learn concurrently from my own lived experience through self-inquiry. This practice has in turn shaped my thinking about the inherent values of action research, and is linked to the earlier discussion on first-person and second-person inquiry.

As written by Geiger (1958, p.63), "the situation in which knowledge is born, according to Dewey, is a problematic one". A **problematic situation** is indeterminate, uncertain, doubtful, and obscure (Dewey, 1938). It poses difficulty, and though one knows that *something* has to be done, it is not clear: "what sort of action the situation demands" or "how the situation should be dealt with" (ibid., p.161). Out of this unsettled situation grows the question that has to be answered, and thus inquiry begins.

Dewey rejects dualism, for example of object and subject, mind and matter, man and nature, individuals and the social world, action and thought. In his view, there should be a "wider and freer range in inquiry" that is not constrained by a predetermined fixed "framework of reference" set by external forces (1947, p. 381). There is a rejection of the hierarchical division between theory and practice, that typically characterises mainstream academic work, wherein theory is considered the highest form of knowledge. Theory and action are deemed

inseparable. In action research, such concerns are reflected through concepts like praxis (Freire, 1996; Eikeland, 2012), and reflection-in-action (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014).

Central to Dewey's philosophical approach is the transaction between living organisms and their environment through which knowledge is constructed. Our environments impact us. Our beings and doings also have an impact on our environments, and we in turn undergo the consequences in the process of inter-action. There is a transactional process, which is relational and temporal involving adaptation and continuous readjustment over time. Linking this to research more explicitly, in the "act of knowing: and hence in research, both the knower and what is to be known are changed by the transaction between them" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p.12).

Understanding inquiry in terms of a transactional process, highlights its **contextual and temporal qualities.** Consider the following: the "'settlement' of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion will always remain settled [. . .] the criterion of what is taken to be settled, or to be knowledge, is being so settled that it is available as a resource in further inquiry; not being settled in such a way as not to be subject to revision in further inquiry" (Dewey 1938, p. 8–9). Inquiry is contextual, and yet there is some sort of continuity that transcends situations in our process of thinking, action, and transformation.

Values "assumes an ineludible explicit character" in action research (Streck, 2018, p.9). For Dewey, no inquiry is value-neutral (Ralston, 2010). Values, which give enriched meaning to choices, behaviours, and actions become more explicit through the transactional process of inquiry. When faced with a doubtful or an unsettled situation, reflection and action are triggered by the environing conditions, and what people have reason to value being and doing in that context.

The significance of "problematic situation", "contextual and temporal qualities", and "values" have been introduced and positioned within a broader discussion of inquiry. Key takeaways are: the need to understand a problematic situation contextually and temporally, and allowing an inquiry to unfold without imposing pre-determined fixed frameworks that constrain reflective activity about what people, including action researchers, have reason to value being and doing, and the resulting transformation.

The concepts set the foundation for discussing the inherent values of action research in territorial development, and the cases. They do not exist in silos, but are rooted in a rich conceptualisation that knowledge is generated through a process of lived experience and reflective activity.

3.2   Action research for territorial development (ARTD)

The other significant influence in conceiving the inherent values is action research for territorial development (ARTD; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). In ARTD, action researchers combine knowledge in regional and local economic development with action research (Larrea, 2019), and emphasise the joint participation of researchers and other actors in territorial development. Unlike other approaches in territorial development, ARTD shows the value of reflecting on the role of action researchers, and changes that occur within researchers, other participants and the overall process. This provides a reference point for undertaking a different approach, in

contrast to mainstream ones, when thinking about and doing research in the context of territorial development.

For the purpose of the discussion in this paper, I focus on four inter-related notions of ARTD: co-generation, conflict as natural, collective knowing, and action researchers as facilitative actors for territorial development. As co-generators, action researchers in territorial development are privy to the unfolding process, including issues like decision-making, conflict, and consensus in real-time, not only as observers, but also as participants and facilitative actors (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014, 2018). As facilitative actors, researchers generate the conditions for dialogue, reflection and action (Larrea, 2019). They also facilitate questioning, which helps to get to the source and definition of problems. Long-term collective knowing is also developed in the territory, i.e. "a capability, a learned pattern of collective action, where the actors systematically modify their actions over time through a dialogue and learning process" (Arrona & Larrea, 2018, p. 139).

Conflicts and differences between action researchers and other territorial actors, arising from "different values, experiences, interests, resources and approaches to a given situation" are normalised as they enrich the discussion and outcomes (Larrea, 2019). This is a rarely discussed aspect to territorial development and action research. Writings about research processes often tend to present a more sanitised version, concealing the realities/complexities involved.

ARTD supported my conceptualisation of inherent values of action research by reinforcing: 1) the importance of being aware of my own change process through the transactional nature of inquiry; 2) the need to make these changes explicit so that the quality of the inquiry process, including what we do as researchers, facilitative actors, and co-generators of knowledge can be improved.

Embracing the notion that action researchers are not outsiders or third parties and that they have a role as stakeholders in territorial development processes (Larrea, 2019) helped in positioning the work that I undertake with colleagues in the case of the wine-producing territory in British Columbia (Pesme, Sugden, Mooken, Valania & Buschert, 2021). It informed reflections on what I had reason to value being and doing as an academic, but also as someone working/living in the territory.

4.   Presentation of the two cases

Two cases through which I developed a core appreciation of the value of action research are introduced here. Together, they provide insights about my journey with action research, including adjustments and learnings. They also set the context for the subsequent discussion on the inherent values of action research that justify its adoption for inquiries in territorial development.

The first case is related to when I first started exploring action research for an inquiry in real-time. It is about a Knowledge Transfer Partnership project, and it is in this context that key notions about inquiry first emerged. The second case reflects current practice, and is about ongoing work with actors in the wine-producing territory of British Columbia in Canada.

4.1   The Knowledge Transfer Partnership with an arts centre

Established in 1975, the Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) is a UK-wide programme supported by the government. The programme supports a partnership formed between a company and a university/research institution, to address challenges that the company faces, and to drive innovation through the transfer of knowledge, technology and skills. Often what is "transferred" is "knowledge about how to find a solution or approach a problem rather than the solution itself" (Howlett, 2010, p.11). To do so, the partnership recruits an associate — a graduate or postgraduate to manage the project over a fixed period of time.

In 2009, the University of Stirling and an arts centre in Scotland formed a KTP. For both partners, an underlying motivation was to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and to co-generate knowledge. The arts centre was particularly concerned with demonstrating the value of its activities to funders. For the university, the KTP was an opportunity to study socio-economic issues in practice and contribute to positive impact through real-time participation with other actors (the arts centre, policy-makers, professionals in the arts, and the wider community) in the territory.

The inspiration for developing an approach to inquiry in real-time and towards co-generating knowledge was action research. Though at the time, we had limited understanding of how to develop it in practice.

Aim of the KTP, and my role

The specific aim was to enable the arts centre to assess and articulate the socio-economic impact of its activities. The university and the arts centre agreed that the KTP would focus on a newly developed and funded socio-cultural project.

The arts centre received funding from the national arts council, to run a project with the objective of inspiring young people aged twelve to seventeen years old to realise their creative potential through their engagement in the arts. Young people participated in the decision-making process of developing and delivering a multi-arts festival, through three core groups: advisory, programming and marketing.

Over a period of twenty months, I worked as the KTP Associate whilst undertaking my doctoral studies. I developed an action-oriented inquiry, enabling the arts centre to foster and embed capabilities for evaluating its socio-economic impact. As a KTP associate, I was not subject to day-to-day company tasks and pressures, and could adopt a broader critical perspective to help identify and address endemic problems in the organisation. Concomitantly with observing, listening, discussing, and reviewing documentation, I engaged with various literature to help shape analytical perspectives and foci.

4.2   The wine-producing territory of British Columbia

The wine sector significantly impacts the development of British Columbia (BC), a province in Western Canada. This is perhaps most felt and visible in the Okanagan Valley, where an overwhelming majority of vineyards and wineries are located. The valley has a history of fruit farming as the region was settled over 100 years ago, and the recent growth of the wine industry contributes to the on-going transformation of the territory (Sugden & Sugden, 2019;

Pesme et al., 2021). The wine industry has been hailed for its economic contribution, most notably through the generation of employment and tourism-related revenues. However, there are particular concerns about how, alongside other land developments, the wine sector is affecting the eco-system (Poitras & Getz, 2006; Wagner, 2008). These have serious implications for all those who live in the territory, and more especially indigenous people.

A group at the Okanagan campus of the University of British Columbia (UBC) has been actively engaging with winery owners, grape growers, industry organisations, and policy-makers, to understand the needs, interests, and development of the wine-producing territory, since 2012. Their work focuses on supporting the wine industry to enhance its competitiveness, and critically understanding the wider impact on territorial development.

A particular focus of UBC's engagement and my role

At the early stages of engaging with the industry, observations about tensions and lack of collaboration in the industry, and between the industry and university, led to the idea of creating safe spaces for discussion. In 2014, the UBC group started to organise and facilitate an annual Wine Leaders Forum, a retreat-style space, where various winery owners congregate to identify and address their strategic concerns. Various workshops across the province are also organised to ensure inclusion of diverse voices, and to address specific concerns, for example around the identity of the wine-producing territory and strategic investments in research and development (Pesme et al., 2021; Pesme, Mooken, Valania & Sugden, 2020).

In November 2015, I joined UBC as a postdoctoral research fellow, working alongside four other core members of the group engaging with the wine industry. An explicit role that I took on is to foster an action-oriented approach to inquiry, stimulating reflections, and contributing to the creation of conducive spaces for dialogue among various actors in the wine industry and the wider territory.

5.   Inherent values of action research in the context of territorial development

This section is guided by the introductory question: what are inherent values of action research that may appeal to researchers who want to challenge hegemonic practices and do research differently? The resulting framework, depicted in Figure 1, is based on the concepts of problematic situation, contextuality-temporality, and values, and my action research practice in the two cases. The case discussions in Section 6 reflect this combination of theoretical knowledge and practice.

Figure 1: A framework for inherent values of action research in territorial development
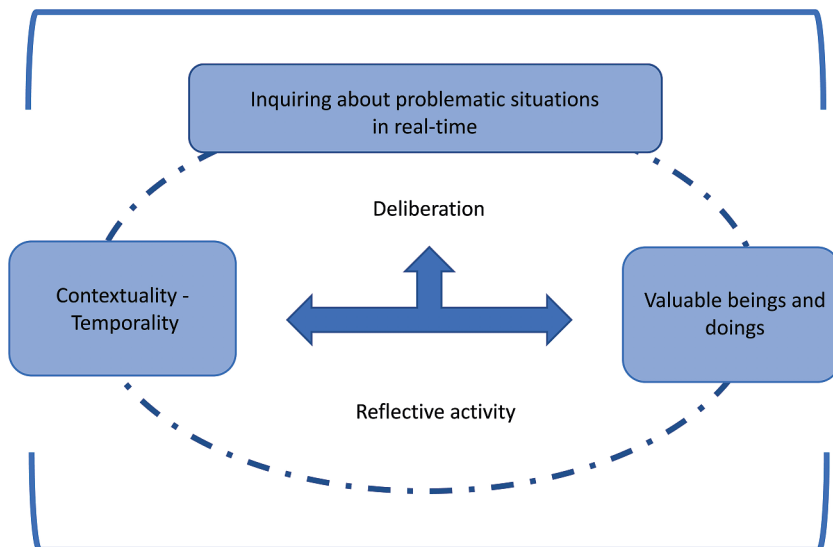
5.1   Inquiring about problematic situations in real-time

A valuable aspect of action research in territorial development is that we learn and analyse problematic situations in real-time. There might be many contributing factors to a problematic situation, or more than one problem and solution. Hence, certain operations in an inquiry are crucial to determine the problems and related solutions, and to identify which ones to focus on at a particular point in time. Observations, deliberation, and reflection in real-time contribute to determining the conditions that constitute a problematic situation. This is in sharp contrast to mainstream research approaches that pre-determine what the problem is, and start with applying prescriptive solutions.

It is important to first understand a problematic situation. Why? How a problematic situation is determined sets the course of inquiry: "what specific suggestions are entertained and which are dismissed; what data are selected and which rejected", determining the "relevancy and irrelevancy of hypotheses and conceptual structures" (Hickman & Alexander, 2009, p.173). Action taken during inquiry to seek and find answers in relation to the problematic situation alters the situation itself.

Inquiry involves directed activity, and "doing something which varies the conditions under which objects are observed and directly had and by instituting new arrangements among them. Things perceived suggest to us (originally just evoke or stimulate) certain ways of responding to them, of treating them" (Dewey, 1929, p.123). A problematic situation is settled through justified changes as a consequence of inquiry. We shape our reasoning, understanding, and how the problematic situation is resolved through a process, where "theoretical knowledge and concrete practical application reciprocally support each other" (Dewey, 2012, p.284).

5.2   Contextual-temporal qualities of the process

We know of the grand challenges facing societies at large, but these can play out in particular ways in different contexts and times. Local environing conditions may vary, and depending on a number of factors such as habits, values, resources, policies, and capabilities, people may respond differently to a problem. In understanding and transforming a problematic situation, it is important to situate knowledge in that particular context, and inquire with those who experience the problem, and are most affected by it.

However, the "'settlement of a particular situation by a particular inquiry is no guarantee that that settled conclusion will always remain settled" (Dewey 1938, p. 8–9). Conclusions drawn from an inquiry are not finite; over time they may be further tested, reaffirmed, deepened, revised, or lead to other inquiries in the same context (at a different point in time) or in other contexts (Tiles, 1988). Although knowledge is contextual and each problematic situation requires particular actions for its resolution at a given point in time, there are learnings that stay and are shared, which may be used subsequently.

Inquiry and the transformation of a problematic situation is thus temporal. The past, present and future are connected, contextualizing values, actions, and development paths.

5.3   Reflecting, and acting on what we have reasons to value being and doing as researchers, participants, facilitative actors, and citizens.

In conducting an inquiry, values matter: implicitly or explicitly. They have an effect on our choices and judgments in the inquiry. At the core of an action research process is the practice of democratic participation in response to socially problematic situations (Fricke, 2018). This implies valuing the conduct of research *with* people, rather than treating them as objects or subjects of study. Nevertheless, scientific-technical approaches to action research tend to ignore value orientations and questions of meaning and purpose (Maurer and Githens, 2010).

I argue that values need to be spelled out, and also the underlying reasoning. For example: What are the valuable reasons that we have to do an inquiry? What really matters to us and others in the process? Who are our co-inquirers or collaborators, and what do they value in the process? What are the roles and responsibilities that we have, and why? What sort of relational dynamics exist or are we working towards? What are we aiming for, in terms of change, and why?

I use the phrase "have reason to value being and doing", borrowed from Amartya Sen, and in line with Dewey's philosophy, to indicate that values are formed and expressed through a dynamic process, rooted in reasoning, deliberation and judgments.[1] In this process, different viewpoints are tolerated, and learning with others is valued (Sen, 2006).

Certain values become more explicit during the transactional process of inquiry. When faced with a doubtful or an unsettled situation, reflections are triggered, not only about the external environing conditions, but also about what we have reason to value being and doing as researchers, participants, citizens, etc. This often happens when there is tension or conflict, for example about what action to take, within ourselves and with others. In those situations, what we have reason to value tend to surface and help to ground decisions and actions.

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1   'Have reason to value being and doing' is used by Amartya Sen and others in the context of studies on human development and the capability approach.

The case discussions below highlight the pertinence of these three dimensions of inherent values.

6.   Case discussions

The cases show how inquiries rooted in action research can be inherently valuable in situations, characterised by territorial complexity where there are uncertainty and inter-dependency with no one having the sole power or resources to direct others and solve challenges (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). There are insights about why the adoption of action research in these cases of territorial development is justified.

6.1   Inquiry in the Knowledge Transfer Partnership

The starting point for the inquiry was to investigate what the young people aspired to, and how the project might enable them to realise those aspirations. However, the situation was problematic. There were no initiatives from the project management team to find out what the young people might aspire to, or how they might be enabled to explore, and realise their "creative potential and ambition" (which was the core aim of the socio-cultural project). Interacting with the participants in real-time and being part of the context, I felt growing tension within the environment. The precise source for those tensions was initially unclear.

To understand what was problematic, I had more regular interactions with participants. I spent about two to three days every week in organisational meetings, which lasted for two to three hours at the arts centre. For occasional workshops or artistic events, I spent half a day or a full day with participants. I initiated one-to-one dialogues with the young people, listening to them, and encouraging reflective activity. I observed them developing new experiences — attending and discussing artistic performances, participating in meetings and workshops, overcoming conflicts, and interacting with mentors working in the Scottish creative industries. Below are examples of what the young people expressed when I asked about their aspirations.

"Well, see I don't know, I'd quite like to do something that's quite interesting, you know, something…like, not necessarily as a job but, at some point, be part of something that most people wouldn't be part of, I'm not really sure what that was, what it could be."

"I am about to start a higher national certificate in illustration…I just hope to go with the flow really. I've been to a lot of festivals in Greece and Italy and I just thought it would be interesting to see how they manage to make them all work actually … to get behind the scenes view really."

As the inquiry evolved, new questions emerged. The focus moved from what the young people aspired to as a career, to include other questions. What were their broader life aspirations? Do they all have developed capacities to aspire? Were there real opportunities for them to do and be what they have reasons to value through the project and beyond? Those questions arose through the interplay of theory and practice, and helped calibrate the course of the inquiry, so that it was more aligned with the contextual and temporal realities.

Interestingly, whilst the focus was on the young people, issues with the project management team also surfaced. Those issues related to their own career aspirations, group

dynamics, and organisational pressures/constraints, which contributed to the problematic situation. The narrative that unfolded showed that their experience in the project, including their respective action-thinking, had an effect on each other, and on their beings and doings. In the process of inquiry, they were growing more aware of the consequences of their actions. Consider the following from a member of the project management team:

"My creativity has suffered, I have done things that I wouldn't have done elsewhere. And that's one of the reasons I got annoyed, no not annoyed but defensive when you asked me about outreach [and its aims in terms of] quality vs. quantity [of the activities and], in-depth impact vs. wider impact. The questions you asked then, I would have asked myself these but in this environment, I overlooked them."

The above indicated that there might be deeper issues with the organisation that in turn affected the overall process of engaging with the young people. Other members of the management team expressed related concerns. For example:

"Like anything in the project, you come with a good idea, you say it and they [senior management] go, oh that sounds great and nothing is ever actioned on it."

In retrospect, I realise that there was a relational aspect to the inquiry based on trust, dialogue, and respect that allowed sensitive insights to be shared.

There are three key points that I retained from the inquiry. A balance needs to be struck between: not having the inquiry "so controlled by a conceptual framework fixed in advance that the very things which are genuinely decisive in the problem in hand and its solution, are completely overlooked", and carrying out endless observations that create more confusion and does not allow the inquiry to progress (Dewey, 1938, p.70). Initially, we focused the question of aspirations on career aspirations, and we had not considered that the young people may not have well-defined career aspirations, or had other life aspirations. This was a misguided approach. Problems and inquiries are context-bound. Research questions and concepts are more precise when determined in real-time with others. In this case, new understanding was uncovered, for example through the exploration of notions such as the *capacity to aspire* (Appadurai, 2004), and considering aspirations in a more holistic way.

Essentially, we had to change how we approached research. We had to open up our perspectives, and understand the motivations and realities of the people actually involved in the project. By determining the problem in real time with those concerned, the narrative unfolds during the process of inquiry "where data shift as a consequence of intervention and where it is not possible to predict or to control what takes place" (Coghlan 2011, p.54). The focus is on real issues taking place in the context, rather than concerns such as filling a gap in the literature. More nuanced contextual and temporal perspectives are revealed.

Reflecting on my role and responsibilities as an academic researcher and KTP associate, what I had reason to value being and doing, and the substance of, and limits to my participation was central to developing the inquiry. Reflections were in part triggered by the lived experience, and comments from university colleagues about whether I was not afraid that I will "contaminate the data". I could not take for granted that everyone understood or remembered what I was doing through the inquiry. It is useful to provide clarifications throughout the process, and an understanding of the inherent values of action research can help position ourselves and the collaborative work.

6.2   Inquiry in the wine-producing territory of BC

When the UBC group started to inquire, by visiting wineries, speaking to industry actors, and reviewing documentation, one thing stood out: the lack of territorial cohesion, where actors in a defined geographical area share a set of practices, strategies and institutions, and draw on common quality standards and values that contribute to greater coordination and a strong identity (Pesme et al., 2021). This problematic situation was linked to high industry fragmentation, significant geographical distance between regions in the province, and significant mistrust from various wineries in industry associations (Hira & Bwenge 2011; Cartier, 2014).

The creation of safe spaces became central to providing the conditions for industry actors and others to understand problematic situations, build trust, learn collectively, express themselves openly, and address issues of common interest. Conflicts and consensus are made explicit through dialogue, sometimes across spaces and time. This accords with the notions of contextuality-and temporality in inquiry. Knowledge that is settled is available as a resource in further inquiry; it is not settled in such a way as not to be subject to discussion and revision in further inquiry. Below is an overview of key spaces/activities led/facilitated by the group at UBC:

Wine Leaders Forum (WLF): British Columbia winery owners, principals, and other stakeholders participate in a retreat-style setting, to reflect, strategize and set agendas to address strategic challenges facing the wine territory, since 2014.

Task force on Labelling and Presentation: Set up in November 2015. The task force engaged with industry stakeholders to provide recommendations about wine labelling and label architecture. Findings were used for discussion with policy-makers about desirable regulatory changes.

Identity Workshops: Participatory workshops with wine industry actors, in different locations in BC in 2017 and 2018. A short film, two complementary reports, and a peer-reviewed article were produced to disseminate the work on the identity of the BC wine territory.

Exhibition & public talks: An eight-month exhibition, and public talks held across BC in 2017 to encourage dialogue about the development of the wine industry and its impact on the territory. The exhibition was displayed in seven wineries across the territory, in a regional library, and a museum.

Survey & Workshops with the BC Wine Grape Council: Guiding strategic decision-making on R&D investments in the BC wine and grape industry between July 2019 and November 2020 through a survey, series of workshops and reports.

In the first Wine Leaders Forum (WLF), industry actors and academic researchers identified identity, quality and collaboration as strategic to the development of the wine industry. That discussion, together with initial visits in the territory informed our understanding of the problematic situation in the territory. As mentioned before, it is important to situate knowledge in a particular context, and inquire with those who experience the problem. By inquiring with people in the context of the BC wine territory, we had a deeper appreciation of what was going on, and the local environing conditions. The participants are not considered simply as sources of data, but as people who have particular knowledge and understanding, and who can address issues that affect their lives. They are co-generators of knowledge, not objects or

subjects of research, in the process of inquiry. A participant who has attended the WLF expressed the following:

"This is the fifth one [WLF] that I have attended, and I remember the early ones where we said that issue will never be resolved . . . We have actually addressed that issue and there is real action and change that came out of it. So, I believe in the process. It's exciting, it's essential."

The interactions that took place over the years through these spaces and activities have helped us and industry actors to learn about each other, and get a better appreciation of what each has reason to value being and doing. The long-term engagement in the BC wine-producing territory has revealed more nuanced perspectives of the social, economic, political and environmental issues in the territory.

Inquiring over a long period of time provides a temporal quality, which enhances understanding of the territory and collective knowing in a consistent, and timely manner. The relational dynamic between the wine industry and university has enabled the sharing of critical perspectives on complex issues like working conditions in the industry, and debates about the use of carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic substances for pest and disease control in many wine regions of the world. Such issues are addressed in the spirit of open inquiry, based on sensitivity to the quality of the situation, and reasoning.

The basis for the inquiry is not to collect data per se, but to educate, co-generate knowledge and action, and help transform problematic situations. This ties in to the discussion of ARTD on action researchers having different roles, for example, acting as facilitative actors for territorial development, and co-generators of knowledge. Building on the conceptualisation of Karlsen & Larrea (2014), we have been more explicit in situating our engagement at the intersection of action research and territorial development (Pesme et al., 2021).

We approach questions of knowledge from a practical perspective — connecting theory-practice, knowing-action. Co-generative knowledge processes are developed in which experience, reflection, knowing, and action are inter-connected (Greenwood, 2007; Karlsen & Larrea, 2014). This sort of processes has been central to building collective capabilities that help to identify and resolve complex problematic situations, and in developing appropriate methods and concepts. For example, industry actors mostly associated identity with branding, and territorial reputation. They used terms such as "supernatural BC" and "pristine". In the identity workshops, we introduced conceptual ideas relating to terroir and territorial cohesion, and encouraged industry actors to identify and value commonalities and differences, and coalesce around shared interests and challenges. The deliberation has led to the emergence of a more meaningful narrative, reflecting the systematic interaction between natural and human factors.

Participants also shared that a limited percentage of people in the East of Canada know about the valley, and that a lot of time and money is required to share the story of the various wine regions in BC, and the territory as a whole. In their view, the diversity of the narrative gets diluted when it comes from a top-down approach, and there should be different entities telling the story rather than one governing body.

Overall a multi-dimensional perspective of identity, which industry actors can draw on in developing strategies for their businesses and the industry, was co-generated. From our perspective, participating in this process enabled us to gain a better appreciation of how certain factors play out in practice, shaping our conceptualisation of identity, and how to engage an industry on such issues. Being able to bring enhanced awareness of the "human"

and the "socio-economic" aspects of territorial identity in ways that were not obvious in the industry before is also valuable. It may trigger continuous reflection amongst industry actors on what they are doing and how in the territory.

Initially, the UBC group described the 'safe spaces' as being neutral. This was probably phrased in response to conflicts that prevailed within the wine industry, and to indicate that the university would not take sides. According to conventional research approaches, researchers are supposed to be neutral, and values should not influence the process of inquiry. I was uncomfortable with the use of the term "neutral". It did not accurately reflect our positions. My thinking on the matter was shaped by my experience in the KTP, observations of interactions between UBC and industry actors, and writings in the ARTD literature.

Citing Freire (2008), "we cannot study the world without engagement as if suddenly, mysteriously, we had nothing to do with it" (Karlsen and Larrea, 2014, p.158). Every choice made in an inquiry (starting from why we do it, to choosing a method and concepts, and interpreting findings) is intrinsically linked to what we have reason to value. We make value judgments informed by observations, reasoning, and analytical reflection. Accordingly, we influence the process. This is done in ways that are congruent with what we have reason to value, shaped by our worldviews, and experience (including feelings).

We now refrain from using the word "neutral", and are more explicit in explaining our positions, and why we are engaging with the wine industry in BC. Our concern is fundamentally rooted in educational values: providing opportunities for territorial actors to learn, deliberate, and act on shared interests without being controlled by the agenda of dominant groups. Also, as mentioned earlier, the wine industry is an integral part of the province, and its impact on the development of the university's host territory is of interest to us. We are exploring ways to include non-industry actors more systematically in discussions about territorial impact.

7.   Concluding reflections: the journey ahead

A fundamental reason for embracing action research is its inherent values: what it brings to the research process itself. I have addressed the question of inherent values conceptually and by providing practical illustrations through two cases in territorial development. Insights about my journey with action research, and how it is valuable in 1) inquiring about problematic situations in real-time, 2) understanding contextual-temporal qualities of the process, and 3) reflecting, and acting on what I have reasons to value being and doing are shared. The framework and learnings from the cases may not be applicable to all action research projects but I hope they stimulate others to realise and further discuss the inherent values of action research.

In earlier work, I put much emphasis on *pursuing the spirit of the truth* (Mooken and Sugden, 2014). Whilst it remains central to my approach, it is not the end purpose of why I inquire with others. Through a better appreciation of action research, and reflection about what I value as a person: not separating who I am from what I do, I am now more conscious and explicit about seeking to contribute to transformative action in society.

Although features of action research were discussed with participants in the two cases, none of them was formally set up as action research projects. In part, this is because action research remains marginalised in certain disciplines, and many researchers are not familiar with its diverse approaches. Much work remains to be done within the academic community to educate about action research, cutting across disciplinary boundaries. One of the things that I look forward to is including action research in the courses that I coordinate and teach in a Master of Management programme at UBC, and developing action research projects wherein students and faculty can engage with practitioners, and wider communities to address problematic situations in real-time.

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