

Special issue of the International Journal of Action Research

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Working with action research for sustainable and regenerative environments, communities, and organizations.

Wicked problems are calling for action

At a global scale, we're dealing with an eco-social crisis where both "eco" and "social" are abbreviations, "eco" for climate, depletion of nature, decimation of species, pollution, sea-level rise, etc., "social" for psychological, interpersonal, political, economic, general power inequalities, social and gender justice etc. We are confronted with "wicked problems" without straightforward solutions to any of the complex problems of our time. The ecological and social challenges are deeply intertwined, and there is a need for research that conceptualizes ideas, projects, and initiatives for sustainability, which integrate ecological and social perspectives.

Environmental destruction and the exploration of natural resources are happening in systematic ways, e. g. through the logging of the forests, exaggerated exploitation of the soil, overfishing etc. Our environment is suffering and characterized by pollution, CO₂-emission, global warming, forest fires, floods, drought, melting ice, plastic in the oceans, loss of biodiversity etc. If we continue this track, the collapse of ecosystems will be followed by the collapse of our societies characterized by rising inequality and human suffering, which will result in even more conflicts, wars and increasing flows of refugees.

Not only are our ecosystems suffering. We are also dealing with suffering at the social level where people experience an increasing social inequality and dissatisfaction. The neo-liberalist economical model entailing a capitalist mode of production and primitive accumulation (Chertkovskaya and Paulsson, 2021), which is based on untamed economic growth and short-term profit, is creating even more inequality in the world and puts enormous pressure on people. Many people feel exploited at their workplace, which is characterized by a high work pace and a performance race, often leading to stress, burn-out and depression. Many employees experience that there is not enough time left to take care of their family members and friends – or even themselves. The time for engaging in relationships with other people is scarce, and not only the elder generation, but also children and young people, suffer to an increasing extent, from alienation and loneliness.

As Habermas (1987) pointed out, our *lifeworld* has been colonized by the *systems world*, and Hartmut Rosa, uses the terms *social acceleration* and *dynamic stabilization* to characterize the conditions for living and working in our time (Rosa 2019). Rosa points out that social acceleration is not only driven by the desire for growth, but to a high extent also by the

fear of being excluded from the labor market and being marginalized in society. So how can we create workplaces, organizations, and educational institutions, which are sustainable and inclusive, not only in relation to the physical environment, but also at a social level?

The crises are all deeply connected and therefore we need to rethink the ways in which we relate to each other, to nature, to the ecologies in which we're embedded, and the ways in which we organize our ways of living, producing, and consuming etc. We need to understand that everything is interrelated and search for new ways of relating to our surroundings.

From a perspective of interrelatedness, how can we create and reinvent human practices towards more regenerative and sustainable ways of living, organizing, producing, and consuming in order to preserve and regenerate our nature, ecosystems, and communities? And how do we as action researchers engage with other researchers, practitioners, citizens, influencers, and decision makers in order to create and put into practice sustainable solutions to these complex problems and create eco-social change?

Movements and tendencies

In recent years we see an increasing tendency of researchers working together with climate activists, practitioners, and vice versa. The latest example is the new book edited by Greta Thunberg: "The Climate Book" where the climate activist Greta Thunberg has gathered more than 100 researchers from different fields such as history, philosophy, and psychology to oceanography, geophysics, and meteorology to demonstrate scientifically how we can change the climate crisis in the attempts to save the future of our planet.

In this special issue we invite contributions that explore how action research might offer a practice for research and change, where action researchers take the role as partners together with practitioners in creating positive social and environmental change through local action and community-based initiatives. We think that action research can contribute, not only to critical reflexivity, multi-disciplinarity, and the inclusion of people's voice in addressing both global and local challenges, but also to concrete action for change.

To what extent and how can action research contribute to the needed eco-social transformation?

Creating change for more sustainable and regenerative ways of living, organizing, producing, and consuming is not an easy task. With this call for papers, we are interested in figuring out whether and how action research can further eco-social change for the improvement of our environment and society. As mentioned above, there is a need for action research, which conceptualizes ideas, projects, and initiatives for sustainability, through the integration of both ecological and social perspectives. Therefore, we call for papers, which deal with complex eco-social problems that both analyze and discuss practices of action research based on involvement, co-creation of knowing and the transformation of our society towards a more sustainable and regenerative future *together* with citizens and practitioners. At the same time this call also invites for more philosophical papers concerning these issues. The overall themes could for instance be:

- Papers concerning action research projects for eco-social transformation based on co-creation between different stakeholders, e.g., both from the public and private sector, citizens, volunteers, activists etc.
- Papers concerning action research for social sustainability in workplaces, in local communities, neighborhoods or larger societal units.
- Papers concerning the active involvement of children or young people in action research towards more sustainable practices.
- Action research-based initiatives for the inclusion of marginalized citizens in the eco-social transformation where these citizens are given a strong voice.
- Papers exploring action research-based initiatives working for alternatives to the paradigm of growth and consumption, profit-oriented production, and competition.
- Action research for the development of more sustainable and regenerative ways of leading and organizing.
- Eco-feminist approaches to action research for eco-social transition.
- Action research projects involving indigenous knowledge and ‘knowing’.
- Action research projects, which work across various, often disconnected contexts, for instance urban and rural contexts and their relationship.
- Philosophical papers that discuss some of these overall issues and contribute to new thoughts and insights in relation to action research for eco-social transformation. What does it mean for social relations and systems to be sustainable?

Literature for inspiration

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Deadlines

Submission of extended abstract: November 15, 2023. Extended abstract: Maximum 1200 words (Including an extended summary, outlining for the content in each section).
 Acceptance or rejection of extended abstract: January 15, 2024.
 Submission of full article: July 1, 2024.
 Review process: July–September, 2024.
 Review will be sent to the authors: October 1, 2024.
 Final article submitted: January 15, 2025
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Full article length: 6000–8000 words.

All communication, submission of abstracts, drafts and articles should go to the issue editors.

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