

Rethinking action research to face climate change: contributions from different traditions

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International Journal of Action Research encourages its editors to publish their work in the journal, thus contributing to the academic discussion on action research. Our aim is to have an impact in the endeavour of the action research community to be relevant in the face of global challenges. This is one of those occasions, as one of the authors of this editorial is simultaneously editor in chief and guest editor of this special issue.

The issue addresses how *action research for territorial development* (ARTD) (Karlsen and Larrea, 2014) can evolve to better meet the needs of territorial actors working together in neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities or regions to face climate change. The goal is to understand how action research can improve to help gain awareness of the deep implications of this challenge and to mobilise in ways that respond not only in terms of effectiveness, but also in terms of democracy and justice.

The issue is the result of a collaborative process of action researchers coming from different traditions and geographic areas, with a very conscious effort to bring together action researchers from the global South and North. The process started with the publication of a working paper entitled “The limits of territorial development. Reflections on the climate emergency and how the pedagogical approach and action research can contribute to addressing it” (Larrea and Costamagna, 2023). We argued that facing climate change requires understanding its roots, and for that, action research must reinforce the connections with development practices, globalization, powerful actors and the multilevel rationales of policy and politics in countries, regions and municipalities. Experience tells us that there is a widespread politically correct discourse on these issues, but scarce action. This is applicable to climate summits as well as to actors operating in neighbourhoods, cities and regions who resist change. We also see that there are environmentally harmful processes that do not stop unless there is mobilization for alternative ways to those proposed by powerful actors with strong economic interests.

In that working paper we argued that some of the features of ARTD could be helpful to work for sustainability (praxis, facilitation, participation, capacity building and its explicit political nature), but we needed to explore what new features our frameworks required to specifically address climate change. That is why we invited experts in territorial development and action researchers from the global North and South to reflect and write together.

In order to help open the reflection process to the South and the North, we decided to approach Spanish and English-speaking action research communities. That is why this special issue published in IJAR shares some contents with a book that will be published in Spanish under the title “El desarrollo territorial ante la emergencia climática: desafíos conceptuales y metodológicos” (Territorial development in the face of the climate emergency: conceptual and

methodological challenges) (Costamagna and Larrea, 2024). While the book brings together perspectives on territorial development and action research, this special issue focuses on the contributions that specifically address action research.

Therefore, the goal with the papers in this issue is to revisit action research in order to propose ways to rethink our practices and make them more transformative. These are not papers based on specific action research processes, though they do share some examples. These are position papers that share what the authors think about the problems connected to climate change and their position regarding potential solutions. The writing process included workshops where we explored shared ground among the different articles.

In the first paper of the issue we, Miren Larrea and Pablo Costamagna, present our lessons learnt in the process and reflect on how these can be useful for the reformulation of action research for territorial development. The goal is to be better prepared to integrate the sustainability dimension in the projects we might develop with policy makers in the future.

The second paper is authored by Ainhoa Arrona, another researcher that practices ARTD and revises it to propose how collaborative governance processes generated through action research can be made more transformative thus making policies related to climate change more effective and, simultaneously, democratic. Her core suggestion is strengthening the critical dimension of facilitation to achieve this goal.

Another contribution connected to governance in territorial development is made by Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga, Andere Ormazabal Gastón and Izaro Gorostidi Bidaurrezaga, who frame their work within *participatory action research* (PAR). Their core contribution to ARTD is to propose the consideration that governments alone cannot face this challenge and ARTD can be a way to facilitate governments' dialogue with social movements.

After two papers focused on more transformative approaches to territorial governance, the next two focus on justice. On the one hand, Danilo Streck and Carolina Schenatto da Rosa explore the relationship between socio-environmental justice and action research focusing on three core dimension, interdependence, mutuality, and co-responsibility. They propose an "ethics of the fair measure" as a means to achieve balance between human needs and the planet's limits. On the other, Malida Mookken is the author of a position paper on epistemic justice, where she helps us gain awareness on the fact that climate change will not equally affect different communities around the world, and there are vulnerable communities that will suffer it most. She also argues that by stimulating the inclusion and participation of those who are marginalised, action research can contribute to countering dominant narratives and giving voice to those lesser heard and visible.

One of our initial conclusions in Larrea and Costamagna (2023) was that there are learnings that territorial development can take from feminism in order to imagine how material economic growth can be removed from a central position in territorial development, to situate life in that position instead. Patricia Gayá integrates the feminist perspective in this issue by sharing her position on the contribution of *decolonial feminist action research* (DFAR) to the challenge of climate change. In her paper she argues that if action research is to help combat the climate crisis, it must mobilise intersectional feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial frameworks, thus offering long-overdue theoretical, methodological, and practical insights.

Another dimension that we felt ARTD should further explore was the role of emotions in the endeavour to respond to climate change. This challenge was accepted by Hilary Bradbury, who contributes to this issue with a position article where she argues for the relevance of emotions in action research in this moment of ecosocial crisis. She argues that reason alone

does not suffice to articulate the responses the problem requires and proposes a mutually nurturing relationship between reason and emotion.

The final paper of the issue is authored by Davydd Greenwood, who asks for solidarity and for broadening the practices of action research. He argues for the potential of action research to contribute to existing global challenges, but also points out the need to improve the integration of global action research networks as “the lack of collaboration and solidarity across the whole spectrum of action research is an unaffordable luxury”.

We hope that action researchers interested in being part of the mobilization needed to face climate change will find these position papers useful.

References

- Karlsen and Larrea (2014). *Territorial development and action research: innovation through dialogue*. London, UK: Gower.
- Larrea, M. and Costamagna, P. (2023). *The limits of territorial development. Reflections on the climate emergency and how the pedagogical approach and action research can contribute to addressing it*. Praxis Working Paper Series, May 2023.