

Participatory Democracy as Philosophy of Science Orientation for Action Research

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Background

- Experience from working with Scandinavian "dialogue democratic" approach to change work and action research (broad participation of concerned, democratic dialogue, dialogue conferences, networks, development coalition/partnerships, dialogic action research)
- Dissertation "Management by Freedom"
- Using theory of participatory democracy as change theory
- Also science based on participatory democracy so as not restrict the participatory approach
- There are democratizing ambitions in the action research/interactive research tradition
- We live in democratic cultures

Problems of practice

- Dominance of positivist/non-democratic practice of science in Academia – action research still marginal
- Also in society – capacities for research are unknowledged/repressed
- Philosophical backing of participatory action research in democratizing science need to be strengthened

Issue: Moving towards democratic scientific inquiry

- Going democratic – advantage or risk?
- Is it a **scientific** advantage or risk?
- Which are the arguments for its advantage?
- My claim: Participatory democracy can be used as a philosophy of science point of departure

The point of the article

- Exploring the arguments for using participatory democracy as philosophy of science point of departure
- Realizing it in academic-societal context
 - The case of building a national/international educational platform for PAR in Sweden



A participatory democratic philosophy of science – basic assumptions

- Everybody a source of knowledge, learning and inquiry (e.g. Follett)
- Democratic interaction, practices and virtues favour good science (e.g. "Creative democracy – the task before us", Dewey, 1955)

The arguments (e.g Gustavsen, 1992)

- Empirical – evidence that it works in practice
- Epistemological – character and distribution of knowledge and scientific inquiry
- Moral – values, normative choices and virtues inherent in science
- Institutional – institutional and cultural dimensions of science
- Political – power and politics inherent in science as “truth politics”

Empirical argument

- People are knowledgeable and have a capacity for inquiry and problem solving
- Commitment to ideas require influence (democratic legitimation)
- Evidence that scientific inquiry benefits from broader participation (e.g. the action research tradition)



Epistemological arguments

- Character, distribution and availability of knowledge
- Practical, experiential, tacit knowledge
- Relevance of knowledge
- Significant knowledge among practitioners
- Inquiry: wider opportunity for experimentation and validation (discursive, pragmatic, dialectic) through participation
- Knowledge is local and contextual
- Social intelligence through democratic praxis (Dewey)



Moral arguments

- Inherent moral choices and values in science
- Praxis basis: Knowledge – human interests (e.g. Habermas)
- Discourse ethics – democratic legitimation
- Often associated activities in social inquiry (Dewey)
- Theories construct people/social situations in certain ways (as "citizens or "cogs")
- Which truth would we like to make true? E.g mechanistic or humanistic organizations

Institutional arguments

- Practical force of democratic legitimation in democratic cultures
- Democracy – a right to choose/create the theory which is to prevail in my praxis
- Truth is plural and based on tradition, we must develop "truth for us" compatible with our values and institutions
- Integrational function – common efforts, not fragmented research
- Comprehensive reform perspective (general interest) – common value basis providing direction for research

Political argument

- Replace rule of men with the “gentle rule of truth” (Bacon)
- “The inquiry is precisely a political form – a form of power management and exercise that, through the judicial institution, became, in Western culture, a way of authenticating truth, of acquiring and transmitting things that would be regarded as true. The inquiry is a form of knowledge-power.” Foucault (2001: 52)
- Distinguish coercive from non-coercive forms of power (Follett (1930): “power-over”, “power-with”)
- Participatory democracy: management of common affairs minimizing the use of coercive powers, instead using “power-with”

Political argument: veritocracy

- Truth not only "enlightenment"/emancipation from power
- Rule by truth not free from power but a particular managing approach – "veritocracy"
- Tensions between veritocracy (e.g. as technocracy) and democracy
- Develop more democratic rule by truth; e.g. science empowering practical knowing and capacities of inquiry of people

Relations between veritocracy and democracy

Veritocra Democracy	Limited participation	Extensive participation
Oracle, few experts, one truth, truth as governing laws	Expert rule, technocracy (Plato, Saint-Simon, Taylor, Weber), elite democracy	Will/virtue democracy (e.g. Rousseau)
All can judge, all are knowledgeable,	Competitive, oligopolistic (Michels, representative systems)	Discursive or interactive democracy (Dewey, Habermas), partly liberal democracy (pluralistic)
Scepticism, rhetoric, plural truths or no truth	Ordering ruler (Hobbes)	Postmodern democracy? (Rorty, Gergen)



How realize the arguments in practice?

- Embed them in your own self-reflective practice (1st person) – understanding of being "scientific", and relating to others
- Guide for research groups (2nd person) – democratic dialogue as core medium
- Supportive institutional setting (3rd person) – often more or less restricting by dominant scientific philosophies and practices, and academic governance systems
 - How build a broader educational platform for PAR which has institutional impacts? - the case of SPARC PhD/research education program development "Democratic knowledge and change processes" in Sweden



National/international PAR educational program

- Initiative to build an educational platform in Sweden by SPARC (Swedish Participatory Action Research Community) since 2010
- Emergent program through giving courses in collaboration with interested universities and popular higher education schools (both academic and non-academic participants)
- Network based research school under development
- In process: 7-8 universities, Mälardalens University as hub, labour union, municipalities and other organizations with PAR competence and research interest
- International links and supports with leading action researchers/action research centers (e.g Mary Brydon-Miller, David Coghlan)
- Building links to international networks (e.g. ALARA)
- Political supports? (ministry discussions)



Realizing the arguments in SPARC educational program

Philosophy of science arguments	Potentials	Challenges
Empirical	Disseminating and increasing knowledge of potentials of democratized research	Reach out to those with learning needs, resources for giving courses and run program
Epistemological	Mobilizing distributed knowledges and intelligences	Non-democratic philosophies of science, unacknowledged/repressed knowledges and intelligences
Moral	High performing democratic system of research commendable/right	Broad commitment and partnership as moral force among academic and social actors
Institutional	Embed democratic values and praxis in society also in science, Mode 2 production of knowledge	Institutional leadership and entrepreneurship, institutional (mis-)fit, e.g. academic governance and carrier system
Political	More democratic "veritocracy", empowering practical knowing and inquiry capacity of people	Conceptions and practices of truth, knowledge, science restricts democracy – paradigm reflection needed



- Reference:

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