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 positivitist/non-democratic practice of science in Academia – action research still marginal
- Also in society – capacities for research are unknowledge/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

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

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

- Questions?
- Suggestions?
- Do you want to collaborate?