

Territorial Development Series



Roots and Wings of Action Research for Territorial Development

Connecting local transformation and international collaborative learning

Edited by Miren Larrea

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Note for the reader

The contributions in this book have been written in English, Spanish and Portuguese and their contents synthesized also in Basque, Norwegian, German and French. By choosing to have an inclusive approach to all these languages we want to generate awareness on the fact that action research is conducted throughout the world in diverse cultural contexts and in multiple languages, although many of these languages disappear when action research enters the academic realm.

To go beyond the symbolism of this decision and make our work understandable for as many readers as possible, we will publish in 2021 a book that will mirror this one by sharing its contributions in English translated into Spanish and its contributions in Spanish translated into English.

Notas para los lectores

Las contribuciones compartidas en este libro han sido escritas en inglés, español y portugués y sus contenidos resumidos también en euskara, noruego, alemán y francés. Nuestra decisión de tener una aproximación inclusiva al uso de todos estos idiomas responde a nuestro deseo de generar conciencia de que la investigación acción a lo largo del mundo se hace en diversidad de contextos culturales y en múltiples idiomas y que muchos de estos idiomas desaparecen cuando la investigación acción llega al ámbito académico.

Más allá de la dimensión simbólica de esta decisión, queremos compartir nuestro trabajo con el mayor número de lectores posible y en 2021 publicaremos un libro que será un espejo de este y que presentará las contribuciones publicadas en inglés en este libro traducidas al español, y las contribuciones en español traducidas al inglés.

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Chapter 7

“Pedagogy of the privileged”? Reflections on how Deliberative Policy Analysis can help action research to foster transformation from within

Ainhoa Arrona¹

Laburpena

«Pribilegiatuaren pedagogia»? Politiken azterketa deliberatiboak ikerketa-ekintzari eraldaketa «barrutik» bultzatzen laguntzeko moduen inguruko gogoeta

Helburuetan eta oinarri epistemologikoan antzekotasuna izanagatik ere, politikak aztertzeke ikuspegi deliberatiboa (DPA, ingelesezko sigletan) eta ikerketa-ekintza (IE) elkarren arteko dialogorik gabe garatu direla esan daiteke. DPAk interpretazioan eta deliberazioan oinarritutako eta praktikara bideratutako politiken azterketa proposatzen du, politika publikoen mundu konplexua eta politikoa hobeto atzematez gain, erabilgarria eta demokrazia sustatuko duen ezagutza eta prozesuak garatzeko. Era berean, IEk eragileekin dialogoa eta ko-sortzea ezagutza sortzeko eta eraldaketa pertsonal, sozial eta politikorako bide gisa ulertzen ditu. Bi ezagutza arloen artean erlazioren bat egon den arren, duela gutxi hasi dira lotura estuagoa sortzen, politikak aztertzerakoan ikerketa-ekintzaren erabilera areagotzeko beharra nabarmendu duten akademikoek lanen bidez.

Kapitulu honek bi komunitate akademikoek arteko elkarreraginean aurrera egiten jarraitu nahi du, IE eta politiken analisiaren arteko harremana aztertzeke bidea ireki duten lanetan oinarrituz eta Lurralde garapenerako ikerketa-ekintzaren ikuspegian (LGIE) norabide honetan egindako lana abiapuntutzat hartuta. Ikerketa-ekintza, hein handi batean, botere eremuetatik kanpo dauden komunitateekin garatu da. Aldiz, LGIEren ezaugarrietako bat da gobernantza instituzionalizatuetakoa testuingurutan eta eragile eta erabakitzaile publikoekin garatu dela. Hori dela eta, kapitulu hau (erantzungo ez den) galdera baten pean kokatzen da: ea ikerketa-ekintzak aldaketa sustatu dezakeen testuinguru horietan boterea duten eragileekin lan eginez.

Lehenik eta behin, kapituluak ikerketa-ekintzaren —eta zehazki LGIEren— eta politiken azterketa eraldatzailearen arteko lotura zehazten du. Ondoren, DPAk ikerketa-ekintzari eskaintzen dionaren inguruko gogoeta egiten da eta proposatzen du ikerketa-ekintzari eraldaketan laguntzeko marko eta metodologiak eman diezazkiokeela, politika publikoak garatzeko testuinguruetan egiten denean. Bereziki, DPAk politika publikoen

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fenomenoa ulertzeko modu jakin bat eskaintzen duela garatzen da, ikerketa-ekintza erabakitzailer publikoekin garatzen duten ikertzaileei kultura politiko autoreflexiboagoa eta demokratikoagoa eraikitzeke erabilgarri gerta dakiekeena, horrela, «pribilegiatuen pedagogia» garatzen lagunduz.

Resumen

«¿Pedagogía del privilegiado?»: Reflexiones sobre cómo el Análisis deliberativo de las políticas puede ayudar a la investigación-acción a transformar «desde dentro»

A pesar de las similitudes en su proyecto normativo y su base epistemológica, el enfoque deliberativo para el análisis de políticas (DPA en sus siglas en inglés) y la investigación acción (IA) parecen haberse desarrollado sin conversar mucho entre sí. El enfoque deliberativo propone un análisis de políticas públicas interpretativo, deliberativo y orientado a la práctica, como forma de capturar mejor el (complejo y político) mundo de las políticas públicas y desarrollar a la vez un conocimiento útil que promueva el desarrollo democrático. De igual manera, la IA entiende el diálogo y la co-generación de conocimiento con actores como metodología óptima de investigación y como un camino hacia la transformación personal, social y política. Sin embargo, y a pesar de que siempre han existido vasos comunicantes entre ambos cuerpos de conocimiento, no es hasta hace poco que han comenzado a entrelazarse a través de académicos que han enfatizado la necesidad de aumentar la adopción de la IA en el análisis de políticas.

Este capítulo pretende seguir avanzando en la interacción entre ambas comunidades académicas sobre la base de los trabajos que han abierto el camino de la exploración de la relación entre la IA y el análisis de políticas y del trabajo iniciado en esta dirección en el enfoque de Investigación acción para el desarrollo territorial (IADT). Si bien la investigación acción se desarrolla principalmente con comunidades que se encuentran fuera de los espacios de poder, una característica de la IADT es que se ha desarrollado en contextos y con agentes y decisores públicos de gobernanzas institucionalizadas. Este hecho hace situar el capítulo bajo la pregunta (irresuelta) de si la investigación acción también puede promover el cambio trabajando en estos contextos y con agentes que ostentan el poder. El capítulo establece primero una relación entre la IA, y en concreto la IADT, y el análisis de políticas transformador. Después, reflexiona y sugiere que los marcos y metodologías desarrollados en el DPA pueden ofrecer herramientas a la investigación acción para promover transformación cuando ésta se desarrolla en contextos de desarrollo de políticas públicas. En especial, el capítulo sugiere que la DPA ofrece una forma de entender y aproximarse al fenómeno de las políticas públicas y su desarrollo que los investigadores en la acción pueden usar para construir una cultura política más autorreflexiva y democrática cuando trabajan con decisores públicos, y contribuir así, a una «pedagogía de los privilegiados».

“Pedagogy of the privileged”? Reflections on how Deliberative Policy Analysis can help action research to foster transformation from within

Introduction

Despite their extremely similar normative and epistemological bases, deliberative policy research and action research (AR) seem to have evolved without engaging in much dialogue with each other. It was not until recently that these bodies of knowledge started to become intertwined through the work of certain scholars who highlighted the transformational potential of AR and its *fit* with the challenges and characteristics of today’s society, and who also stressed the need to increase its use in policy analysis (see Bartels & Wittmayer, 2014, 2018a; Li & Wagenaar, 2019b, 2019a; Wagenaar, 2011). For these scholars, AR is part of the Deliberative Policy Analysis (DPA) programme, a research project and also a political one that proposes a type of analysis which is not only better at capturing the nuances of the complex and political world of policy, but also aims to produce usable knowledge that serves democratic purposes. Bartels, Greenwood & Wittmayer (2020) even propose a combined approach of DPA with AR as a means to increase the transformational potential of DPA by strengthening its active engagement in the change of practice.

Inspired by these scholars who opened a path to explore the relationship between AR and policy analysis (i.e. Bartels & Wittmayer, 2018a; Wagenaar, 2011), and based on our latest explorations in Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD) in this direction (Arrona, 2019; Arrona & Larrea, 2018; Larrea & Arrona, 2019), as well as my own experience², this chapter aims to contribute to advancing in the interaction between the DPA and AR communities. Using as a starting point the dialogue with my co-inquirer in this chapter, Koen Bartels, and his work (see, in particular, Bartels *et al.*, 2020), this chapter delves into the interaction between the two communities by reflecting on the contributions that DPA can offer to AR practice in policy settings. Specifically, this chapter suggests that DPA can provide a lens through which to see the policymaking process and which action researchers can use as a tool for building a more democratic and reflexive policy culture when working with policymakers.

In the second section of the chapter, I discuss how AR relates to transformative policy analysis. In the third section, I focus on AR developed within institutionalised governance settings, since ARTD is characterised by its development *with* policymakers rather than *in opposition* to them. I then delve into how DPA can enhance the potential of AR to contribute to a more self-reflexive and democratic policy culture in section four, before concluding with a brief summary.

² Before starting my PhD, I worked for 6 years as researcher facilitator in Etorikizuna Eraikiz Territorial Development Lab, an action research and collaborative governance process developed with policymakers in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country, Spain), which constitutes the core experience for the theoretical and methodological approach of ARTD. I am once again involved in this project as a researcher (although not as an action researcher). I became acquainted with DPA scholarly work through my PhD, and this gave me a new way of looking at what I had experienced and witnessed over my 6 years of working in policy settings. The following extract of my PhD thesis shows how I described the interaction with DPA related works (Arrona, 2019, p.19): “I formulated some initial research questions that drove me to a literature that I started filtering unintentionally according to its fit with my experience in a policy environment; and that at the same time *led me to read the same experience from new angles and new theoretical glasses* (*oh, this explains when...*).” [italics not in the original]

The action researcher as a transformative policy analyst

DPA, a term coined by Marteen Hajer and Hendrik Wagenaar (2003) in 2003 in their hugely influential book “Deliberative Policy Analysis: Understanding Governance in the Network Society”, belongs to the post-positivist family of policy studies, which emerged in the 1970s and became one of the major epistemological changes in this field (DeLeon & Vogenbeck, 2007). Post-positivist scholars, who encompass different families and lines of inquiry (see Wagenaar, 2011), criticised the positivist and rationalist perspective that has traditionally dominated policy analysis for its lack of attention to issues such as power and values, which are intrinsic to the world of policy, and for its contribution to technocratic and top-down governance achieved through rational, self-believed, neutral and objective analyses. Instead, post-positivists proposed an analytical programme based on interpretive ways of knowing that is contextual, addresses power issues and aims at promoting individual autonomy and alternative relationships between institutions and citizens (DeLeon & Vogenbeck, 2007; Fischer, 2007; Ingram & Schneider, 2006; Yanow, 2000). More specifically, DPA proposes a type of policy analysis that is practice-oriented, interpretive, and deliberative (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003), and includes scholars who combine these three dimensions with different degrees. Proponents of this type of analysis argue that not only does it have intrinsic moral value but also that its epistemology has greater validity in the complex, plural and uncertain world of policy.

Indeed, although policy studies have a normative character, different understandings of what role the analyst should play can be found (DeLeon & Vogenbeck, 2007; Enserink, Koppenjan, & Mayer, 2013; Goodin, Moran, & Rein, 2006; Howlett, Ramesh, & Perl, 2009). These vary depending on the policy model which frames the researchers’ work, their view on the policymaking process and the role of knowledge in it (Enserink *et al.*, 2013; Diane Stone, Maxwell, & Keating, 2001). In DPA, the analyst is “more a facilitator than a policymaker or designer” (Howlett *et al.*, 2009, p. 28), and a “facilitator of public learning and political empowerment” (Fischer, 2003a, p. 224). Moreover, as Fischer & Mandell (2012) argue, whilst conventional facilitation does exist in policy analysis which focuses on first-order issues, deliberative approaches propose a more critical facilitation that involves making implicit beliefs and values explicit, as well as questioning and reframing them. The values and beliefs underlying policies and the behaviour of actors are often the root of the problem when it comes to alternative courses of action. These policy analysts are, in the words of Fischer and Mandell (2012), *transformative policy analysts*. As Li & Wagenaar (2019b, p. 1) posit:

Policy analysts are no longer advisers selling ideas to their clients at the “top”. Instead, deliberative analysts attempt to assist and mediate between relevant policy actors, helping them to articulate their views, deal with disputes, and develop and implement possible collaborative actions.

AR can be considered a transformative policy analysis approach when developed in policy settings. Furthermore, as an interventionist, interactive, evolving and pragmatic approach that deals with a wide range of actors, AR not only captures the emergent and changing nature of time and policy problems but also deals pragmatically with complexity and the differences in value to reach agreements (Wagenaar, 2011, Ch. 10). In AR “analysis does not precede and guide action (...), but emerges interactively, pragmatically, and deliberatively with it” (Forester, Kuitenbrouwer, & Laws, 2019, p. 2).

In my view, the following words from a policymaker who collaborates in an ARTD process convey very well this very same idea (Arzelus, 2018, p. 154):

AR has allowed us to address problems that previously had become entrenched. The outsider perspective of researchers has helped us to talk frankly and even harshly about issues that previously were not treated successfully, probably due to the fear of making explicit the existence of conflicting perspectives. We have brought about change and, together, we have managed conflict from a new perspective. We have also learnt to deal with complexity: it is no longer valid to flee from it or simplify it. Hence, the scenario and the actors are the same, but the rules of the game have changed.

Transforming from *within*?

In their initial reflections that later derived in a substantial body of work on AR and policy analysis (see Bartels, this book), Bartels & Wittmayer (2014) noticed that AR is seldom used in policy analysis. However, if we understand policy analysis in a broad sense, i.e., as “a variety of activities concerned with the creation, compilation, and application of evidence, testimony, argument, and interpretation in order to examine, evaluate, and improve the content and process of public policy” (Dryzek, 2006, p. 190), we could probably find that many AR experiences around diverse policy issues actually do that. Thus, rather than a lack of AR practice in policy settings, it could be a lack of dialogue between the research communities that contribute to policy analysis and to AR.

And what seems to be rarer is practice developed together with policymakers within institutionalised processes. In fact, whether AR should engage in formal institutional decision-making processes or remain outside (or *in opposition to*) is a contested issue. For some scholars, the adoption of AR by large institutions entails a risk of co-optation and instrumentalisation of research that could damage the AR’s democratic aspirations in seemingly participatory practices (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Greenwood & Levin, 2007, Ch. 17; Reason & Bradbury, 2008, Ch. 49).

But do AR processes developed in institutionalised governance contribute to change, or do they merely help to maintain the *status quo*? One can find studies that argue in favour of one position or another, and it can still be difficult (at least for me) to take a position in this debate, since the results of change processes are usually long-term and also very subtle if put in a wider macro-change perspective. Nevertheless, we could think that “the pedagogy of the oppressed must be matched by a pedagogy of the privileged if we are to move our world towards justice and sustainability” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 700). This means that both working with the marginalised and also working *within* to change mainstream institutions and organisations are relevant. Although policies can be affected and influenced in many different ways from the outside, government institutions still play a central role in policymaking. For this reason, analysts and researchers need to engage with those (public officials, politicians) who are part of formal decision-making and implementation processes if they want to have any influence on them (Wagenaar, 2011, Ch. 1). Otherwise, it would mean “to condemn AR to the poverty-stricken margins of the world system” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 264).

ARTD has, in fact, developed its practice in policy settings with governments, as described in the introductory chapter of this book. As any AR approach, it follows a social change agenda that is particularly oriented to fostering participatory forms of governance for socioeconomic development. One of its features is that researchers maintain a continuous dialogue with policymakers and co-create spaces that constitute the core of collaborative governance among different policy actors, developing a kind of *collective research and praxis* (Ginsburg & Gorostiaga, 2001) where the limits between the two are fuzzier than in other types of AR. As described by one of the policymakers who worked with ARTD (Arzelus, 2018, p. 154) “the relationship between researchers and practitioners could be defined as a cross-border relationship”. Using the distinction by Bartels (2012, p. 447), we could say that rather than *communities of inquiry* built

in spaces created by the researchers, in ARTD, researchers act in (and facilitate) *communities of practice* where action (policies) and knowledge emerge from the interaction between policy-makers and researchers in specific “quasi” every-day practices and situations.

Understanding how the policymaking world works and how research can have an influence towards more democratic practices is especially relevant for action researchers who, like in ARTD, work inside “the corridors of power” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 700), but also for those who work outside trying to influence and change policies by other means. In this sense, post-positivist and deliberative policy analysis can provide action researchers with insights into how to impact these policy settings.

DPA can provide frameworks and methodologies to promote collaborative and participatory policymaking and governance processes. As participation in itself does not guarantee transformation and democratisation, action researchers must become aware of the risks and challenges that institutionalised modes of engagement entail (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008; Greenwood & Levin, 2007, Ch.17). So what should collaboration in policymaking towards systemic changes look like? Many works by DPA scholars have focused on alternative ways of policymaking, delving into the different dimensions involved in the co-inquiry processes between policy actors, such as conflict resolution (Forester, 2006, 2009), transformative learning (Fischer & Mandell, 2012), or collaborative policymaking (Innes & Booher, 2003, 2010) that aims at systemic changes and transformation. All of them provide analytical frameworks and methods that can assist action researchers, who play multiple roles in their facilitation work (Bartels, 2012; Bartels & Wittmayer, 2018b; Costamagna & Larrea, 2018), when fostering participation and AR processes among policy actors.

Furthermore, as I argue in the next section, DPA can provide theories and concepts which can foster a policy culture that is more aware of the complex and conflicting nature of policy processes and this culture in turn can also be one more element that contributes towards a more democratic way of engaging in policymaking.

Building a more a “self-conscious policy culture”

Action research processes take place in particular institutional contexts and belong to specific policy domains with their own dynamics. Thus, to propel change, this type of contextual dynamics needs to be understood and acted upon both through researchers’ and practitioners’ knowledge and experience, because they belong to the specific arena of intervention. However, the understanding of the broader, albeit more abstract picture of policy dynamics, i.e., how policies are produced, reproduced or performed can also constitute a powerful tool in AR practice, not only for sense-making purposes but also for building awareness of the nature of policymaking among policy actors (thus empowering them).

Policy studies have developed a large body of literature that has tried to understand what makes up policymaking and governance. Despite there being different ways of looking at policy processes, most researchers and practitioners have been very influenced by a “high modernist,” rational, stage-based, and instrumental account of policymaking (Goodin *et al.*, 2006; Hoppe & Colebatch, 2016). For a long time now, an account of policymaking, which is seen as a process that is developed in stages where delegated actors make rational choices and decisions which are later implemented, has formed the common-sense approach (Colebatch & Hoppe, 2018; Hoppe & Colebatch, 2016).

Instead, DPA works give an account of a policy world that is complex, decentred, open-ended, emergent, contested, and socially constructed; and which is driven by ideas, interests, power, and emotions. We have learnt from these studies that policies are not only shaped by formal institutions but that they are also partly developed in spaces which exist in “institutional voids” (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003, p. 9), i.e., where it is very difficult

to trace any specific decision moment or decision agent (Goodin *et al.*, 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). These works also show us that policies are characterised by complexity, time, and pluralism (Wagenaar, 2011, Ch. 10); in other words, they are emergent—and unpredictable—properties and are products of “complex networks of actors and objects” (p. 451) and are shaped by different incommensurable moral values that are in constant conflict. And as the world of policy is unavoidably also a world of conflict, hence, policymaking is also a type of bargaining, “about who gets what” (Goodin *et al.*, 2006).

We have also learnt that policymaking has a discursive and persuasive nature which involves constantly defining and redefining ideas and arguments (Fischer, 2007; Pérez-Lejano, 2013; Stone, 1989; van Eeten, 2007). And moreover, that people—policy actors in this case—try to interpret reality and make sense of it by reducing its complexity through, among others, frames and narratives (Hajer & Laws, 2006; Pérez-Lejano, 2013); we have learnt that stories and narratives are not only a sense-making schema which can help develop actors’ understanding and define their actions but also tools for establishing policy agendas and structuring devices with which policy coalitions, networks, and communities are organised (Goodin *et al.*, 2006; Hajer & Laws, 2006; Pérez-Lejano, 2013; Stone, 1989). Furthermore, we know that policymaking not only involves bargaining, persuasion or argumentation, but also practice. *Practices*, or in other words, the everyday work of policymakers, are also political: they embody and produce institutions, and they shape policies as much as any formally established strategy (Freeman, Griggs, & Boaz, 2011; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Laws & Hajer, 2006; Wagenaar, 2004; Wagenaar & Cook, 2003). We have learnt, too, that framing and structuring problems is of utmost importance for policymaking since it significantly determines how their solution is defined and who participate in solving them (Hisschemöller & Hoppe, 1996; Hoppe, 2010). In this sense, we know that policymakers tend to *tame* problems and see them as simple because this gives them a sense of control (Hoppe, 2010).

To sum up, we have learnt that policymaking, far from being a technocratic endeavour carried out in a world governed by instrumental rationality, should become more attuned to the participatory modes of democracy. In other words, the complexities and pluralism of the world of policy, the interdependence of actors facing them, the uncertainty around any policy issue, and the need to include different kinds of knowledge require that policymaking processes should be collective, collaborative, and participatory processes, where deliberation, communication, collective learning, joint responsibility, concrete problem-solving, and trust building are also fundamental aspects (DeLeon & Vogenbeck, 2007; Goodin *et al.*, 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Innes & Booher, 2003).

AR mainly fosters *self-managed change processes* based on stakeholders’ knowledge in order to produce change. Nevertheless, *expert* knowledge of researchers can play a relevant role in co-generating knowledge and addressing the issues at hand (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, Ch.8; Karlsen & Larrea, 2018). The use of expert knowledge and the role of theories vary in each AR practice (see Dick, Stringer, & Huxham, 2009), but the implicit and explicit theories that researchers bring to the dialogue are relevant and influential despite the focus being on local knowledge. Moreover, local knowledge can be partly drawn from mainstream widely held views of a particular issue, like the widespread perception that policy processes are processes carried out in stages, based on rational choices and that expert advice is relevant for finding the best solutions. Hence, (in my view) an interesting question is: could breaking this widespread idea, which is aligned with and promotes top-down governance models, be a part of the *pedagogy of the privileged* (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 700) when working with power holders?

Action research does play a pedagogical role, which is mainly practice-based, through direct involvement in specific problems and situations. The following words from a policymaker with whom we collaborate in an ARTD process are an excellent example of this:

When you start working in collaboration, you also start sharing your power. And that needs to be learnt. Even though you might have taken a political decision to collaborate, you need to learn... (...) for example, one thing we have learnt with the researchers is to make conflicts explicit³.

Undoubtedly, he refers to learning that occurred in practice, when interacting and dealing explicitly and consciously with conflicts. However, this practice learning was preceded and accompanied by frameworks that raised awareness of the relevance of acknowledging the conflicts in territorial development, as well as the need to deal with them, which is an idea that is at the very core of ARTD (see more on conflict in ARTD in Karlsen & Larrea, 2014b, Ch.2; Larrea, 2019; Larrea & Arrona, 2019).

Indeed, ideas and concepts are part of the co-construction of collective responses (Karlsen & Larrea, 2018). But although concepts are not used as unquestionable truths—they are only one more element in ARTD processes—they help collective sense-making and feed and enrich the dialogue between policymakers and researchers for developing collective responses (see, for example, Larrea, Estensoro, & Sisti, 2018, and Karlsen & Larrea, 2018). If research can provide interpretive settings that contribute to sense-making among policy actors who do not share the same vocabulary (Hajer & Laws, 2006), in AR, at least in ARTD, theoretical concepts can also be used for doing so (Karlsen & Larrea, 2018).

In this sense, the way we understand and conceptualise the policy process is important: theories and disciplinary knowledge, as argued by Colebatch & Hoppe (Colebatch & Hoppe, 2018; Hoppe & Colebatch, 2016), have a *performative* role, a power to influence policy practices through specific accounts of policy activities that practitioners partly draw on. The way in which an issue is framed or conceptualised is relevant since it has the power to co-produce that very same issue, even if the experiential accounts of practitioners regarding their own practice may differ.

Hence, concepts, theories, and abstract ideas drawn from research do have a framing, performative, and even pedagogical role to play in AR, and can be used (and are used) to raise awareness and change how things are usually done: “Many times what we do is close our eyes and look the other way... No, let’s put conflicts on the table and let’s talk and, quote unquote, not waste our time”⁴. Therefore, which account of the policy world researchers either explicitly or implicitly put on the table *is* relevant.

ARTD has recently started to introduce some DPA inspired ideas in its academic works and practice. Larrea & Arrona’s (2019) article is one such attempt in which we shared some concepts with the policymakers to address a conflict that emerged in the AR process. The article describes how one of the authors (Miren Larrea, editor of this book) noticed an unresolved conflict among the policymakers and consequently, used some ideas from DPA to make sense of the situation and share and discuss it with policymakers. It was very interesting to see in the dialogue that, after sharing the ideas of *pluralism* and *agonism*, one of the policymakers said “Yes, I think this is happening in this process, but it also happens in all the processes that we work on” and “we also have them [pluralism and agonism] inside our organisation^{5,6}”. The terms not only helped this policymaker to make sense of the particular situation they were addressing, but it seems that they provided her with a new lens to view her everyday work and intervention in a different manner. This policy actor gained awareness of the pluralism that characterises her everyday activity.

³ Words from a policymaker in Arrona, Karlsen, & Larrea (2020).

⁴ Extract from an interview with a policymaker.

⁵ Extract from the transcription of the recording of the meeting.

⁶ The name of the organisation has been substituted by “organisation” for confidentiality issues.

Although this example may seem to be almost insignificant, in my opinion, it offers a glimpse into the contribution action researchers can make in building a “reflexive, self-conscious policy culture” (Goodin *et al.*, 2006, p. 7) which breaks with a rationalist, linear, and technocratic account of policy processes that may still prevail in government institutions and the administration.

Concluding remarks

Intervening in policy arenas, even more so when engaging directly with policymakers, poses specific challenges for action researchers who can learn from policy scholars dealing with change, collaboration, and transformation in policy settings and who have developed theoretical work and methodologies with this aim. In ARTD, we have already started to seek insights from these works to improve our theory and practice. In this regard, this chapter contributes to ARTD by presenting the action researcher as a transformative policy analyst and by reflecting on how theory can also enhance transformation when working with policymakers.

This chapter has discussed that building awareness among power holders of the, *inter alia*, conflicting, uncertain, and complex nature of policymaking can be a contribution that action researchers who work with policymakers could make towards a more self-reflexive policy practice, which in turn may contribute to transformation. In order to do so, DPA accounts of the world of policy that challenge the traditional ways of seeing the governing process and policy work offer relevant insights which can be integrated into the dialogue with policymakers.

Beyond its contribution to ARTD, this chapter aspires to engage with the wider AR community that works in policy settings and to contribute to the debate initiated by my co-inquirer in this chapter, Koen Bartels (see Bartels, this book), amongst others. As Greenwood (2007) asserts, each AR practice is unique because it depends on the skills, experience, and ideological position of the researcher. Moreover, each action researcher will find inspiration in the theoretical works that better fit his or her values, and his or her understanding of the world and concrete experiential practice. But in my view, DPA scholars constitute an excellent community with whom action researchers can discuss and learn in their shared endeavour of transformation: because not only can action research increase the transformative potential of deliberative policy analysis (Bartels *et al.*, 2020) but also vice versa.

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