


Territorial Development Series



The Evolution of Action Research for Territorial Development

Nurturing an intergenerational
and multicultural environment

Edited by
Patricia Canto-Farachala
and **Miren Estensoro García**

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La evolución de la Investigación Acción
para el Desarrollo Territorial:
nutriendo un entorno intergeneracional
y multicultural

The Evolution of Action Research for Territorial Development: Nurturing an intergenerational and multicultural environment

Patricia Canto-Farachala
Miren Estensoro García

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Mundaiz 50, E-20012, Donostia-San Sebastián
Tel.: 943 297 327. Fax: 943 279 323
comunicacion@orquestra.deusto.es
www.orquestra.deusto.es

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P. Box 1 - E48080 Bilbao
e-mail: publicaciones@deusto.es

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Chapter 3

Learning how to muddle through divisiveness. Because we have to! The contribution of ART to rethinking ARTD

Hilary Bradbury¹ and Miren Larrea²

Abstract

This is a chapter that addresses how facilitative action researchers can deal with divisiveness, defined as natural among actors seeking to work together, and as the consequence of conflict; and attachment, which is a relational process to help overcome divisiveness. To share how these concepts operate in practice, the chapter is based on two experiments. One is based on ARTD (action research for territorial development) and took place in a Think Tank in the Basque Country. The other is based on ART (action research for transformations) and refers to a workshop in an Action Research + coLAB. In each experiment, action researchers and policymakers participated in self-inquiry and self-development processes. These learning processes have inspired a very simple but straightforward conceptual framework of attachment that overcomes divisiveness.

Laburpena

*Zatiketa gairitzen ikasi. Behar dugulako!
ART-en ekarpena ARTD birpentsatzeko*

Kapitulu honetan, elkarrekin lan egin nahi duten eragileek euren arteko zatiketa gailentzerakoan ekintza-ikertzaile erraztaileek nola lagun dezaketen aztertzen da, horretarako atxikimenduaren garapena bultzatuz. Zatiketa zerbait naturala moduan azaltzen da, konfliktuan

¹ Action Research Journal and AR+ Foundation.

² Orkestra-Instituto Vasco de Competitividad y Universidad de Deusto.

duelarik bere sorburua. Atxikimendua zatiketa gailentzen duen prozesu erlazionala da. Kontzeptu hauek praktikan nola funtzionatzen duten partekatzeko, bi esperimentutan oinarritzen da kapitulua. Horietako bat LGEl-n (lurralde garapenerako ekintza-ikerketan) oinarritzen da eta Euskal Herriko Think Tank batean egin zen. Bestea, ART-ean oinarritzen da (eraldaketarako ekintza-ikerketan) eta Action Research + fundazioan antolatutako coLAB bateko tailer bati egiten dio erreferentzia. Kasu bakoitzean, ikertzaileek eta arduradun politikoez auto-galdetara eta autogarapen prozesuetan parte hartu zuten. Ikasketa prozesu hauetan oinarrituta atxikimenduari buruzko esparru kontzeptual oso simple baina zuzen bat proposatzen da, atxikimenduaren bidez zatiketa nola gainditu pentsatzen laguntzen duena.

Resumen

*Aprender a salir del paso a través de la división. ¡Porque tenemos que hacerlo!
La contribución de ART para repensar ARTD*

Este es un capítulo que aborda cómo las personas que facilitan la investigación-acción pueden abordar la división, definida como algo natural entre los actores que buscan trabajar juntos, y que emerge como consecuencia del conflicto y el apego, un proceso relacional para ayudar a superar la división. Para compartir cómo funcionan estos conceptos en la práctica, el capítulo se basa en dos experimentos: uno en la IADT (investigación-acción para el desarrollo territorial) y el otro en ART (investigación acción para las transformaciones). El primero se desarrolló en un Think Tank del País Vasco y el otro en un coLAB organizado en Action Research +. En cada caso, las personas investigadoras y una serie de hacedores de políticas participaron en procesos de autoindagación y autodesarrollo. Estos procesos de aprendizaje han inspirado un marco conceptual de apego muy simple pero directo que ayuda a pensar cómo superar la división a través del apego.

Learning how to muddle through divisiveness. Because we have to! The contribution of ART to rethinking ARTD

1. Introduction

This chapter integrates our separate reflections originally published in *Roots and Wings of Action Research for Territorial Development* (Larrea, 2019). Hilary had written about Action Research for Transformations (ART) and Miren on Action Research for Territorial Development (ARTD). We now find a new integration informed by our ensuing collaboration in groups to transform conflict.

Action research in response to eco-social crisis is now happening in a context of increasing political extremism. Organized and widespread disinformation on social media occurs within a warming natural environment while toxicity—social and ecological—is on the rise. It is reasonable to suggest that a social transition on the scale of a new epoch is on the horizon as we transition (because we must) to a post-fossil fuel era. As post WWII institutions struggle to remain relevant/find a new significance, democratic fragmentation can appear unable for collective sensemaking. It's unclear whether we will create a next era of scarcity or one in which human beings learn successfully to live with one another within nature's parameters.

As action researchers we hold out hope for participative democracy. Not idealistically but because it has proven itself at scale and over time. And remains better than the alternatives. Moreover, we hold fast to the possibility that in an age of global communication local projects can inform one another across boundaries. It is in this spirit that we have reflected about ARTD, conducted locally, through the lens of ART. Specifically, the following chapter uses concepts and perspectives from ART and its metamodern approach (Bradbury, 2022) to reflect on how ARTD can improve its approach to conflict (Larrea, 2021). We look to a shared lineage to suggest experiments for a combined path forward.

Two core concepts act as a scaffolding of this chapter. The first of them is divisiveness which we define as natural among actors seeking to work together, and as the consequence of conflict. The second is attachment, which we present as a relational process to help overcome divisiveness. The concept of attachment is therefore presented with a bridging role in transforming conflict and constructing adaptive agreements. Attention to attachment may help grow collective capability of actors to solve their problems together in contexts of collective knowing.

The paper is based on two experiments, one from a Think Tank in the Basque Country and the other from an ART workshop. In each we invited ARTD practitioners, that is action researchers and policy makers to participate in ART inspired self-inquiry and self-development. The experiments were not designed specifically to experiment with divisiveness, however, believing it naturally arises, we agreed to face it and to bring an attachment lens in reaching the explicit goals of shared learning at the intersection of ART and ARTD.

The chapter is structured to first present the two experiments we have facilitated together. We then explain the relevant literatures and present a simple conceptual framework to clarify how to work with divisiveness in a way that can more readily generate attachment and transformation among action researching actors. We close the chapter with reflections on limitations and enablers.

2. **First experiment: A Think Tank in the Basque Country Experiments with Personal Development**

To conduct the first experiment, we established a space in which key stakeholders from the Etorikizuna Eraikiz Think Tank could meet. This is a deliberation group tasked with the positive transformation of political culture and led by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (the regional government of Gipuzkoa).³ It involves a representative mix of government and non-governmental actors with the latter drawn from universities, research, experimentation centers and county development agencies. This group began working together in 2020 aligned around the goal to transform the policy ecosystem towards more collaborative forms of governance and to do so using a process that co-generates knowledge. The cogenerative methodology is action research for territorial development (ARTD). The provincial council, in collaboration with Orkestra-Basque Institute of Competitiveness, had experimented with this action research methodology since 2009.

Since 2018 ART has been used to enrich ARTD and its focus on interactive, interpersonal, i.e., second person action research (Chandler & Torbert, 2003; Bradbury, 2015). Building on the original positive results, first-person action research was proposed. As Larrea (2020), describes, this initiated a more mutual inquiry processes within the Think Tank (e.g., Larrea *et al.*, 2021), in which second person action researchers deepened their own reflexivity to bring first person action research to the fore.

The experiment brought a self-developmental inquiry process that involved fourteen people from the deliberation group. Included in the group is Miren, in her role as insider-facilitator who actively encouraged the group to integrate personal development in its deliberative agenda. The group had made no explicit connection between its goals (for new culture etc) and how participants perceived themselves as agents of change. Thus, the relation between “me” and “us” was unclear. Notwithstanding, the group accepted to undertake the experiment. Hilary took a role as outsider-facilitator, perceived as a “third” who granted neutrality and encouragement. She also brought an online assessment (called “Shifting Horizons”) in which those who wished could self-assess their own developmental journey specifically with regards personal habits of power, feedback and collaborative action in their work. For those who engaged in the assessment within the Think Tank she also created a confidential space in which to discuss the personal assessment report so it could be used for self-development in the work context of meeting the goals of a new political culture.

Before entering into the assessment process the group's discussion brought up one concern: doesn't working on personal and self-development strengthen the tendency towards individualism? In other words, in a group that wants to develop a new political culture based within its communitarian ethos, should self-development even be considered? In the discussion, connections were made between self-development and individualism.

The divisiveness in the group, in terms of the definition of new “me”, “us” and “other” therefore emerged in the form of the caution that some of the participants showed regarding self-development and its potential harm on the community. Deeper political views became evident. The divisiveness emerging in the group connected to political perspectives on how the development of self and the development of the community influenced each other.

³ Gipuzkoa is a region of around 750,000 inhabitants in the Basque Country (one of the autonomous communities of Spain).

In terms of the narratives of attachment, there was tension between “us” and “me”. In a context where only “us” (the territorial / communitarian) had been discussed, the introduction of self-development as part of the process was perceived as a risk to “us”. Self-development was first interpreted as prioritizing “me” before “us”. The group, however, accepted to continue learning about this relationship through a next step in the experiment, where the five participants that had engaged in the assessment (plus two new ones now intrigued) specifically explored the relationship between self-development, “me” and “us”.

Five participants (two from the government, three from research and experimental centers) were first to take the assessment, which they completed online and followed up with debrief. Then a workshop was held with fourteen participants of the deliberation group, in which Hilary presented the purpose of framework, and the five volunteers were invited to share their experience from the assessments, especially as it related to the experiments they’d chosen to work with their own habits of power, feedback and collaboration. In sharing their experiments, each sought collegial support.

Figure 3.1 is a synthesis of how, through facilitated interviews based on the assessment, they described their lived experience of these connections. Due to limitations with the length of the chapter, and because there was considerable overlap, we have chosen four out of seven narratives.

Figure 3.1. Story of Self-Us-Now as a developmental tale

Now [that I am retired] and I think of my development path and the next step, I especially feel the need for transfer. [...] I would like to help others develop their transformation skills. If I were to carry out this exercise the group would learn about the importance of ambition, and this would help to regain awareness of the relevance of the long-term collective vision in the ecosystem.

I have made a great effort to fulfill the goals set in the group and to take action and “do”. This required an executive mode. My involvement through this mode has had an impact on the team’s ability to meet its operational goals. My next step would be to take more time to reflect on the process, stop and consciously seek feedback from others. If I did this, [...] would develop the courage to start talking about such things as emotions, inertia, dominant attitudes, underestimating different knowledge, self-change.

The exercise has helped me see that since the launch of the Think Tank, other people’s views have changed my own. I guess mine had an effect on others too. Looking forward, in my own development, I want to cultivate this permeability in a conscious way. Consciously practicing permeability can affect the readiness of everyone in the team, which would strengthen the team, making it more productive and innovative. If we become more mutually permeable in our deliberative group, we will carry the same to other deliberative groups, and consequently to the policy ecosystem.

Doing this exercise has given me the freedom to start from “Me” within this group, and then think about the group. [When facilitating] I see my contribution in the form given to the voices of others, but not in my own voice. A next step in my development is to take on roles that require me to use my voice. If I took that step, somehow the group would gain a “process expert” and lose a facilitator. [Then] this group could better explain and share the work it has done, and this would help raise awareness of the need to transform the political culture in Gipuzkoa and outside Gipuzkoa.

A next step was sharing the seven narratives into the group that had experimented with the assessment. The following are some of the spontaneous responses in the e-mails exchanged upon receiving the document, which were shared with the whole group:

"I think it's a nice contribution, because I think that if we want real transformation, we have to get used to discussing these [personal developmental] issues as well."

"In my opinion, we often give 'macro' or 'objective' reasons for not talking about 'me' such as: we will distance ourselves from the collective, it is not important, it is not objective... But, often it is just our fear of talking about ourselves and the subjective dimensions. Transformations are made by concrete people. We, each of us. In my opinion, this experiment captures the core of transformation. Reading the narratives of the other participants 'humanized' the group in my eyes. I liked it a lot."

"I too believe that it is important to analyze the dimension of self in this dynamic that seeks to build a renewed collective subject. To fight the damage of individualism we need a strong communitarianism, no doubt, but the community is made up of people and the development of the collective is empty if it does not lead to the development of individual persons."

"I believe that an important shortcoming of advanced western societies is that the relationship between individual autonomy and social determinants is ignored. In other words, almost all of our mental states are largely determined by the social groups we belong to. This exercise, at least for me, has helped me reflect on the connections between these two dimensions of human beings (individual and collective)".

Our aim with the experiment was not to "convince" participants of anything specific, but to generate the conditions for the group to explore the different dimensions of divisiveness, "me" "the other" and "us". We saw that because of the experiment the group grew in its awareness of these relationships and thus generated better conditions to explore narratives of power, feedback and collaboration in a context of attachment, i.e., going beyond transactional (ethical) arguments that are based on fragmenting "me" and "other". Narratives of attachment based on "I take on the needs and utilities of our community as part of knowing myself" as a combination of 'the community-me' may be inspired by a larger sense of me who cares-for-us; for this we use the provocative label 'mother-me'.

3. Second Experiment: Action researchers from Global North and South learn together

For the sake of simplicity, we may contrast the learning models that participants from the Global North brought to the process as rational, influenced, for instance by Argyris (1990). While action researchers of the Global South who participated worked within a more political-emancipatory learning tradition, influenced by Freire (1996). In the following sections we illuminate these influences looking more carefully at how each approaches divisiveness. Then we reflect back on our specific experiment of gaining awareness of divisiveness and the potential value of re-constructing narratives of attachment among action researchers from differing/divisive formative lineages.

3.1. *A lineage of learning*

3.1.1. IN THE GLOBAL NORTH

Argyris highlighted the ubiquity of individual ‘learning defenses’ as the root of much divisiveness among people seeking to learn. For example, we may espouse “X” (say democratic process), yet in fact we enact “Y” (say autocracy). Moreover, we remain blind to, and defensive about, our impact. He proposed an Action Science (Argyris *et al.*, 1985) that both takes natural ego defenses and cognitive biases into account and seeks to transcend them. In action science noticing the disconnect between our theory and practice is encouraged. This is then followed by rationally unpacking the unseen theory-in-action that is the real dynamo of our actions. In other words, we learn to see and then overcome our own learning defenses.

Argyris perhaps believed that all would equally benefit from working to rationally reconstruct the gap in practice between what they say and what they do. However, we have since learned of cognitive biases—often gendered—that can make rational argument unhelpful for groups. Argyris’ student Torbert (2004) went on to develop a theory for how leaders may mature in embracing difference, in which, for example, the ability to seek and give mutual feedback, is learned together and encouraged within a group as a mechanism for maturing. Without facilitation, however most groups are, at best, tolerant of feedback. Thus, the capacity of the facilitator is an important element in transformational work (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

3.1.2. IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: EMANCIPATORY LEARNING

Paulo Freire, in the South, viewed divisiveness through a lens of oppression, rather than cognitive bias. He proposes a pedagogical process that is liberating, in a context defined by the existence of oppressors and the oppressed. This is a relationship that is inherent also to colonialism and its consequences, and the western conception of science. With his pedagogy Freire (1996) takes us to unveil that there would be no privileges without oppression and advocates for a liberating praxis. However, this requires gaining awareness of the situation, as, often, “submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the ‘order’ which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized” (1996: 44).

Freire argues that “The oppressor [...] is unable to lead this struggle” (Freire, 1996: 29). This means that in our action research, when aiming to explore the consequences of colonialism and the preponderance of western science, we need southern leadership. Moreover, his proposal of problem posing pedagogical processes overcomes banking approaches where those who know deposit knowledge on those who don’t know. In problem posing educational processes all participants become teachers and students simultaneously. All participants voice their ‘here and now’, and together, they reach awareness of their relational and dialectical ‘here and now’.

There are multiple interpretations of the legacy of Paulo Freire, e.g., that facilitator and participants must try to generate spaces where: (a) the tensions can be honestly enacted, without softening the fact that oppression can be entrenched in these spaces too; (b) the nature of the South-North relationship can be unveiled not in theory, but in praxis; and (c) true solidarity can be sought. We brought these South and North ideas to practice together in the experiment we share next. The experimental container was an ART workshop, called a coLAB.

3.2. *Micro divisiveness yields micro transformation: The North's "me-future" meets South's "us/past": the Politics of Caring Co-lab*

ART coLABs (Bradbury, 2022) are described as a community of inquiry and practice that invites and supports participants to develop capacity with other ARTists from around the world. coLABs start "here", among those who turn to learn from their personal experience. Each coLAB supports the participants' own learning orientation and their "inner" work for the world (AR+ website).

Divisiveness is not overcome in a vacuum, but in the effort to address a specific issue at a time. One coLAB became a case experiment for this paper. It was entitled the Politics of Caring. The goal was to bring together action researchers from North and South and to share their inquiry and practice while learning how to upscale their work. The intention was to empower more collaborations for more transformative outcomes in socio-political spaces.

Through 9 monthly coLAB sessions of 90-100 minutes, eleven participants developed an inquiry into their theory in practice (not the abstract ideas) of finding and/or co-building a different, more learning oriented, way into a better present. We, the authors of this chapter, facilitated the process together with Lake Sagaris, each of us located in the United States (Hilary), Chile (Lake) and the Basque Country in Spain (Miren). The other participants were made up of three activists from Chile and Argentina, a policy maker and a university researcher from Argentina (who worked together in several projects) and a policy maker and researcher from the Basque Country (also working together). Each brought to the process examples of their work and what had required changes and adjustments within their own practice. They also shared techniques and principles to reduce risk and enhance the effectiveness of experiments that they, as practitioners, constantly realized.

The following table shares the cases that were used for discussion through the process.

Table 3.1. Cases for discussion

PROPONENT	CASE
Facilitator of the process a	A case about how the meeting of different worldviews generated hurt and discouraged participation.
Facilitator of the process b	A case about how being flexible about the process can take us to unexpected positive results.
Facilitator of the process c	The case of legislating for Gay marriage in Ireland and how care in small groups can be powerful catalyst for national change.
Chilean activists	Care in the educational context: how do we know what the others need in order to take care of them?
Argentinian researcher	Respectful relationships between action researchers in USA and Latin America. The relevance of respecting silence.
Policy makers and researchers in Argentina and Basque Country	A definition of care that helps facilitators.
Argentinian activist	How to ask for caring in working contexts mediated by power.

Participants were invited from the beginning to dare to be vulnerable together. This is precisely something that conventional politics does not address, as it often focuses on power as a unilateral force to garner or guard against. For this, the coLAB was designed explicitly as a so-called brave relational space that could catalyze new ideas and experiments (Bradbury, 2022). In this we needed to encourage constructive criticism while acknowledging that we would not always feel comfortable.

3.3. *The experience of divisiveness*

A feature that initially separated us and simultaneously brought us together was language. Pablo Costamagna⁴, one of the Argentinian researchers whom we mention in this section, spoke only Spanish, Hilary only English and Lake and Miren both Spanish and English. We used the simultaneous translation technology available through Zoom so the whole group could speak the language of their choice with relative ease. Hilary expressed the two-fold role of language when she wrote:

“this is my first bilingual coLAB. In technical terms it's a delight because of Zoom. What used to be so difficult, is much simpler. [...] However, the politics of language among us are also more apparent. They are the expression of the ‘North/South’ dialogue. Its difficulties and its promise.”

Lake (who grew up in Canada but moved to Chile when young) wrote: “Thanks very much to every one of you, and Hilary, for [...] willingness to bridge across English and Spanish. This doesn't happen often and has been a real luxury for me to bring two such different sides of my existence together”.

It was in this stage of group “bonding” that the tension between South and North emerged explicitly.

Pablo reacted to an invitation by Hilary to signal where we lived by using a global map and naming well known cities closest to us. For this Hilary had pointed to San Francisco. Pablo had understood that the northern cities' location had been taken for granted as known to all, while the southerners were invited to better explain theirs. He later reflected about this episode turning to Miren:

“I felt uncomfortable [...] with the North/South relationship, I did not feel cared for even when I understood that nothing was designed on purpose to make me uncomfortable. In this process it was important that Miren acted informally because she knew both sides and she understood the political dimension of what was going on. We needed a person that could help us reflect based on trust and the knowledge of the various logics that were operating. This helped me rediscover how people can feel (independently of being right, wrong or somewhere in between) when we propose things that not always consider their perspective or position.”

Pablo, based on past experiences, had shared with Miren how important it was for him that the coLAB would not be understood as a space where the South learnt from the North. Based on this and relating to *care* as the core concept in the coLAB, Miren shared: “I have learnt that [...] the way to take care of the south is to acknowledge the wisdom in its pain.”

⁴ Pablo chose that we use his full name in this chapter.

One of the inputs Miren used to help reflect on the differences was a poem by Eduardo Galeano that started “According to some ancient traditions, the tree of life grows upside down. The trunk and branches downwards, the roots upwards”. The metaphor of the tree helped to think on the differences between the South and the North. The idea emerged that the North looks with ease at the future, but the South cannot because the past still hurts. This conversation helped not only gain awareness of the differences, but also show respect for each other. Hilary reported being surprised by how uninterested she was in the past and she proposed looking for shared spaces: “I am looking more carefully at the trunk! What do we want to take from the past into forming the future? [...] we have to do this discovery together. And if we are truly rooted differently, this is not easy”.

Explicitly acknowledging the breakdown in “bonding” helped generate a space of mutual respect. Pablo later described this as a political act: “We were sharing cases on how we shape political culture. At the same time the coLAB itself was political” To which Hilary answered: “I too am liberated by acknowledging the pain of the South— which is what has been exiled from the North”.

We close with some words by Lake about this experience: “I really loved this ‘breakdown’ with Pablo and [...] saw it much more as a mild rebellion and therefore a door opening onto a more direct and interesting conversation [...] Perhaps this is an exercise that we could invent together, to open Pablo’s door sooner, at once more gently and more explicitly, and thus far from making inquiry difficult, it actually makes it much richer and more surprising”.

The South North divisiveness is one that crosses the spaces where action researchers from North and South collaborate. Constructing ‘the community-me’, inspired by the ‘mother-me’ and worded in this case as ‘the action research community-me’ requires explicitly dealing with rational and emotional factors that emerged in the case.

4. Discussion and findings: A narrative of attachment

In this section we present two sets of literature to bear on both cases from the narrative transformation work of Marshall Ganz and from attachment theory of Alison Gopnik. In combination, they helped us reflect about the previous experiences to inspire the conceptual process framework we present for how to address divisiveness.

4.1. *Inspiring concepts to rethink divisiveness and attachment*

4.1.1. NARRATIVE OF TRANSFORMATION: THE STORY OF SELF COMES FIRST

The Ganz model of building social change through story (Ganz, 2011) draws on the power of narrative as a mechanism for transforming divisiveness. Ganz’s work found renewed interest in the political organizing of the Obama era in the USA and from there other breakthrough political transformations in the Anglophone world, including Irish citizens becoming the first country to vote for same sex marriage⁵.

The Ganz model highlights the sequencing of three narratives: Story of Self, Story of Us, Story of Now. Transformation is supported, suggests Ganz’s model, when peo-

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9yvOqmhReE>

ple first share their stories of Self. It is thought those stories that they connect to the listener who may previously have seen them as “other.” In turn the sharing of one person invites a sharing of the other which allows both to see what is common. This newfound commonality among “strangers” allows both to turn together as an “us” to take (political) action together. We use this model to unpack key moments in what we have seen as a transformative development in the previous cases and to propose the three stages in Figure 3.2.

4.1.2. “Us” BEFORE “ME”

Gopnik’s model of relationship and learning (Gopnik *et al.*, 1999) enriches and perhaps corrects the Ganz model in clarifying that “us” comes before “me,” as is the foundational human experience of first relationships. In other words, as children —when we are laying down the foundations of relational sensemaking practices— we know ourselves as a combination of “mother-me”.

Gopnik contrasts two common archetypes of relationship that exist today. One is the common rational and transactional archetype, in which actors are presumed separate and in pursuit of their own separate goals. It emerges from the basic insight of the Enlightenment which insists that rational agreements —entered consensually— bestow mutual value on those involved. This model has led to markets and popular democracy. What binds individuals in these relationships is a kind of “contract” which works at interpersonal to national scale. In contrast Gopnik suggests the model of Mother/Child as a more adaptive way of thinking about relationship pointing out that in this foundational and original relationship actors do not have a contract. The mother, after all, takes on the needs and utilities of the child, in a way that is one-sided, albeit sequential, as it also (eventually) switches when the child takes on needs of the mother. However, it is foremost an emotional relationship in which there is mutual satisfaction and dissatisfaction and in which both muddle through occasional and normal dissatisfactions to peaceful resolution in an evolving relationship.

Evolution of relationship is thus foremost, though at first undifferentiated and entangled. We find this a helpful re-framing of otherwise transactional individuals because it suggests there is an “us” that is *a priori* to divisiveness; also potential for change. This framing stands in contrast with the often taken for granted idea that conflict arises between originally separate entities who fight to defend their separate difference. Divisiveness in this attachment model, on the other hand, is normal. And the transformation of divisiveness is even more normal as healthy relationships contain conflict as natural development ensues. Those involved naturally separate and through that separation find space to return to an increasingly spacious relationship between equals.

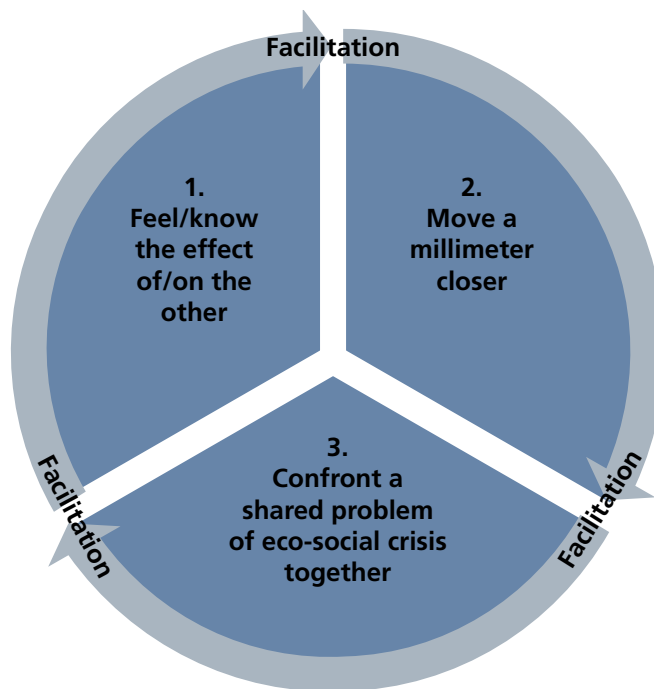
Once we have understood narratives on attachment in a specific community, and considering that the narratives that prevail are not nowadays able to respond to the complex challenges we are facing, the political question ensues: Can we scale up/out such close, intimate relationship of attachment like the one Gopnik proposes? How do we scale them up to the scale of a policy making community in a territory, or even a nation or a planet? Could that, for instance, help us think differently about climate change and our attachment with future generations?

It is with these questions in mind that we present, in the next section, our conceptual process framework.

4.2. A conceptual process framework of attachment

In the following figure we synthesize how these processes worked based on a continued reconfiguration of “me”, “other” and “us” to overcome divisiveness. The figure might seem oversimplified, but repeated cyclically, the process helps overcome divisiveness.

Figure 3.2. A conceptual framework of attachment that overcomes divisiveness



Source: Own elaboration.

The first step in the process is to *get to mutually feel and know the effect we have on the other* (and the effect the other has on us). This is not always evident as sometimes what is most significant in the relational space is not what is explicit in the agenda. Yet, what is not explicit can still be deeply rooted. We have shared the perspectives of Paulo Freire and Chris Argyris to represent the deeply rooted perspectives of some of the participants in the coLAB. While they are not contradictory, still, the differences can be divisive. One example of how we mutually got to feel and know the effect we had on each other is, in the coLAB, how we used informal facilitation through email conversations to share the difficult thoughts and feelings about the South-North tension. Another is how in the Think Tank we tried to generate a constructive dialogue that made explicit the worry of some participants that self-development could hinder communitarian development. The requirement at this stage is not to be alone with our experience of divisiveness and find the spaces and procedures to share it.

The next step is to *move a millimeter closer*. The examples of moving closer are, in the co-LAB, the moment when participants explicitly recognized what they had learnt from each other, and in the Think Tank the moment when the group decided to experiment despite the differences in perspective, when seven participants volunteered. We have named this step

using the term millimeter because each of these moves can seem initially small. We frame this move, conceptually, within Gopnik's model of Mother/Child and invite the reader to think this millimetric move as something not necessarily related to a contract, nor to ethical reciprocity. The millimetric move is one that a mother would make, taking on the needs and desires of the child. It is one-sided, albeit sequentially so, and is a prelude to a natural switch when the child takes on needs of the mother (as we are discussing adults, the switch is likely more fluid and faster). What we underline about this relationship is that it is emotionally at-tuned; there is mutual satisfaction and dissatisfaction, but both parties muddle through dissatisfaction towards peaceful resolution. Maybe thinking of these millimetric moves can help invigorate processes long stagnated by conceptualizing them in the less fluid, more frozen terms of contracts and ethical reciprocity.

The third step is to *confront a shared problem of eco-social crisis together*. This is the most difficult step to visualize, as it is not easy, for instance, to see how our understanding and closeness on the South-North tension can help overcome the global South-North tension; and how our integration of self and communitarian development in the Think Tank can help transform the political culture in the face of the growing totalitarianism. However, we believe that micro processes are fractals of macro potentials and each of these experiences contribute to the major changes the world needs. The requirement at this stage is thus to acknowledge that each renewed attachment can be used to face the grand challenges and take natural steps.

5. Concluding reflections

We are both women action researchers who see value in conflict as a transformative component of learning. We facilitate microprocesses as scalable when recognized as fractals of macro processes (Karlsen & Larrea, 2016; Bradbury, 2022; Larrea *et al.*, 2021). We position this work's outlines in the action research lineage from Marja Liisa Swantz' practical work with stakeholders as an anthropologist (see Nyemba & Mayer, 2018) from which PAR developed. In this work which started out in Tanzania, we see also links between Global North and South traditions of action research. Thus, we're suggesting there is a *third and integrative way* that transcends the boundaries of dualistic thinking (self/other; North/South; Masculine/feminine). Transcending dualism, and in place of its fragmentation may come, with imagination and practice, the possibility of developmental friendship (Bradbury, 2022; Larrea *et al.*, 2021). In developmental friendship, developed as central to the practice and theory of ART, care for connection is paramount. Not remaining oblivious of, or stuck in, conflict is foremost. Thus, constructively engaging conflict grows those involved to accomplish work together. The motivating power source is not that people like each other necessarily, but that they realize they are connected and can learn with one another. This may be especially important in the midst of challenging inquiries inherent in relationships of diversity.

We have met our goals with this chapter if: (a) we have normalized divisiveness, as we have presented it both as natural situation in human groups and as a resource to be used; (b) we have drawn attention to the developmental capacity of learning to transcend it, a feminine capacity (that men and women can practice) that needs more attention as we move away from a millennia of patriarchy and (c) have shared how overcoming divisiveness in the lineage of action research offers us tools to combine and recombine our learnings (also with theory from other disciplines, in this case, from social movement theory).

At this time of climate change and other eco-social crises, when we want to see action research contribute, we think understanding divisiveness and learning to overcome it can have positive implications for humanity. The main contribution of this chapter, in the con-

text of this book that presents the developments of ARTD, is to share insights on how ART has helped ARTD transcend second person action research and community processes. The first step in that process of transcending was to consider that ARTD contributes beyond the specific communities that practice it, and one example is how the connections between Latin American and European researchers practicing ARTD helps better understand the South-North divisiveness in other international relational spaces for action research. The second step in transcending presented in this chapter relates to the integration of the personal level and self-development (“me”) as a dimension deeply connected with (and not confronted to) the community (“us”). We have presented how these dimensions generated tension in an ARTD process, but also how participants addressed them in the search of new paths forward.

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