ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN RESEARCH METHODS

Commons, Sustainability, Democratization

Action Research and the Basic Renewal of Society

Edited by
Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Ewa Gunnarsson

ROUTLEDGE

Commons, Sustainability, Democratization

This book presents theoretical discussions and practical examples of Action Research from Scandinavia, Latin America and Africa, primarily dealing with how to combine nature conservation and management with local democratic community development, seeing the renewal of the Commons as a way to transcend the present dichotomy between these two dimensions.

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Preface

This book is closely connected to another book on Action Research that was recently published by Routledge: *Action Research for Democracy: New Ideas and Perspectives from Scandinavia*, edited by Ewa Gunnarsson, Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah.

Back in 2010, Kurt Aagaard Nielsen, Birger Steen Nielsen and Ewa Gunnarsson started planning a book on the contributions from Scandinavian Action Research to the contemporary international discussions on the role and function of Action Research. Kurt Aagaard Nielsen died in 2012 and was replaced by Hans Peter Hansen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah. During the further development of the book, it became clear that this book, due to its broad and rich material, would exceed the limits of one publication. It was therefore decided to extract the section on sustainability, commons and democracy and turn it into an independent publication. The contributions already planned for the first book were supplemented by a handful of new ones. The result is this book.

Commons, Sustainability and Democratisation: Action Research and the Basic Renewal of Society can easily be read as an independent publication on the contribution of contemporary Scandinavian Action Research to a renewal of societies in the perspective of sustainability and democracy. However, the book can also be read together with the first book. What binds the two books together is the idea to investigate how Action Research deals and could deal with the current problems concerning democratic development and deficits in democratic development in modern societies, and how it could confront the challenges emerging from the present global sustainability crisis, including its political, economic and social-ecological dimensions. Talking about a "sustainability crisis" in this broad sense thereby refers to societies' political and social ability to regenerate and renew the living conditions of human beings. This cannot be achieved only by the instruments of the state or the market, but requires a new societal orientation and awareness by "ordinary people", providing the possibility for people to take part in the regulation and administration of the "common affairs". As stated at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1991, only by a more genuine involvement of all the members of

society will it be possible for people to share the responsibility of the social and ecological implications of the present culture. A more genuine involvement of all members of society is first and foremost a question of political culture. This is why the question of democracy and democratisation is so much in the centre of the existing social and ecological crisis. And this is why the notion of Commons has been put up front, incorporating the idea and hope of a new kind of basic societal institution that transcends the state and the market as well. The authors of this book all share the perspective that the political culture is also a decisive and obvious question for Action Research to deal with and for action researchers to engage in. In this book, the overall problem of the political culture is investigated in relation to Natural Resource Management, nature protection and environmental planning, and local community development in rural areas as well as in urban areas and large cities.

As mentioned, our late friend and colleague Kurt Aagaard Nielsen took an eager part in the initial discussions and planning of this book project. For Kurt, the question of Action Research, its obligations and possible role in the democratisation of our societies was of great importance, and for him, as well as for us, the increased authoritarian and destructive tendencies we are witnessing in the present historical situation are a major concern and have been so for years. Simultaneously with this concern, Kurt shared with us a strong confidence in the human and social potential existing all over the world, a potential capable of strengthening democracy and offering our societies a more hopeful democratic future. Our shared concern as well as our shared confidence made up the horizon for the idea of presenting Scandinavian contributions to *Action Research for Democracy*. As mentioned, Kurt died in 2012 due to a severe form of cancer, which returned rapidly after a couple of years' absence. Despite his illness, he continued until shortly before he died to take part in the planning of the book, including the discussions of the chapters he was going to write with Birger Steen Nielsen. After his death, we have continued and finished the editorial work.

We dedicate this book to Kurt in memory of him as a highly appreciated colleague and dear friend, and as an acknowledgement of his intellectual and practical contributions to the development of Action Research within and outside of Scandinavia.

Stockholm, Uppsala and Copenhagen 2015

Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen,
Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Ewa Gunnarsson

Editors' Introduction

Why Sustainability *and* Democratisation?

Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Ewa Gunnarsson

AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

As mentioned in the *Preface*, the basic idea of this book, as well as of its predecessor, *Action Research for Democracy*, is to illuminate how Action Research deals with and could deal with current problems concerning democratic development and democratic deficits in modern societies. Democracy and democratic development is directly connected to the challenges emerging from the global sustainability crisis understood in a broad sense, including political, economic and social-ecological dimensions. The "sustainability crisis" refers to the basic societal order and socialisation processes of our societies, and could not just be understood as transient disturbances. However, although the different dimensions mentioned should be seen as interdependent, this interdependency is not to be analysed in the form of simple causal connections. But put to the point, then, the crisis—in singular—is understood as a question of *the societies' ability to regenerate and renew their living conditions*. In our understanding, such ability could never be related to a systems level alone (state and/or market), but must be located, furthered and cultivated at the level of *everyday life*.

The implication of this particular perspective on the problem is that the basic ability of societies to renew *and* regenerate must be rooted in a shared and practical responsibility of "ordinary people", understood as *citizens*. It is as *citizens* that we address our *common* affairs, and it is as *citizens* that we can address the social and ecological implications of our collective culture and individual lifestyles. On the collective level and within a democratic society, awareness and responsibility per definition must be developed and embedded in the political culture. The citizens of society must actively seize it, while at the same time, the political and practical initiatives of the citizens must be furthered and supported by society. Or, formulated differently, there must be a correspondence between the level of everyday life practices in their numerous localisations, variations and forms and the societal regulations and political and administrative practices at their different levels. This is the reason why *democratisation* is central in the perspective of the sustainability crisis. If democracy is perceived not only as a political system of representation and

decision-making, but as *a way of living*, democracy itself is also the objective for reconsideration and renewal in terms of new forms of interdependent levels of decision-making, planning and management and stewardship.

Reconsidering and renewing the interdependent levels of democracy is a huge challenge in our present historical situation. But the global contemporary crisis should not prevent experiments and discussions of even the most modest character and reach. In fact, even limited and modest initiatives make up a necessary precondition *and* permanent dimension of a more all-embracing renewal or new invention of our democratic *societal* practices. In this book, the democratic challenge is primarily dealt with in relation to the specific question of how to move towards democratic forms of Natural Resource Management, and intrinsically connected to the question of democratic local community development. But also the question of possible *forms of correspondence*, including co-operations and exchanges, between citizens' self-regulated forms of regulation and management and the different societal, political and administrative levels is also touched upon in some of its dimensions.

What such new sustainable constellations might look like, nobody actually knows. They have to be conceptualised and tried out experimentally in a way that respects the nature of an experiment, not just understood as a "scenario" (perhaps later to be "implemented"), but as something we need to take serious in an *everyday life perspective* while at the same time, it must be considered provisional in the sense that it could be changed or revised. Within their work, the authors of this book have experienced that Action Research holds the potential of bringing about changes, partly by supporting ongoing experiments and projects, and partly by initiating the experiments themselves. What Action Research, as a non-traditional and in itself democratic and co-operative form of *research*, can bring in is not only experiences and *methods* of alternative forms of practices. Action Research can bring in two important aspects connected to the possible change horizon of social experiments: 1) A critical and self-critical reflection as an intrinsic part of projects or initiatives that offers the participants the possibility of establishing a "free relation" to their practice. This is necessary to prevent the participants from being absorbed into the change processes and thereby losing the *open* horizon for changes. 2) The emerging constitution of a general or universal perspective as a dimension of the practice and knowledge. Hereby the horizon potentially opens up, and it becomes possible to see the inherent relations, interdependences and co-operative possibilities, in a much broader global perspective, cf. the idea of a "world democracy" advocated by Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (Shiva 2005).[1]

This points towards an apparent kinship between Action Research and the concept of *Commons*. *Commons* incorporates the vision of and hope for a social regulation that will be neither state nor market (in the sense of the dominating understanding of the capitalist market economy). *Commons* would be the pivotal institutional form (or forms) of the new kind of sustainable democracy referred to by—amongst many others—Vandana Shiva.

However, it is not easy to concretise what such new social regulation could look like. In the discussions on *Commons*, useful conceptual differentiations are made. *Commons* is the overall concept of the phenomenon here at stake, trying to identify the wide range of common conditions and affairs that reasonably could be looked at and claimed as *Commons*, i.e., as something that could and should be managed by people themselves as "citizens" or "members of society". (This is broadly elaborated by Clausen in *Chapter One*.) *Commoning* refers to the practise of creating, managing, cultivating and renewing the *Commons*; it conceptualises the processual dimension of *Commons*, understood as weaved political, cultural and economic practises, taking care of our living conditions as the base of human wealth. Recently, then, also the concept of *commonance*[2] (as opposed to governance) has been brought into play. It refers to the specific dimension of *Commons* as a new way of also institutional and legal regulations, a very important—and difficult—issue that couldn't satisfactorily be dealt with alone as a question of partnerships, co-operation, interdependencies, social learning and solidarity. *Commons* are fragile and, following Elinor Ostrom, it could be said that *trust* and *fairness* as basic qualities characterising commoning as a social practice must be combined with institutionalised forms of control and also (potential) sanctions (cf. Ostrom 1990; Beckenkamp 2014). But although the idea of commonance certainly refers to practical experiences, it still seems a programmatic concept. Action Research, as we see it, might contribute to such necessary concretisations, especially if it addresses the question of opening up local experiments towards exchanges and co-operations with institutional bodies at different societal levels while *through* this co-operation, hopefully also initiating changes *within* these bodies.[3]

In this *Introduction*, we will take this basic problem of sustainability in its relation to democratisation and open it up to a *Commons* perspective a bit further, especially focusing on the possible role of Action Research. First, we sketch how and why democratisation could be considered the central legacy of Action Research. Secondly, we turn to a discussion of some main aspects of the current multiple crisis and outline some basically different options to try to overcome it. Based on this background, then, we discuss why Action Research, at least in some of its versions, should obviously become part of a sustainable transition. Eventually, we finalise the *Introduction* with a short description of the book, its horizon and contributors.

AT A TURNING POINT? THE MULTIPLE CRISIS OF TODAY, AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Democracy: The Legacy of Action Research

Democracy has both theoretically and practically been a key concept for Action Research since its establishment as a separate research tradition. When Kurt Lewin in the late 1940s elaborated his conceptualisation and

practice of Action Research, what he had in mind was not only to achieve specific social improvements and reforms, but a more profound need to transform political culture, generally in society and specifically within science and research institutions and practices too. We consider this the tenor of his work, despite all its contradictions and shortcomings.

As a refugee from Nazism, he had developed a strong sensitivity for authoritarian tendencies and an understanding of their potentially destructive impact on the development of freedom and democracy. He saw an intrinsic relation between furthering a democratic culture, combating inequality and injustice, and the blossoming of ideas, renewals and societal richness. Kurt Lewin found that research and science should be situated within such a horizon—not only as a political or moral obligation, but because the question of democracy should be considered a necessary issue within research and sciences themselves: if research and the sciences should be able to contribute to a democratic culture, they themselves had to be democratic. This makes up a legacy for Action Research—and it is not only found in the tradition from Lewin, but likewise in traditions based on John Dewey and Paulo Freire, especially those leading to *Participatory Action Research* (White 1943, 1991; eds Kindon et al. 2007) and in similar currents emphasising *empowerment*, cf. the reader edited by IG Craig and M Mayo (1995). In line with this argument, D. J. Greenwood and M. Levin, in their influential *Introduction to Action Research*, simply state that "the social project of democratization [. . .] is the heart of AR". (Greenwood & Levin 1998, p. 89)

The participation and empowerment thinking of Action Research has emphasised that democracy should not only be considered a formal election system, based on free public discussions and of mass parties, but a much more far-reaching way of citizens actively taking part in societal life in its many dimensions, including at the institutional level and in workplaces and everyday life: *democracy as a way of living*. As to research and science themselves, this required a paradigmatic shift from thinking of people as objects for research into recognising them as subjects. This was also a new way of thinking about the creation of knowledge, and it constituted the basic epistemological assumption of Action Research: knowledge emerging from Action Research couldn't have been created within traditional approaches.

Action Research indeed creates a new kind of knowledge. The question of the specific character and form of this knowledge, however, has been disputed from the very beginning of Action Research. This very claim of creating new knowledge has, for a long time, not been recognised by the mainstream of academic society, partly also due to deficits of the conceptualisation *within* Action Research itself. Throughout the last decades, this has begun to change, with regards to the recognition as well as to the internal conceptual deficits. Despite these changes, we still see the constitutive relation between knowledge creation and democratic proceeding of Action Research as not yet being sufficiently elaborated.

It would be an illusion to think that this principal shift away from thinking of people as purely objects for research could just eliminate the differences between the researchers and the lay participants in the research projects. It requires—and has indeed led to—a rethinking of the relationship between researchers and participants. Action Research itself somehow had to proceed democratically, no matter whether this would or should lead to the elimination of (all) the differences between researchers and participants or not. From the early years of Action Research in the 1940s, this challenge necessarily also had to include a reflection on the societal meaning of democracy. Therefore, since the very beginning, the questions of how to understand (or define) democracy and how to practice "democratic research" have made up the pivot of ongoing discussions and disputes within the field of Action Research.

Thus, it could be said that democracy, taken as an inalienable legacy of Action Research in a general sense, could still be considered uncontested within Action Research in all shades, as, for instance, represented in *The Handbook of Action Research* (eds Reason & Bradbury 2008). This said, in relation to the field of Action Research today, it seems to us that it is fair to add that all in all, democracy might not be appropriately dealt with and maybe even be weakened as to its decisive impact for Action Research in its theoretical, methodological and practical conceptualisations. The consequence is a shortcoming of a necessary critical self-reflection within the "Action Research society".

Therefore, if Action Research should be a part of the change agenda, as discussed above, it cannot just invoke its classical democratic legacy, presupposing that Action Research per se is democratic, emancipative and empowering, but thoroughly has to reconsider the impact of this legacy today.

The Current Sustainability Crisis: Some Basic Dimensions

The nature and definition of the sustainability crisis is strongly contested, and one can even ask if it makes sense to talk about it as *one* crisis. We will not go deeper into a discussion of the definition of the sustainability crisis, but we think there are strong arguments supporting the interdependency between economic forces, the ecological erosion, ongoing climate changes, the erosion of social life in terms of inequality, lack of equity and the newly growing precariousness of people's work and life situations. Although these issues are central to contemporary globalisation processes and closely connected to the dominating neoliberal ideology, the interdependency does not mean that there is just *one* causal factor we can point out, neutralise and thereby solve the problems. The overall crisis is also multi-centred. The erosion processes are far reaching and concern the basic dimensions of everyday life and life conduct, and therefore, this level must be addressed. The decisions made nationally and internationally at the institutional political and economic top levels have, rightly it seems to us, been characterised as an

"organised irresponsibility", practically denying the real problems (Ulrich Beck 1986 [1992]). The widespread powerlessness and resignation among "ordinary people"—recurrently, however, interrupted by protests and even revolts—is a reflection of this denial of the real problems. That is one of the major reasons why the question of democracy is so important: in some parts of the world, democracy is being eroded, while in other parts of the world, it is absent and hindered. We find no convincing arguments that technocratic solutions should be able to find answers to the multiple-crisis phenomena; on the contrary, without a living democracy, the "organised irresponsibility" and hence the sustainability crisis cannot be overcome.

Some 70 years ago, Karl Polanyi in *The Great Transformation* (Polanyi 2001 [1944]) presented his critique of capitalism as a *dis-embedding* process, a critique that made up a counter position to F. A. Hayek's contemporary neoliberal treatise *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek 1944). Today, where neoliberalism has won a hegemonic position,[4] while at the same time the actual economic crisis[5] could be seen as a crisis of exactly neoliberal politics and economics, Polanyi's argument has obtained a renewed actuality and provides us with an outline for better understanding some basic dimensions of the crisis. At the same time, it points to vital perspectives for an alternative experimental practice that could—and should—start as a *located practice*, while at the same time opening up to find ways of transcending the purely local community level.

The notion of dis-embedding refers to the separation of the economic dimension of social life from its other dimensions. According to Polanyi, the separation of the economy from the other dimensions of social life has led to the excessive autonomy of the economy, organised by certain market and profit logics dominating all other social, human and natural logics and concerns. Thereby "economy" has been simplified, isolating and optimising specific dimensions of the overall reproduction of life. We see how a strong *expansionist* economic logic has taken over the central societal agenda. The ecological crisis in the 1970s raised basic questions about economic growth (Meadows et al. 1972). Today, however, this basic problematisation is no longer really recognised. On the contrary, and based in neoliberal economical politics, the expansionist economic logic has become hegemonic, seeing "growth" as the only solution also to the ecological crisis. Ecosystem services, carbon trade and the development of green economies in various forms have become tools in this dominating economic logic.

The German scholar Wolfgang Sachs argues that sustainability rephrased as "sustainable development" no longer represents a hope for the future and therefore is meaningless (Sachs 2000). Sustainability connected to development is rather an attempt to protect economic growth against its own risks, rather than finding alternatives to the way we organise our societies politically, socially and culturally. This transition from a critical reflection on the consequences of economic growth towards economic growth as being the solution is re-enforced by the erosion of democracy by the ongoing but still

partial displacement of political power from the (nation) states to the powerful multinational agents of transnational markets—including the financial markets, which now hold a leading position in relation to the flows of capital.

A common denominator for the strategies in the Global North and the Global South after the Second World War was that of *modernisation*, a very effective labelling, implying that all critique and resistance of this strategy was—and is—old-fashioned, looking backward. The other logics are made invisible, disregarded as "non-productive", and are not recognised in their vital implications for the societal economy as a whole, i. e. "economy" understood as the regeneration and renewal of society and nature, of people's living conditions and the richness of life. Polanyi brought the rise of fascism in the 1930s in relation to the dis-embedding mechanisms, thus underlining the intrinsic relation between politics and economy.

In the first period after the Second World War, the dis-embedding dynamic in some parts of the world was, to a certain degree *as to some of its social implications*, countered by political initiatives and a corporation between state, employers and trade unions, with the welfare states of the Global North as the most prominent example. But this was only possible due to what is called the *externalisation* of all the negative implications of the dis-embedded market economy, reaching from pollution, the exhaustion of natural resources and—at a social level—the health consequences of the intensification of work and new forms of exploitation. Externalisation means that those whose production results in damaging ecological and social consequences bear no or little responsibility. The cost of the "externalities" is either taken over by the state and thereby, indirectly, by the citizens, or the problems are simply neglected or "exported" to other countries, typically in the Global South. Strategically, the building up of welfare states in the Global North was brought together with the so-called "development" agenda for the de-colonialised countries of the Global South, promising a global modernisation and the growth of wealth and freedom.[6]

Today this "golden age", as Eric Hobsbawm—not without irony—has called it (Hobsbawm 1994), is over, and the Western world is facing probably the worst crisis since the area of fascism, a crisis that, due to its combination of ecological, economic and social dimensions, to our view, as already mentioned, must be seen as a civilisation crisis. Probably, we are amidst a new great transformation (Guy Standing 2009, p. 3), a *global transformation*, harboring new, severe dangers. Politically, the ongoing global transformation has been led by neoliberal options. These options systematically attack the mechanisms that previously to a certain degree have succeeded in cushioning some of the worst effects of the dis-embedding processes, and this cushioning could not have been obtained without democracy. *Neoliberalism is dis-embedding as an absolute program*, with strong anti-democratic tendencies, and not surprisingly, the dominant current crisis management, which paradoxically optimises the very same logics that have led to the crisis, also seems to imply strong disciplinary and authoritarian tendencies at

the political and social level, with resemblances to the 1930s. It is difficult—if not impossible—to imagine ways to overcome the basic erosional dynamics of the multiple crises without moving towards a *re-embedding* of the economy into society. And it is difficult to imagine a re-embedding without democratisation.

In the present situation, different ways are outlined, and we will roughly contrast two of them. Both of them are parts of the ongoing discussion of the tasks and possibilities of Action Research today, too, and they are explicitly obligating themselves to a sustainable, democratic and social perspective.

Two Different Options: Ecological Modernisation/Green Capitalism vs. Commons and Democracy

One of the alternative approaches (also) discussed within Action Research can be seen as a draft for a renewed modernisation strategy, including a critique of some parts of the historic modernisation strategy. *Innovation* is central to this approach and often linked to the idea of some kind of *knowledge economy*. It was recently also linked to the idea of *new public governance* as opposed to traditional forms of "government", and also to the concept of "new public management". These ideas involve a critique of the traditional administrative and managerial top-down logic and favour explicitly the involvement or participation of citizens, interest organisations, NGOs, etc. The idea of a knowledge economy embraces almost all parts of production and services, but if we consider its relation to the central point of the contributions to this book—the question of sustainability as to its nature and community implications—then it could best be understood in the perspective of the quest for a *green economy* or an *ecological modernisation*.[7] A green economy is the more basic option, and a knowledge economy could be seen as a central dimension of establishing it, although a knowledge economy certainly also has other dimensions.

Within the framework of the existing discussions, "green economy"—or a "Green New Deal" (cf. for instance Barbier 2010)—is de facto synonymous with *green capitalism*, i.e., a renewal of the existing dominating economy without any breaks as to its basic logics and dynamics, bringing it to a new level.[8] The implication seems to be a continuation of the old "developmental" strategy, now intensifying the process of turning nature, knowledge and culture into *strategic resources* that should be optimised. In this perspective, people are also seen as a strategic resource, either as workers or as consumers. There are great aspirations and expectations in the EU as well in the UN,[9] where it is believed that such a green economy is not only possible, but that it also—primarily due to new technological leaps—simultaneously can overcome the destructive trends of soil erosion, the exhaustion of natural resources, biological diversity, hunger and poverty *and* establish a new fundament of the accumulation of capital (cf. for instance: OECD 2011).

Thus, the belief is that this alternative will be able to create the fundament for the prolongation and expansion of the Western or American *way of life* (cf. Kaufmann & Müller 2009).

The creation of a new fundament of capital accumulation may be obtained, for a while, and the promised *modernised way of life* might be realised for parts of the populations around the world, but hardly without a continued production of the ecological and social externalities that lead to environmental and political instability. This renewal alternative is still obligated to an increased global competitiveness, and it does not address the question of the *re-embedding* of the economy. As to these aspects, we find that this "modernised modernisation" approach is not sufficiently questioned by those researchers who also, from a democratisation and sustainability perspective, favour it.

Based on broad experiences, also represented and discussed in this book, the new participation strategies are at best half-hearted, but more likely generally also reproducing inequalities, establishing new dividing lines between those who are ready and fit for participation and those who are not. Likewise, the new governance principles have been criticised for replacing more traditional, but principally *public* democratic forms of decision-making with forms that exclude the public dimension and obscure the substance and interests of the decisions made. Until now, the hoped-for technical solutions to the sustainability problems (new forms of energy supplies, "smart technologies", including bio-technology) are just hoped for. Of cause, this interpretation of this strategy is somewhat simplified. When it comes to particular, concrete Action Research projects and practices, many of those that to some extent follow this alternative are often more democratically and socially sensitive than the overall analysis may indicate. Still, however, it seems legitimate and useful to consider the principal logics and long-line perspectives at play.

The second alternative approach is the one that makes up the horizon for the contributions of this book. The argument here is that overcoming the sustainability crisis requires that we critically address the dominant economic and political logic and strategies that have led to the crisis. But it also stresses that this cannot be conceptualised within an expert-dominated technocratic perspective, nor in a traditional political perspective, which considers the state and/or social (protest) movements as the subjects for the required transformation. Certainly both state initiatives, including legal regulation and administrative practices, and social movements, as important popular forces, would be part of a transition, but the required change must be situated and grounded at *the level of people's everyday lives*. This is the decisive dimension of a democratisation that might be the medium of a true *re-embedding* of the economy into society, changing the meaning of economy itself and breaking the existing primacy of the "productive" sphere over the "re-productive" sphere.

This should not be considered an anti-modern option. In fact, the classical concept of dis-embedding/re-embedding by Polanyi can to some extent

be criticised for being mute—and therefore affirmative—to pre-capitalist or pre-modern repressive dimensions of a traditional "embedded" economy, concerning both the question of *democracy* and the question of *emancipation*, as recently elaborated from a feminist perspective by Nancy Fraser (Fraser 2013). Thus, the option sketched here is critical to *modernisation* strategies, but cannot be considered to be anti-modern, which in itself would appear meaningless, as democracy and emancipation are indeed modern ideas par excellence.

Corresponding to this overall understanding of the crisis, the Action Research that places itself in this line, and which is presented in this book, in different ways emphasises a radical democratic approach that could not be integrated without frictions in strategies affirmative to the dominating strategies, centred around developing a green knowledge economy, as for instance is programmatically outlined in the European Union's *Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (European Commission 2010) and in *The 7th Environment Action Programme* (EU 2013). Green economic strategies have also been promoted by the United Nations at the Rio +20 (UN 2012). The focus, as presented in this book, lies on something else, first and foremost on strengthening the *renewal of communities* and the rise of *citizens' emerging responsibility for their common affairs*, including establishing a new human-nature relationship. To understand this focus, it is imperative to realise that it should not be thought of as an opposition of the local community level vs. the societal level. To overcome the sustainability crisis, such localising endeavours would only be meaningful on the premise that a societal dimension could also be seen as *intrinsic* to the local initiatives and learning processes themselves. Re-embedding taken in its radical meaning implies a societal transformation that must be developed as an *integral part of everyday life*, while at the same time transcending it.

Also in this interpretation, knowledge creation will be at the heart of the renewal of society, and certainly not seen as something superfluous or unnecessary, as in the Chinese Cultural Revolution under Mao, but as part of renewing both the role of citizens' experiences, their way of life, including their interaction with the natural world, *and* of the society's ability to self-regenerate as a society. This is knowledge of another kind and quality than that of the "knowledge economy", and it will be related to another kind of learning processes, uniting knowledge and "maturity" in the sense of the enlightenment tradition of "Bildung". It is not learning in an empty space, nor learning just as an intersubjective exchange, but learning in relation to the common material and social world.

The concept of *Commons* (Shiva 2005) and introducing it into Action Research, as briefly sketched earlier in this *Introduction*, should also be seen in this perspective. It embraces the different levels and dimensions, here brought together. It aims at a *de-commodification* of central societal activities and areas, or at protecting them against commodification initiatives which

are at the centre of dis-embedding and of the neoliberal politics of today. Finally, it also points to the possibility of another kind of *public*, *common regulation* than that of the *state*. In an overall perspective, *Commons* could be seen as an alternative to the "development project", as discussed and criticised above. It represents another understanding of value and societal wealth. The products—or gifts—of *Commons* could not just be fixated, but could "come to an expression in the dynamics of life itself". What is at stake is the preservation and renewal of "the foundations of our life and of the integrity of the social relations". In *Commons*, it is "the creative process itself and the fair distribution of wealth that is reproduced" (Helfrich & Bollier 2014, p. 21). In this sense, one could see the social practice of commoning as the process of creating wealth *and* at the same time a fair distribution of it, *through* this double process that reproduces the *Commons*. Thus, we can understand commoning as the creation of economy and culture in one, economy *as* culture, culture *as* economy, based in an understanding and practice of sustainability as an "integrative life principle", as the ecological economist Christiane Busch-Lüty, referring to Shiva, has called it (Busch-Lüty 2000, p. 62). Also, the (maybe often latent) impact of many Action Research projects could be seen in this perspective if we would just open our eyes to this dimension.

ACTION RESEARCH AS PART OF A SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION?

In the following, we will take the discussion of the potentials of Action Research as part of a sustainable transition a bit further. Although a necessary precondition, invoking its overall democratic legacy is not sufficient for an Action Research that wants to be part of an alternative change agenda, such as the one outlined above.

What Is Required of Action Research to Be Part of a Democratic, Sustainable Change?

Most of the contributions in this book are related to or inspired by the central dimensions of a specific concept of Action Research called *Critical Utopian Action Research*, which has been developed in Denmark from the 1980s on. This concept was developed as part of a quest to find answers to the above-mentioned questions. As it is comprehensively introduced below (especially in *Chapter Three*), we shall here only mention a few points.[10] Its decisive inspiration came from the so-called *Future Creation Workshops*, created by the Austrian writer, journalist and grassroots activist Robert Jungk (Jungk & Müllert 1981). Due to this inspiration,

Critical Utopian Action Research was basically conceptualised[11] as being committed to the democratisation of social life in all its common dimensions. Practically, it was based on a constellation of *utopian*-oriented workshop methods developed from the basic principles of the Future Creation Workshop, but considerably widened out. It is characteristic of Future Creation Workshops that the emergence and cultivation of *social imagination* is considered not only a precondition for democratisation processes, but seen as a quality of democracy itself, understood as a way of life. Putting this kind of utopian-oriented workshop approach at the centre of Action Research, while at the same time still promoting an *experimental* perspective, furthers the potential transcending power of Action Research, and it marks a considerable difference from mainstream Action Research. We consider it an important contribution to the search for appropriate forms of Action Research that are able to meet the challenges related to the sustainability crisis.

This does not imply that Critical Utopian Action Research is *the* answer to these requirements. Like other currents of Action Research, more comprehensively discussed in our book *Action Research for Democracy: New Ideas and Perspectives from Scandinavia* (eds Gunnarsson et al. 2015), it has met difficulties, as many singular projects after a while may tend to fade out and the potentials awakened therefore also may seem to vanish again. But where other kinds of Action Research seek answers to similar difficulties by changing their perspective away from privileging particular, experimental local projects to a bigger *scale*, typically in the form of stronger, institutionalised regional networks and/or organisational settings (more or less giving up the practical experimenting dimension that directly involves citizens at the level of everyday life), Critical Utopian Action Research has insisted on keeping a strong localisation of the projects, while at the same time looking for ways of overcoming the risk of isolation and consequent weakening of the projects. This is considered necessary in order *not* to give up the initial democratising impulse that the participants should develop and take over responsibility for their "common affairs", collectively and in a dialectical relationship with the surrounding world.[12]

The idea is that the development of such self-regulated autonomy must be related to living communities and have a strong base in *social imagination* based in people's *everyday life experiences*. The workshop dimension is intimately related to this perspective. In this sense, Action Research here still adheres to the original *action* dimension interpreted in a basic political sense, i.e., related to constituting autonomy and emancipation. This marks a difference from an important and more general trend of transforming Action Research into—or replacing it with—*Interactive Research*, explicitly leaving the "action" term behind. In many specific cases this difference may appear small, taken at a concrete project level, but as to *the horizon*, the differences appear more clearly, and of course this is not without impact on the practice at the concrete project level, either.

The strong emphasis on the everyday life and on the basic participants of the research being locally situated does not imply that Critical Utopian Action Research only relates to laypeople. One of the biggest challenges of Critical Utopian Action Research is to bridge the hopes, visions, knowledge, experiences and values emerging within the locally situated context with the role and function of governmental agencies and the decision-making systems and legal procedures. In fact, the attempts to initiate the development of a democratic and potentially re-embedded economy within locally situated communities seem to be easier to do than the attempts to bridge everyday life and the emerging re-embedding initiatives with the governmental institutions, the decision-making systems and legal procedures. The powerful domination of neoliberal steering logic combined with a strong expert and interest domination and a systematically distorted communication practiced on the formal levels make up barriers that are difficult to overcome. This however, doesn't take away the responsibility of the action researchers to address this challenge and also try to integrate the work with the formal levels in the research projects. For Critical Utopian Action Research, the potential for bridging the initiatives rooted in everyday life with governmental agencies, different kinds of rationalities and power structures (while at the same time trying to transform them from within) basically lays in the fact that the representatives of governmental agencies and decision-making procedures are also, themselves, rooted and situated in an everyday life context. This is what creates the "cracks in the wall" and thereby the potential for new forms of co-operation and more significant changes over time. (This is reflected on in a series of contributions, especially in *Part Two* of the book.)

What is here outlined in relation to Critical Utopian Action Research should, of course, not be reserved for this concept, although the constellation of constitutive moments is specific to it. It will be evident also from the different contributions in this book that an everyday life approach that is opened up to a wider societal horizon is at the centre of other conceptualisations as well, and is also considered a decisive condition for Action Research dedicated to democratisation (cf. below).

As to the question of *knowledge creation*, this common horizon implies a rejection of the notion of purely local knowledge in favour of an idea of a general, societal and universal dimension *within* the local or particular, but without simply reducing the local to its societal and universal dimensions. This makes it possible to understand the *learning processes* taking place in democratic Action Research as a form of *social learning* that transcends the traditional (and today predominant) understanding of social learning as a strictly contextual activity, often related to a one-sided instrumental concept of learning (for instance, as the development of competencies). At the centre of social learning in this non-traditional perspective stands the emerging endeavour to conceive and make an account of the impacts of one's actions and way of living, i.e., working through one's *experiences*, *making them new*. This makes up the point where social learning and emancipation coincide.

These knowledge creation and learning dimensions are tightly connected to Action Research as *research*, i.e., transcending the function of the "facilitation" of practical projects. It is a dimension of Action Research in the understanding presented here, that the researchers should have a specific focus on supporting the maybe hesitant emergence of the inherent *general and therefore transcendent dimensions* of the knowledge creation and social learning taking place, while still respecting the local peculiarities in their own irreducible right and diversity. This is intimately related to a concretisation of the utopian dimensions and of the utmost importance for the social imagination. The development of this general dimension could only be consequently supported from a perspective that is not one-sidedly preoccupied with a narrow, instrumental definition of that which should be obtained. That is the reason why it could and should be furthered by the action researchers, having a specific position as committed to and also identified with the project, simultaneously being at its periphery.[13] The researchers' specific awareness of this dimension corresponds with the fact that the participants are invited and gather as *citizens* and not only as representatives of different functions and interests, i.e. as "stakeholders". (As to the impact of this, cf. especially *Chapter Four*.)

Within specific Action Research projects, this furthermore corresponds with an endeavour to establish the project as a (relatively) "free space", where the participating citizens could develop a critical and self-critical reflection of their ongoing work. This can give them the possibility to establish a "free relation" to their practice, preventing them from being absorbed into it and thereby losing the open horizon from their sight. Developing these dimensions is not to be understood as the prerogative of research projects alone, but we think that under the existing conditions, an Action Research practice dedicated to a democratisation perspective, as an integrated part of seeking ways to overcome the sustainability crisis, can contribute to this.

CHARACTER AND HORIZON OF THE BOOK: CONSTELLATION OF CONTENTS AND CONTRIBUTORS

The contributions to this book are all characterised by a rigorous awareness of the sustainability crisis, understood as the complex constellation sketched above, as *the* challenge of our historical situation, a challenge that therefore also science and research should relate to. The contributions stand sceptical to endeavours of inscribing Action Research into an unbroken modernisation or developmental agenda, although it might favour the prominent notion of a knowledge economy. Another kind of economy is certainly asked for, but it could not be reduced to the question of a new kind of problem-solving, contextual knowledge and "knowledge production", like the prominent Mode II concept, introduced by Gibbons et al. (1994). The assumption is, rather, that modernisation concepts themselves, including the

innovation concept of a "knowledge economy", should be questioned as to their potential complicity in the crisis, and that in the end very different, if not incompatible, concepts and ways of societal renewal might appear.

Related to very different contexts and levels, all contributions reflect the possibilities and limitations of Action Research in taking part in such a change agenda. Action Research is seen as having a unique potentiality of being part of the quest to find answers to this overall sustainability crisis, which is, of course, limited in its range. Central to all contributions is the emphasis on the necessary, intrinsic relation between sustainability and democracy, as it is also put ahead of our book. In this perspective, the classic experimental dimension of Action Research is reconsidered as being intimately related to a notion of social learning in slightly varying interpretations dependent on theoretical conceptualisations and practical methods and designs.

The book brings different theoretical inspirations together. Critical Utopian Action Research—as briefly outlined above—is richly represented, and plays an important role in the work of all the Scandinavian contributors. This specific concept of Action Research, however, is brought into a tight dialogue with other traditions. Thus, the chapters by Hans Peter Hansen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and their younger colleagues represent an interesting joint collaboration between two previously unconnected Action Research traditions, Critical Utopian Action Research, primarily located at the *Centre for Action Research and Democratic Societal Change* at Roskilde University in Denmark, and Systems Thinking in the specific version of Sriskandarajah, who combines it with a social learning approach. This collaboration goes back to 2006, when the late Kurt Aagaard Nielsen and Hans Peter Hansen (both rooted in Critical Utopian Action Research) met with Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and discovered some strong epistemological overlaps in their approaches to Action Research. Together, they initiated the international PhD and researchers' network *ARALIG* (*A*ction *R*esearch *A*ction *L*earning *I*nterest *G*roup), which was formally established by the Faculty of Life Sciences at Copenhagen University in 2006. In fact, all contributors of this book have a relation to this network.

Departing from Systems Thinking and with inspiration from Peter Checkland's "*Soft System Thinking*" (Checkland 1981), a group of Australian researchers developed their own Action Research approach during the 1980s, beginning with rural development contexts and broadening their concern to environmental management, organisational and community issues (Packham & Sriskandarajah 2005; Ison 2008; Bawden 2010, 2012). The relationship of systems thinking to Action Research has also been covered by Burns (2007), Flood (2010) and Ison (2010). With Nadarajah Sriskandarajah coming to the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) at Uppsala and bringing in systems thinking, and with his practical engagement in countries from the Global South, Scandinavian Action Research was enriched with a stronger global awareness and new ties and collaborations have been created. This collaboration has especially been rooted in the

Action Research milieu at SLU, to which not only Hans Peter Hansen, but also Cristián Alarcón, Níca Givá and Erica von Essen belong, and to which also the rest of the contributors bear close relation. With his concept of Action Research for Emancipation, Cristián Alarcón holds a specific position in between, living and working in Sweden, being part of the research milieu at SLU, but with strong Latin American relations and references, due to his Chilean background. He represents another kind of bringing different theoretical and practical traditions in a dialogue with each other; the most important ones, however, are much akin to those that are at the base of Critical Utopian Action Research. All in all, we think that the book, rooted as it is in Scandinavian Action Research (and especially in Critical Utopian Action Research), and at the same time, transcending the Scandinavian horizon, brings new inspirations and perspectives to the international discussion on Action Research and its potentialities vis-à-vis the sustainability crisis.

We have divided the chapters of the book into two parts, the first one gathering primarily practical-conceptual contributions, while the second one presents a series of descriptions and reflections closer to practical Action Research experiments. These primarily focus on the level of citizens' initiatives, but also deal with the question of bridging to the administrative and political levels. In separate introductions to the two sections, their most important contents and perspectives are described.

In each of its chapters and taken as a whole, the book offers exhaustive discussions of the difficult questions addressed in our *Introduction*. Its span reaches from theoretical and philosophical reflections to empirically based practical presentations and reflections of different forms of experimental practices based at an everyday life level, including co-operations between citizens and authorities. It has been our and all the contributors' intention not to smoothen out or deny difficulties, but at the same time, to also show the real potentials here at stake. Keeping a balance between "hopes" and "difficulties" (also disappointments) could be considered a necessary ability vis-à-vis the sustainability crisis that needs to be cultivated. We hope that our book can contribute to this.

NOTES

1. Insisting on the importance of this localisation in everyday life as pivotal to the identification of ways to overcome the sustainability crisis may seem naive vis-à-vis the immense forces condensed in capital and the state that obviously make up powerful hindrances for the necessary basic changes. They constitute a "reality power" that dictates what could be considered possible and what is not, a power that cannot be ignored. This is true, and certainly, we do not think that a transition towards sustainability could just grow out of the numerous initiatives from below. But such localisation implies a growing awareness not only of the problems, but also—and first and foremost—of the *real possibilities* of doing things in another way, and is a prerogative for a basic change. It would be a fatal mistake only to address and confront the "reality power" directly.

2. In the discussion on commons, there is an awareness of the necessity of creating both new practices and a new discourse. In particular, the concept of commonance can be seen in this perspective. Commonance is "the governance of Commons" (Helfrich & Bollier 2014, p. 19)—but as such, it is no longer governance in the way we know it today, where it de facto is inscribed in the neoliberal-initiated modernisation of public administrative logic and characterised by a kind of "participation" that is at least strongly ambiguous, cf. the discussion of this, also in its impact on Action Research, in our *Introduction* in eds Gunnarsson et al. 2015.
3. In fact, this question is dealt with in several of the chapters of this book, especially in *Part Two*.
4. Often, neoliberalism is understood only as a political ideology and strategy, favouring a radical marketisation of as many societal functions as possible, based on the assumption that the free market is the optimal mechanism to distribute and allocate existing resources. That understanding is true, but unlike classical liberalism, neoliberalism is also a political concept, underlining the need for regulation, but with strong authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies. The need for regulation was more strongly elaborated in the German so-called "ordo-liberalism", whereas the US "Chicago School" (that in the end of the twentieth century took a leading role) strongly emphasised the marketisation—but still intimately connected it with authoritarian politics. Focusing on the current economic *and* ecological crises, the regulative dimension gradually seems to re-enter (at least parts of) neoliberal crisis management. As to the constitutive aspects of neoliberalism, cf. eds Mirowski & Plehwe 2009, as to European neoliberalism: Butterwegge et al. 2008, as to the actual crisis: eds Birch & Mykhnenko 2010, and specifically to neoliberalism and nature, cf. the review in Castree 2008.
5. The crisis is often seen as a two-step process starting with the financial crisis emerging in 2007–2008 and caused by a collapsing, overinflated real estate market, which led to the collapse of financial institutions all over the world. The second step was a global economic recession with devastating consequences for countries and people all over the world. But a more basic layer is a profound crisis of the foundations of the accumulation of capital, related to the ongoing transformation from so-called Fordism to post-Fordism, politically forced by neoliberalism. Central to this crisis and to the intrinsic difficulties to overcome it is the autonomisation of financial capital that started in the 1980s and has ended up predominating in today's global economic transactions. The autonomisation of financial capital and an accumulation dominated by financial capital can be considered the square of dis-embedding, and devastating to any sustainability. A political regulation of financial capital and a break with accumulation dominated by it is a societal *prerogative* for moving towards a sustainable transformation, but a reformation of the basic logic of dis-embedding is the long-term change required. As to the discussion of the current crisis, cf. for instance Guttmann 1994; Albo et al. 2010; Altvater 2010; Jessop 2010; Lapavitsas 2009.
6. For a critical perspective, cf. *The Development Reader*, edited by Wolfgang Sachs (1988). As to the intrinsic ideological and strategic relation between "modernisation" and "development", see for instance the essay on "Development" by Gustavo Esteva (ed. Sachs 1988, pp. 6–25).
7. The transformation of the concept of sustainability itself into "sustainable development", as mentioned above, could be seen in this line. But although "sustainability" so to speak has lost its innocence, we are not prepared to give it up. As other important concepts, it has to be defended, taking back its inherent criticism and radicalism. The concept of ecological modernisation

as an alternative to non-sustainable politics and administrative practices has been much disputed. For the European discussion, but with general impacts, cf. Huber 1982; Jänicke et al. 1989; Hajer 1995; Mol 1995; eds Hajer & Wagenaar 2003; Elling 2008; and the discussion in Nielsen & Nielsen 2006. For a general overview of this strategic concept: eds Mol et al. 2009.

8. It would certainly require a regulation of finance capital in favour of productive capital, thus—within (neoliberal) capitalism itself—breaking "the logic of a finance-led, shareholder-value-oriented process of capital accumulation that is more concerned to re-capitalise the financial institutions and restore the finance-led accumulation regime" (Jessop 2010, p.185), as it is currently practiced as the dominant crisis management. Whether this, in fact, is at all a possible option within neoliberalism, is disputed.
9. These bodies being of specific interest, from our point of view.
10. In *Action Research for Democracy* (eds Gunnarsson et al. 2015), Critical Utopian Action Research is also richly represented both as to empirical analyses and to important conceptual aspects, but it is further elaborated in the present book.
11. Here, we will just mention that *theoretically*, Critical Utopian Action Research is primarily based on classical *Critical Theory* in the tradition from Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, and renewed by, among others, Oskar Negt and Rudolf zur Lippe (cf. *Chapter Three*)—Critical Utopian Action Research itself being a renewal of Critical Theory, especially as empirical research.
12. Not until recently had we become aware of the Action Research engaged in developing a "community economy" (in the United States and in Australia), which is associated with names as Katherine Gibson, Julie Graham, Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy, and in which we find a pronounced kinship with some basic orientations (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013).
13. This is also related to the fact that the action researchers take part in different (scholarly, public, political) "practice circles", bringing the experiences into these other contexts as well as bringing reflections and experiences from them back to the research projects (Nielsen et al. 1999).

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Part One

Action Research and Sustainability

Practical-Conceptual Drafts

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Introduction to Part One

Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Ewa Gunnarsson

This first section gathers three different, major contributions dealing with the question of the role and function of Action Research as part of an analytical, critical alternative to the predominant modernisation strategies implemented to overcome the present multiple crises. These strategies always seem to avoid questioning the basic societal logics of the crisis. The discussions in this section are primarily located at a practical-*conceptual* level; all contributions, however, at the same time build and reflect on practical experiences and experiments.

As a common denominator, they try to relate their conceptualisations of Action Research to the idea of Commons. More precisely, this is the idea of *a renewal or re-invention of Commons* as an alternative to the dominant neoliberal and anti-democratic strategies, as argued in *Chapter One* by Laura Tolnov Clausen. At the global level, the discussions of Commons have primarily been related to the Global South, but in Scandinavia, the idea of *allemansrättan* (the freedom to roam, literally: everyman's right), most penetrating perhaps in Sweden, could be seen as a historical and still-living tradition as a Commons, and the Scandinavian welfare state undoubtedly has common roots with this tradition. Therefore, it is far from arbitrary that the endeavour to reorient Action Research into a Commons perspective appears within (parts) of Scandinavian Action Research, as presented in this book, not only adapting this concept, but also contributing to its concretisation. During the last decades, the concept has gradually been widened out and increasingly, it informs the discussions of sustainable alternatives at many different societal levels and in various contexts. In the chapters of this section, it is discussed as a way of concretising the democratic dimension of Action Research and at the same time, the democratic dimension of Commons which, especially seen in a historical perspective, is by no means self-evident.

In her chapter, Clausen exposes the general concept of Commons in a historical perspective, but she also discusses its actual political importance and potential, inspired, among others, by the work of Vandana Shiva. Commons and enclosures—today in new forms that also transcend the original physical forms of enclosure—constitute the "battlefield". But Action Research is

not just turned into some kind of militant concept; rather, she emphasises *new forms of social learning* being at the heart of Action Research, while remaining aware of the preconditions for change embedded in and to a certain degree also hidden in everyday life. This is a central thematic in all the contributions. The commons perspective is considered a way to strengthen a democratic orientation in social learning, thus transcending the instrumental dimensions that are often associated with the predominant varieties of this concept, and widening it out to a *societal learning*. But it also goes the other way round: new forms of social learning agendas, as tried out in critical forms of Action Research, can be used as a tool to strengthen a Commons perspective. This is due to the emphasis that critical Action Research puts on the *humanisation of our whole way of living* as the horizon for any practical initiatives and changes. Commons is not just another way of regulating and managing our living conditions and practices: it is another way of living together in the world.

Clausen specifies her discussion primarily in relation to nature conservation and landscape management, at the same time emphasising the ongoing widening out of the concept in the discussion within the latest decades. As to Action Research, she conceptually refers to *Critical Utopian Action Research* as a concept strongly relevant to the thematic of commons and democracy. As mentioned in our general *Introduction*, Critical Utopian Action Research was developed in a Danish context, carrying a decisive inspiration from Robert Jungk and his *Future Creating Workshops*. Today, it is still primarily based in Denmark, but with ramifications for Norway and Sweden as well, and its influence is growing internationally. The democratic forms and impacts of this concept are thoroughly described and discussed as to its theoretical, methodological and practical aspects in *Chapter Three* by Birger Steen Nielsen and Kurt Aagaard Nielsen who initially worked out the concept together. The role of critique and utopian thinking—conceptualised first and foremost in the tradition from classic critical theory (Theodor W. Adorno, Oskar Negt)—are at the heart of this kind of Action Research, constituting an emerging *social imagination*.

This kind of Action Research differs from most other forms by its explicit democratic orientation and its specific workshop character and its insistence on an experimental perspective. The authors' presentation of the concept is primarily based on experiences with Action Research within a Scandinavian (welfare state) context. Based on the background of a reflection of significant historical changes of society and everyday life within the last decades, they end up discussing how Action Research may contribute to the development of a *Plural Economy* as a way of opening up the horizon of local projects and initiatives for a commons perspective, while at the same time concretising it.

In Cristián Alarcón's idea of *Action Research for Emancipation*, one finds striking correspondences to Critical Utopian Action Research, although it is conceptualised from another, primarily Latin American horizon. Thus,

Alarcón's *Chapter Two* could be seen as a mediation between the global outlook as the starting point of the discussion of Commons in the first chapter, and the discussions of Action Research obligated to a critical-utopian perspective, which are in the third chapter. Alarcón concentrates on elaborating a strong historical, materialistic concept in order to renew the agenda of Action Research for Emancipation and to think of theory-praxis relations in a dialectical way. In *his* concept reflections on Adorno play a central role, related to a reading of Paulo Freire, and to Marxian perspectives in both of them. Likewise, Alarcón relates to the idea—and traditions of—Commons, emphasising the thematic of *commoning*, i.e., commons looked at in a dynamic, emerging perspective, as something that must not only be invented, but continuously cultivated. The notion of commoning might be said to bring an inherent dimension in Commons clearer into our consciousness, namely this: what—in a societal perspective—has achieved the status of Commons is always the—unfinished—result of ongoing commoning practice or endeavours among citizens as the precondition for the establishment and cultivation of Commons. Commons could not be established from above, but must be based in autonomous public practices of differing character and range. As the chapter offers a conceptual discussion, some space is devoted to delve into philosophical and theoretical dimensions of the very question of conceptualisation and conceptuality. Alarcón concretises the relevance of his conceptual reflections in an actual perspective by discussing popular movements in South America, and in relation to this, he pinpoints crucial new challenges and tasks for Action Research in the current crisis, especially underlining the necessity of bringing social change and sustainability together in social-ecological strategies.

Commons is not a magical solution to the problems and challenges that Action Research has met within the last decades—the limitations related to singular projects, as briefly sketched in our general *Introduction*—but it does point in another direction than the predominant political *and* scientific modernisation and innovation agenda, which is widespread also within actual Action Research. Commons inherently combines localisation with universal perspectives, and thus an orientation of Action Research towards a Commons perspective in some ways could be said even to sharpen the above-mentioned problems and challenges that Action Research projects have met in trying to overcome the split between localised, singular initiatives and their societal potentials and dependencies. In *Part Two*, this problem in some of its crucial aspects is enlightened in discussions of practical experiences with Action Research related to citizens' initiatives.

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1 Re-Inventing the Commons

How Action Research Can Support the Renewal of Sustainable Communities

Laura Tolnov Clausen

INTRODUCTION

The notion of the Commons refers to a certain way of sharing and working with others to create a sustainable and better way of life. As the term of a social dynamic arising whenever a given community decides to manage a resource collectively and with special regard for equitable access and sustainability, Commons has throughout history been fostering cultural, social, co-operative and sustainable advances. This way of interacting and organising resources is, however, drastically breaking down, as social systems of collaboration and interdependence have gradually eroded. Confronted with the need for new narratives, the question therefore arises whether the re-invention of new forms of Commons could be a path for social change toward sustainability. Also, the question arises, whether more direct participatory forms of democracy can be used as a tool to support the re-invention of new forms of uniting people concerned about the common good.

This chapter tries to shed light on the coupling of Action Research and the effort towards new uses of an old phenomenon. Using nature protection as an example of how Action Research can play an active role in the development of Commons, attention is also devoted to Commons and the growing physical and juridical exclusion of people from common values in a broader sense. Fostering democratic and environmental dilemmas, the argument follows that resistance to such exclusions and the renewal of Commons need new forms of social learning, where the building of a common responsibility for community and nature can actually emerge. With reference to the development of such a responsibility, it is demonstrated how the Commons perspective can be used to strengthen a democratic orientation in Action Research, but also how Action Research can contribute to strengthen a Commons perspective.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COMMONS

Although the concept is often unfamiliar to contemporary audiences, the idea of the *Commons* has been around for centuries. The very notion of

the Commons refers to a wealth of valuable assets that belong to everyone (Walljasper 2010, p. 2). It implies a resource, which is organised, managed and used by the community, and it embodies social relations based on interdependence, cooperation and co-decision-making (Shiva 2005, p. 21). Anyone can use the Commons, as long as there is enough left for everyone else. This is why limited Commons, such as natural resources, should be managed sustainably and equitably, but many other forms of Commons can be freely tapped. While some forms of Commons, like the atmosphere, oceans and genetic building blocks of life, are bestowed upon us by nature, others are the product of cooperative human creativity, like languages, folklore and calligraphy (Walljasper 2010, p. 2). Certain elements of the Commons are entirely new, like the Internet, while others are centuries old, like shared, inherited knowledge, cultural traditions and norms, and public spaces (ibid.). Similar to all the different forms, however, is the unique kind of strength of the Commons; it is an inheritance, shared by all humans, that provides the basic support systems of all kinds of life (Rowe 2001, p. 1).

Community Governance

Acknowledging its multifarious character, the concept of the Commons actually takes its point of departure in historical landscape management. In England, where the notion has its origin, Commons referred to the shared pastures, fields, forests, irrigation systems and other resources that were found in many rural areas well into the 1880s (Neeson 1993; Angus 2008). The land called the Commons was formally owned by the landlord, but the rights to use it belonged to the commoners (Shiva 2005, p. 19). The Commons thus referred not only to the geographical area, it also referred to rules and principles and to systems of decision-making—on which crops to sow, how many cattle should graze, which trees to cut, which streams should irrigate which field at what time—decisions that were made jointly by the members of the community, making the Commons a form of community governance (ibid.).

Similar communal farming arrangements existed in most of Europe, and they still exist today in various forms around the world, particularly in low-income countries (Angus 2008). Besides farming, a range of user-managed regimes for local ecosystems can be identified, from traditional coastal fishing practices based on commonly accepted norms and values to self-managed irrigation systems or forestry. A main characteristic of all the different forms of management is the accumulated local knowledge delivered from one generation to the other (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2005). In a Scandinavian context, surviving historical traditions for local control of access to fisheries[1] as well as the right of public access to woodlands, fields and moorlands, called *allemansrättan* (the freedom to roam, literally: everyman's right), are Nordic alternatives. The right to walk freely in the woods, (even private ones) picking berries and mushrooms, and camping on somebody's land has, for instance, in a Swedish context been maintained until today (Naturvårdsverket 2015).[2]

Contemporary Enclosures

Still existing in various forms, such systems of community governance have, however, also been subject to a growing pressure. A comprehensive privatisation of commonly owned resources into private property has since early industrialism removed the rights to access to common goods—not only in a Northern European context but also on a broader, international level (Shiva 2005).[3] Moreover, Commons has been subject to more regulation, the common solution to the overexploitation of natural resources being prohibition and control by a state authority. Seen from both perspectives, the word *Enclosure* describes the physical exclusion of the community from their Commons by denying or restricting access to common resources (Shiva 2005, p. 39). As the conceptual antithesis of Commons, Enclosure is meant as an increasing exclusion of people from common values (Hyde 2010; Linebaugh 2014). While privatisation and marketing have throughout history enclosed the Commons by surrounding a piece of land with hedges, ditches or barriers, thus preventing the free passage of men and animals, governmental regulations have increasingly taken practical form by limiting the amount of a common good available for use by any individual. Permit systems for extractive economic activities, including fishing, hunting, livestock raising and timber extraction, are examples of such a regulatory approach.

As a part of the same transformation, it also appears that processes of Enclosure have become more advanced. For instance, Enclosures of the relics of former village Commons can be seen as consequences of the EU's agrarian policy, where subsidies and cheap credits are tied to big investments and given to expansive farmers, who constantly look for opportunities to buy up new land (Mies 1999). And if it concerns patenting and the determination of private rights according to the utilisation of water, air, fish in the oceans (i.e., quota systems) and genetic material from plants and animals, it seems crucial here that Enclosures of one or the other kind are tied up with juridical codified property rights, guaranteed by the state. In that sense, the transformation also draws attention to the complexity of the Commons today. As for the land Commons in the past, so today it is with the biodiversity and seed Commons restricted by intellectual property rights (Shiva 2005, p. 21).[4] From this perspective, and no matter the area, Enclosure can be seen as a technology of power that describes the juridical limits to the range of both material and intellectual resources that people collectively share (Shiva 2005; Bollier 2007; Hyde 2010; Linebaugh 2014).

The Commons-Enclosure Dilemma

A central critique towards Enclosure has been its implications for both people and nature (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2005; Linebaugh 2014). In poor communities, Enclosures have, for instance, deprived the politically weaker groups of their access to essential natural resources that they had through

access to Commons and that are necessary to maintain coherent and healthy living conditions (ibid.). In a more general sense, it has also been indicated that processes of Enclosure have robbed from nature the right to self-renewal and sustainability by eliminating the social constraints on resource use that are the basis of common property management (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2005). In consequence, the growing Enclosure has in different ways eroded people's personal and social motivations to cooperate in preserving natural resources.

In that sense, what has happened in communities all around the world has not only been a physical or juridical Enclosure of land, water, genes and the like. It has also caused the erosion of social systems of collaboration and interdependence. The loss of community ethics for preserving ecosystems can be seen as a symptom of that (Mies 1999). And when uncompetitive farmers have given up farming and left the countryside, or when local knowledge-based innovations, passed on over centuries to new generations, have been patented and privatised, then the dark side of agricultural and genetic development may lead to the social fragmentation of the community (ibid.). Thus, an obvious consequence of the erosion of large swaths of shared wealth and social life can be identified as an effect of the Commons-Enclosure dilemma, where the individual is increasingly being connected to other spheres of life beyond those that exist in their immediate vicinity (Bauman 2001). The decoupling of people's direct relations to nature as an ecological material resource does, in other words, also refer to the socioeconomic and cultural relations to nature and the disconnections of these relations from their immediate context and relationships. With a point of departure in the economic transformation since early industrialism and the emergence of market economy, it is this separation which the Hungarian-American economist Karl Polanyi has described as *dis-embedding* (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). As markets and commodity relations start to spread, and the economy is separated—or dis-embedded—from social relations, then still more social and interhuman aspects become separated, replaced, influenced or forced out, and former communities broken up (ibid.).[5]

RE-INVENTION OF THE COMMONS

In light of the growing Enclosures in landscapes and rural communities, the question may be asked whether part of the answer to the problems lies in the re-thinking and re-invention of communities *as* Commons, based on an understanding of these as common goods, common responsibilities and social engagement. Polanyi described the alternative to dis-embedding as *re-embedding*—meaning reintegrating the economy into the culture and society (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). The re-embedding does, in other words,

suggest that the increasing commodification of social functions and the economising of every aspect of life should be stopped and replaced by other forms of regulation (ibid.).

Others have argued that since communities have for generations formed unique institutions to manage their Commons in a sustainable way, it is not unlikely that this could happen again (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2005). Thus, the point has been stressed that Commons, also in its modern forms, is an activity, *commoning* (Linebaugh 2008, 2014),[6] rather than just a material resource. As a verb for the Commons, commoning reflects the continuously cultivating element of the Commons (see Alarcón's contribution in this volume). Seen as a social dynamic, a Commons can therefore arise whenever a given community decides it and wishes to manage a resource in a collective manner, with special regard to equitable access, use and sustainability (Bollier 2007). In order to succeed, it might, however, require supporting such communities in their co-operations and in the development of common social and human norms (Ostrom 1990; Shiva 2005). Whether capabilities to cope with Common-Enclosure dilemmas may evolve and reciprocal co-operations be established, sustain themselves and even grow depends on whether individuals are able to communicate, make sustainable norms, overcome social dilemmas, monitor one another's behaviour and coordinate activities (Ostrom & Field 1999, p. 4).

In that sense, sustainability is an urgent agenda with democratic implications for societal change. If alienation and a lack of responsibility for nature is to be overcome, then it is of vital importance to involve people in the development of shared norms and activities. It is not known what kind of specific Commons such involvement could actually end up with. Since former ways of life have evidently disappeared, and since historical Commons did often exist within the context of hierarchical societies,[7] it seems neither possible nor desirable to recreate the Commons of the past. However, it may be possible to re-invent new forms of Commons where the principle of sharing and self-management makes sense in a post-modern world. If this should be the scenario, such forms of re-invention would, however, need new forms of learning agendas, from which the building of a common responsibility can actually emerge. The combination of sustainability with the demand of a renewal of democracy does exactly pinpoint the issue as a question of a societal renewal based on the possibility and will of "ordinary people" taking responsibility for common affairs—a potentiality that can develop through processes of social learning.

Social Learning for Sustainability

Making sustainability and democracy the potential horizon for social learning does in different ways confront the organisational logic of landscape management today. A main characteristic of post-modern governance strategies is that they do not work towards the creation of Commons

(Hajer & Wagenaar 2003).[8] Instead, and in accordance with a growing influence of expert culture on policy making, a specific kind of institutional learning plays a prominent role. This addresses the involvement of citizens or "users" in policy making, but not as a way to strengthen a democratic influence and responsibility (Nielsen 2009, p. 3). Instead, this learning often undermines democratic decision-making and the development of an issue *as* a Commons, and this problem can be illustrated from two perspectives.

The first perspective concerns the traditional hierarchy between experts and laypeople, and this also means the hierarchy between everyday experiences and bureaucratic expert orientations (Irwin & Wynne 1996; Wynne 1998). As scientific and bureaucratic perspectives are increasingly prioritised to laypeople's observations and experiences from everyday life, most participatory methods do not fundamentally exceed the principal asymmetry in participation that the way of presenting the problem has often been made by experts. Citizens do contribute as data suppliers to predefined targets in development plans, but very seldom have the opportunity to define the problem themselves (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007). Thus, the questions debated in participatory processes do not usually take their point of departure in people's everyday lives, but instead refer to a professional and civic organisational approach to landscape management (Hansen, von Essen & Sriskandarajah in this volume).

Adding to the imbalance, questions of nature conservation and the economic, social and cultural development of local communities have often been seen and worked with as separate issues. This second perspective thereby also concerns the question of representativeness. While the prevailing understanding is that representativeness only concerns the formalisation of civic society as in different types of organisations (nature conservation, agriculture, outdoor life, tourism, etc.), citizen participation becomes a power arena between specific interest groups (Clausen 2011). Instead of facilitating new forms of cooperation between experts and laypeople (and thus a productive interplay between different kinds of knowledge), the demand for people's participation has been understood as a demand of mediating and compromising between (often highly specialised) interest groups fighting for their specific targets or material interests (Hansen, von Essen & Sriskandarajah in this volume). Apart from the excluding effects of this participatory setup (people who do not feel represented by civic organisations or are not in possession of the competences to perform tend to be excluded), such forms of participation may even have resulted in a growing mistrust in environmental initiatives, as ordinary people have been de-coupled from participation and responsibility (Clausen 2011). Taken to its logical conclusions, such a setup may therefore appear as a reproduction—or even intensification—of those forms of different Enclosures that stakeholders currently represent (ibid.).

The Common Third

As an alternative to such compromising strategies, the belief in a common perspective as the core of the empowerment of people describes another way of working with social learning. Confronted with a conflict situation, the answer is from this perspective not that those professional people (NGO representatives, officials, researchers and so on) who initiate participatory processes should mediate different opinions. Rather, it is the renewal of life orientations built upon a common responsibility to common living conditions, and thereby the aim is to find the general and universal in the singular and local and to find democratic forms of regulation that could match this unity (Nielsen 2009, p. 14). This aim has been described as *the common third* (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, p. 319). This is partly a methodological concept that refers to the product of the collaboration between researcher and participants—a product from a common "we" (Tofteng & Husted 2006), where the breakdown of traditional expert-laypeople knowledge hierarchies plays a central role. In part, it is a value-based concept referring to the building of a common responsibility to a given object—a kind of a common horizon—that goes beyond singular interests (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, p. 156).

Within such a common perspective, specialised interests can still exist, but not as the fundamental core. Instead, the emphasis is on the writing up of the common qualities of a given object—for example, the involvement in a local geographical area as a place of living. What participants see as the qualities of a specific geography are, in other words, not seen as individual interests, but rather as something bigger—an area as a framework for life conditions that are common to all. In that sense, Commons as a form of common third also carries a procedural and a substantial aspect (Ahrenkiel et al. 2012, pp. 298–302). On the procedural or relational side, it refers to the learning process that develops among actors in a social situation; an arena for dialogue that can promote social learning processes, where different perspectives and kinds of knowledge can promote improved mutual understanding of something *as* a Commons—i.e., its common qualities (ibid.). On the substantial side, the common third reflects the deeper common relation that involved and affected actors have with the "object"—for example, nature and society, and which also involves concrete organisational forms (ibid.). At best, it also implies an invitation and encouragement to social experiments and inventions, and this is a challenge lying right ahead of Action Research.

Action Research and Commons

A work towards the reinvention of Commons can be said to constitute a practical concretisation of Action Research and democracy. Basically, Action Research is a scientific method for research that underlines the connection

between understanding and change, between theory and practice and aims at co-operation between researchers and participants in the production of knowledge (Svensson & Nielsen 2006, p. 14).[9] Thus, the establishing of democratic processes is an important aim for many action researchers, and certainly not least for the Action Research tradition addressed here—*Critical Utopian Action Research* (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, 2006b, 2007 and in this volume). A central dimension of this Action Research tradition is precisely the aim—through processes of social learning, knowledge development and empowerment—to reach a form of the common third that cuts across expert systems and local knowledge and goes beyond solutions to problems in modern society that rely on regulation or privatisation alone (ibid.). The point of departure for this approach is the underlying recognition that only through cooperation and common interests is it possible to generate important change. Thus, a central goal of Critical Utopian Action Research is to make visible the common horizons, and to help empower people to take action on them.

By this approach, democracy is taken both as a goal and as a medium (Nielsen 2009, p. 6). In order to create a "free space", where new ways of rethinking Commons could emerge, the aim is to establish a "utopian horizon"—that is, a horizon where questions and dreams that cannot normally be asked in people's daily lives can get a chance to unfold (ibid.). *Social imagination* (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, p. 79)—a creative, both critical and utopian process related to forming ideas and visions of "how to live"—is a key concept in this respect. Thus, the aim of Critical Utopian Action Research can be seen as creating public arenas (free spaces) in which the social imagination emerges in easier and more productive ways than is possible in the structures of daily life (ibid.). In this respect, it is also an approach based on a certain understanding of *everyday life* (Lefebvre 2002 [1971]) and the imbedded difficulties and possibilities. Formed through people's practices and, at the same time, the base of routines and the reproduction of modern society, and the place where people's hope of a better, more human and social life is continuingly recreated, everyday life is seen as a way of life with an inherent duality. It is this duality that Lefebvre described as a situation of "*misery and power*" (Lefebvre 2002 [1971], p. 35). Thus, essential effort within Critical Utopian Action Research is to support processes that can make visible both sides of life. By this approach, and in sharp contrast to the lack of laypeople's voices in the public debate, the aim is to "rediscover" the everyday life relations between local citizens and society within a range of social areas that are gradually dissolving. Re-embedding, in its radical meaning, must in this perspective develop as an integral part of everyday life, and therefore it has in various projects made sense to use the concept of Commons as a guiding principle. At one level, the commons perspective has been used to strengthen a democratic orientation in Action Research. At another level, Action Research has been used as a methodological tool to strengthen a common perspective. The area where this dynamic

synthesis has been mostly developed is within the fields of nature conservation and landscape management.

NATURE CONSERVATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITY: THE MAKING OF UTOPIAN PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY

Characteristic for Critical Utopian Action Research within the field of landscape management has been the aim of developing the Commons through local processes of democracy and social learning. Based on the essential intention of empowering and strengthening local people's independent choice of sustainable solutions, the approach assumes that local experience—as soon as it is recognised *as* something shared—can be activated and connected to a broader level—a common value that can also potentially become the starting point for a common third (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, p. 110). Thus, experiments with nature and development planning have in different cases been carried out where local people, supported by experts and authorities, have developed visions and ideas for the areas in question as frameworks of common living conditions (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, and in this volume, Clausen 2011; Vasstrøm 2014, and in this volume).

The Future Creating Workshop and the Research Workshop

A certain way of working practically with Action Research has in all cases been through using a certain methodological tool—the *Future Creating Workshop* (Jungk & Müllert 1981), where the basic principle is to promote utopian thinking and reflection. Free from inherent necessities, and with the use of games and brainstorming techniques, the aim is to identify and reflect on ideas and visions of the future that not only transcend everyday experiences of what can and cannot be imagined, but also transcend rationally orientated solutions to problems. In contrast to the focus on special interests and stakeholder dialogue that prevails in the rational thinking of most governance strategies, the focus in the Future Creating Workshop is on the kind of social learning that can foster social imagination and empowerment.

In order to create a utopian horizon where the social imagination can emerge, the workshop is organised as a creative public space where everybody—including rhetorically and verbally weak participants—are given the possibility to participate (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007). In that sense, the work is not striving for some kind of problem solving (although problems are confronted), but is rather based on the simple but essential and existential question, "How do we want to live?" as related to the specific question the workshop is dealing with (e.g., the environment, health, childcare, etc.). Through three phases—a critique, a utopian and a realisation phase, each of them supported by certain technical rules, participants are urged to describe their critique, turn it into

(utopian) alternatives and confront the gap between utopian drafts and more realistic projects and initiatives (Jungk & Müllert 1981).

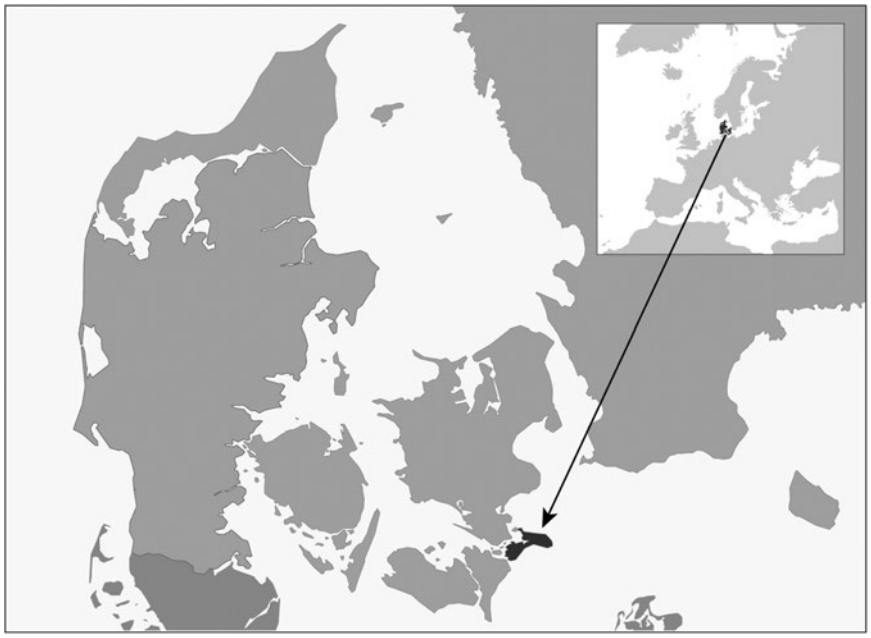
Enjoying the status as the essential method within Critical Utopian Action Research, the Future Creating Workshop has been further developed within the fields of nature protection and landscape management. As a second step in the method, a superstructure in the form of a *Research Workshop* has been added (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, 2007, and in this volume). While the ideas sketched in the Future Creating Workshop are first and foremost based on the everyday life experiences of the participants, these ideas are, within the Research Workshop, carefully examined and meet with different kinds of expert or scholarly knowledge. In order not to subordinate the everyday knowledge within this social meeting, the relation between experts and laypeople is turned upside down. Rather than reducing laypeople to audiences listening to expert-based discussions and to accepting decisions that are already made, experts are asked to relate their professional knowledge to the ideas and proposals developed by the participating laypeople. This approach to participation has been described as *reverse participation* (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, p. 29), and through this second manoeuvre, the ideas and proposals developed are strengthened and further qualified (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006a, 2007).

MØN: A TALE OF WORKING WITH COMMONS IN ACTION RESEARCH

An example from the work with reverse participation as a methodological approach to the reinvention of Commons stems from experiments within the framework of establishing national parks in Denmark. Based on the assumption that larger, geographically coherent areas would be able to improve biological diversity (Wilhjelm Committee 2001; OECD 1999/2000), seven geographical areas were in 2003–2005 selected as potential national park areas. These were later supplemented by three non-official pilot projects. At the same time, it was explicitly stressed that the local voice had to be highly prioritised, and that the final selection of the actual park areas would depend on whether the process had been genuine and whether local ownership and agreement were attained (Ministry of Environment 2003).[10] Thus, an experiment with local democratic decision-making had begun, and much effort was made to design the process of involvement of citizens (Clausen et al. 2010; Hansen 2007).

Initial Openings for Dialogue Across Interests

Within the context of experimenting with the planning of potential national parks, the use of Critical Utopian Action Research came into play in two of the nominated areas. One of these was the Isle of Møn—a 240 km^2 island situated in southwestern Zealand (Map 1.1) and inhabited by approximately



Map 1.1 Study area location (Source: Wikipedia Commons, graphics Kent Pørksen)

12,000 people. On this island, known for its natural beauty (Photo 1.1), a series of locally based Future Creating Workshops were, among other methods, included in the overall participation design.[11] Thus, several Future Creating Workshops were organised under the title, "Local nature and socio-economic development", a theme that was carefully considered in advance. In the workshops, the intention was not only to address participants' view of nature in its specialised sense (e.g., in relation to work life, leisure time, nature conservation, etc.), but also, and more importantly, to address their views of both nature and community and the related common qualities and interests of landscape as a natural and social space. The purpose of the workshops was in that sense to create a space where citizens could jointly express their critique as well as their—utopian—visions for a common future. Based on this background, citizens from all over the island created ideas for a renewal of their community (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, and in this volume).

Creating Coherence in the Local Area

In the further development of the ideas developed from the Future Creating Workshop into more realistic plans, the participants were the agents of the continuing research. With assistance from researchers in the roles of

Photo 1.1 Møn is known in particular for its white cliffs, stretching 8 km from south to north and rising more than 128 m above sea level. (Source: Wikipedia Commons, Thue C. Leibrandt)

facilitators and experts who were invited by the participants themselves, locals defined the agenda and the issues to be investigated. In this process, a constant exchange took place. Participants were transferring local knowledge to the researchers and experts, and these were conveying theoretical frameworks and comparative information that helped participants analyse the local situation in terms of how the wider systems work. From this process emerged a range of carefully prepared suggestions, which, as a whole, reflected the problems and alternative wishes that participants related to their everyday practices in both nature and the community. In this respect, the ideas and suggestions had a holistic character that covered all the dimensions of nature, economy and the social world that the participants connected to their ideal of sustainable development (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, and in this volume; Clausen 2011, 2012). Among other things, this included new ways of using and protecting the landscape, the development of farmers' nature plans, new forms of sustainable entrepreneurships, ecologically constructed housing, planning for public path systems, the involvement of schoolchildren in monitoring ecosystems, the setting up of continuation schools and kindergartens with a green image, nature-related activities and much more (ibid.). In some of the local sites of the island, the ideas included the development of overall nature planning. So-called "nature development plans" made for single farms were connected to other plans for the purpose of increasing biodiversity in the area, and other dimensions were integrated as well. As part of such ideas, they also included plans for establishing the intention of coherent pathways and corridors, not only with the purpose

of improving the possibility of using the landscape for recreational walks for individuals, but also with the broader perspective of strengthening the landscape as a coherent backbone of the idea of the landscape as a common space (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007).

The Parochial Church Council Model

While coherence in the landscape—physical as well as social—was clearly demonstrated in the modelling of future development plans, an important aspect of all such ideas appeared to be the consideration of ways whereby the landscape could be planned and managed by the local people themselves. This resulted in different forms of local, customised solutions based on the interest in Commons as a management model, e.g., very detailed models of self-management of pathways, lakes and meadows, but also for more complex, multifunctional landscape areas. A central element suggested for a future national park was that a democratic and locally based model for the management of natural and cultural environments should be developed. In contrast to traditional forms of governance models, where officials and experts dominate decision-making processes, the essential part in this suggestion was to establish new forms of collaboration, where local people would be actively involved in prioritisation and administration of landscape affairs in close co-operation with authorities and other interest groups. The best example of the concretization of such thoughts was the development of the so-called *Parochial Church Council Model*—a model inspired by the form of local governance existing within the Danish National Church (Photo 1.2). The idea of the model was simple. Just like a parochial church council manages the local religious life and the financial means that stem from the church tax, so could a council also manage local natural and cultural environments. And just like a parochial church council is committed to specified, public standards, so could and should such a local management council be obliged to corresponding standards and should ensure that preservation, restoration and protection was maintained. In the final report delivered to policy makers, the Parochial Church Council Model was suggested as a general model for a local anchored democratic form of governance in Danish national parks (Pilotprojekt Nationalpark Møn 2004, p. 8).

The Developing of a Metaconciousness

Taken as a whole, the experiences from Møn illustrate how Action Research can play an active role in the development of Commons. This takes its point of departure in the grounded perception that the development of a specific subject—in this case, nature protection—and the development of local communities should go hand in hand. Thus, the experiences also illustrate the outcome of Action Research as a branch of research that emphasises the coherence between the common qualities of a given field and recognises

Photo 1.2 Nyord Church was the source of inspiration for a concrete model of local self-management—the so-called "Parochial Church Council Model". (Source: Wikipedia Commons, Sandpiper)

that coherence between democracy, sustainability and self-managed living would include the identification and support of everyday life experiences *as* a common issue.

The results should not, however, be reduced to the sum of observations from these experiences alone. In the case in question, it also became clear how systematic processes in creating a social imagination among citizens made it possible to establish a symmetrical dialogue between laypeople and experts. In the dialogues, the laypeople were able to insist on their specific ideas and to maintain experts in their role as supporters and qualifiers of specific specialist knowledge (about biology, for instance), as well as general aspects of local community development. Even though conflicts and differences in interests did not disappear, they did become related to a constituted idea of a Commons.

What could therefore also be identified as an important dimension from the overall process was the emergence of a political culture among participants—in the form of a newly developed self-confidence and common responsibility for both people and nature, and in the form of competence to *see* both problems and solutions as something that requires common action (Clausen 2011). For some, the main interest was related to their leisure time activities, but still with considerations for the common commercial and social life that encircles recreation. For others, interests were primarily related to commercial worries and hopes, but still with considerations for the quality of the family and cultural life that surrounded them. Seen from this perspective, the processes not only produced ideas of how nature plans and management could be integrated with people's lives, they also strengthened the common third by building a more conscious, self-critical and holistic relation to nature as a central dimension of everybody's life. Referring to Hannah Arendt, the Action Research process in question did in that sense manifest a realisation of a kind of *common sense* (Arendt 1977 [1968], p. 218)—a sort of metaconsciousness that, as a result of social learning, went beyond special interests and where protection of nature was recognised as an important aspect of a collective sustainable life (Clausen 2011).

LOCAL CHALLENGES

If the experiences from Møn illustrate how Action Research can play an active role in the development of Commons, the experiment also, like many Action Research experiments, reveals several difficulties. One difficulty concerned the opposition of both political and nature conservationist authorities as well as big farmers, who systematically opposed initiatives that tried to reach a more common level. Not only was it difficult to attract financial and other kinds of support, initiatives developed by participants were not taken into consideration when important decisions about further implementations were made. Thus, expert-driven solutions were in the end preferred over the ideas and suggestions that local people had (together with experts) developed themselves (Clausen et al. 2010).

Non-Participation

Another difficulty concerned the willingness to participate. Even though people did participate, participants were very few, and many dropped out along the way. This *non-participation* of citizens, was, and is, a problem for the renewal of the Commons, as well as for Action Research as a methodological approach (Clausen 2011). As citizens mostly do not engage in large numbers, it can in reality be very difficult to get processes locally anchored (ibid).

In the specific process in question, the lack of engagement was related to a restricted access to nature—i.e., a growing Enclosure. Thus, it became obvious that the overall process had in a way confirmed the reasons why people did not believe in their own ability to influence decisions about landscape development. Not only had the process of participation very clearly showed that special stakeholder interests were favoured when supported by expert knowledge, but the process had also made visible a community in a state of decay (Clausen 2011). As earlier commercial relationships with the landscape had collapsed—the only remaining traditional occupation being a few very large industrial farms that restricted admission to land—and as tourism and nature conservation had also claimed large areas, people had in effect lost the possibility of interacting with the landscape in ways that were meaningful to them. While people had as a part of the same development taken jobs outside the island and sold their houses to non-permanent inhabitants (tourists and part-time residents), social relations had also begun to erode. In that sense, it became clear that community was falling apart and that a clear cultural preparedness for change did not really exist. As community cohesion was declining, landscape Enclosure had by contrast accelerated into a situation where landscape was determined by privatisations and international regulations like landscape conservation, fishing quotas and agricultural structural changes. In that sense, people were in general not only alienated from nature, but also from community resources and from the ability to identify problems as common issues (Clausen 2011).

Mental Commons

The experiences from Møn illustrate a general challenge in having people taking part in the creation of Commons. Several studies have shown that communities in society are difficult to spot (Hobsbawn 1994; Young 1999; Bauman 2001). While such communities are often characterised by massive fragmentation, huge physical mobility, lack of social interactions, lack of mutual dependence and lack of solidarity, this leaves communities in a state of strong division and with a frayed identity. Moreover, the erosion of transmitted everyday experiences fosters the development of an expert culture, which further accelerates the erosion and blocks tendencies to self-organisation and formation of countercultures (Negt 1984). The result is not only a fragmentation of people's lives as a whole, but also a resignation and scepticism when it comes to participating in a common development.

Nevertheless, some inherent potential probably exists. Even among marginalised people, it is possible to find a reflexive subjectivity, which (when activated) carries the seed to a more collective form of change (Negt 1984). This was observed on Møn, where people identified other ways of compensating for their lack of interaction with the landscape. They did, for instance, choose to move around the landscape in ways where they physically, as well as mentally, crossed the frontiers of the dominant planning strategies, or they

chose to withdraw from the community to the very private sphere in order to live out their wishes and interests here (Clausen 2011). This phenomenon is referred to as *tactics* (de Certeau 1984), a concept that captures forms of everyday practices where people take refuge in different kinds of counteractions. Invisible to the surrounding world (which they thereby momentarily escape), tactics describes the withdrawal to (forms of) backstage arenas, where people can create a space for themselves (ibid.).

In that sense, people's social practice is never fully determined by dominant rules and regulations. In their character as hidden, individual forms of resistance, they do not necessarily transform into the collective ideas and transgressions of dominant practices, but they do nevertheless give a glimpse of something else. On Møn, a picture of dreams and wishes for another way of life appeared side by side with compensatory actions. When people—the 'non-participants' were asked about alternatives, it appeared how new types of sharing and doing things together existed—if not in practice then in the form of Mental Commons. This included new types of sharing and doing things together—a common dream of community, which, if not in practice, existed in the form of a *Mental Commons* (Clausen 2011). From this perspective, it can be argued that nothing is really hindering the re-invention of Commons. A challenge for Action Research seems, however, to be the importance of making visible the invisible, of bringing Mental Commons into activity. Thereby, it can be argued that the very issue of non-participation emphasises the necessity of Commons to *be* reinvented to prevent those who do not participate from being cut out again.

A REFRAMING OF COMMONS IN THE MODERN WELFARE DEBATE

Within Action Research, landscape management is the area that has most directly been related to questions of defending, reclaiming and reinventing the Commons. It has, as far as the literature is concerned, not been usual to relate the concept to a renewal of other social areas, and therefore, the use of the concept has involved a certain narrowness.

Nonetheless, the Commons-Enclosure dilemma is currently receiving new attention in various disciplines, and is increasingly being adopted in modern debates about a range of social areas such as health, childcare, education, knowledge, communication, etc. (Shiva 2005; Hess & Ostrom 2007; Ahrenkiel et al. 2012). Basically, this widening stems from an observation of strong tendencies to establish new kinds of Enclosures of issues that used to be matters of common responsibility—be it through privatisation, patenting or other kinds of moving control away from those concerned. The increasing attention to a Commons approach can from this perspective be seen as a part of the political discussion about alternatives to existing forms of governance. Compared to a situation where still more social areas are being

dis-embedded and alienated from life as a whole, the concept of Commons indicates a shift in orientation that does not only imply another view of humanity, but also proposes alternative social forms of governance.

Welfare Institutions as a Potential Societal Third

The Commons debate does, however, differ among nationalities. While in the Global South, it has primarily obtained a footing within the environmental debate and the coupling to human rights, it has in a Scandinavian context also been put on the agenda in relation to the modern welfare debate. Within the last mentioned context, it has made sense to consider the concept in relation to a situation in which the traditional welfare institutions are currently in a state of crisis and rapid change. Confronted with the situation where welfare institutions are losing their character as social institutions that are obligated towards a universal perspective (the essence in the former welfare model) and are increasingly being transformed into privatised or still state-driven offers for services, welfare institutions have as an alternative been considered as a potential *societal third*—that is a form of common good (Ahrenkiel et al. 2012, p. 288). Thus, the concept of Commons represents an innovation of welfare institutions, as it does not only reject the increasing privatisation of these institutions, but also the re-establishing of the institutions in their classic "etatistic" forms. By introducing the idea of welfare institutions as a common good, what is at stake is the opening up of the debate towards a more comprehensive reform perspective that may influence the shaping of a new welfare paradigm.

Considerations about day care institutions as a matter of common engagement that citizens in a given community could contribute to administering is one example (Ahrenkiel et al. 2012). This corresponds to the situation where a natural resource is considered as a matter of common interest that can be managed by the citizens in cooperation with the governmental authorities. A similar discussion is found within the area of health, where health has been debated as a potential object of social engagement, using the local community and everyday life perspectives as platforms for making health a social concern (Minkler & Wallerstein 2008).

Local Lessons, Global Challenges

By widening the perspective associated with Commons and bringing it into other areas of Action Research, the concept has attained a more general character. What such experimental ways of thinking may lead to remains an open question. Common to all the perspectives is, however, that they view these social areas (health, elder care, childcare, etc.) as areas that call for a societal renewal that neither represents more state nor more privatisation. Thereby the actualisation of the Commons also marks a societal perspective that is different from civil society as identical with different sectors—a

civic society where civil society organisations represent the people rather than sector-specific interests alone. The reconceptualisation of Commons into areas other than the classic landscape field is from this perspective a challenge that must inevitably give rise to serious consideration—not least when bringing it into the debate of a new kind of welfare institution. With its inherent critique of the existing forms and its weight on self-governance, the idea of Commons can easily be misunderstood. It may appear as if Commons is against the influence of institutions and thus rejects the state, and this could be a main reason for the lack of debate of Commons on the political agenda.

The expanded community perspective inherent in the Commons-inspired idea—that people's self-governance of common matters becomes embedded in a social and cultural community context—does not, however, replace the need for overall governmental responsibility. Inherent in the perspective is also that the practical responsibility for the management of special tasks of different areas still belongs on the governmental level. In contrast to the current tendency where people have either lost influence or have been alienated from central areas of their everyday lives, the common perspective argues that people should have more extensive authority for self-management but still be committed to public standards. In this understanding of self-governance, it is realistic that local self-management could in practice operate in collaboration with a professional regulatory authority and within the lines of governmental standards (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, p. 77).

In a nature management context, where such thoughts have been developed the most, Commons can on a smaller scale be seen as managed by communities from overall guidelines that have been set up at the institutional level. On a broader scale, such local Commons can also be seen as a first step towards the creation of (broader) future communities that go beyond the focus on specific geographical localities. The local responsibility is from this perspective not only concerned about local issues, but also reflects necessities from a global scene like climate issues—the *Global Commons*, that is (Mies 1999, p. 144).

A similar broad perspective can be applied to other social areas. Also here, the development of a common third can serve as the basis for new organisational structures, not only on a local, but also on a global scale. No matter the area, the common third takes shape as a subjective responsibility, not only for the specific area in question, but also for the coherence of the community as a whole. In that sense, the perspective is also that more and more activities—commercial, health-related, etc.—are orientated towards living conditions in a broader sense. Future local democratic forums, based on citizens' direct participation (on different levels and in different degrees), can, by activating everyday life experiences, develop into co-operation (nationally as well as globally) and new social bodies that may promote sustainable living on a broader scale (Mies 1999).

ACTION RESEARCH FOR DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABILITY: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIALS

If the reinvention of the Commons (and by this, the re-embedding of life areas into the community) is seen as a prerequisite for and a way to a sustainable transformation of society, an important question is whether and how different kinds of participatory learning could be part of such a transformation. A quality of Critical Utopian Action Research is in this respect that the development of the social imagination as a part of social learning does contribute something unique to a participatory process. Apart from taking the everyday life experiences seriously, it invites people to transcend them, too. It opens up space for learning processes where the questions and dilemmas of personal and societal responsibility are brought into play and are given a free space to develop on their own premises. Within such learning spaces, characterised by the presence and exploration of both criticism and social imagination, the dialogues between laypeople and experts are, when they succeed, able to open up room for a formation of co-operation and a new quality of created knowledge, where both researchers and participants take part in transforming criticism and ideas into new common actions (Tofteng & Husted 2006, p. 266). Last, but not least, the making of sustainability and democracy, a potential horizon for lifelong learning, also implies that the learning processes—limited, specific, local and contextual, as they will always be—are recognised as a part of a broader societal or even universal unity—a dimension that is easily ignored.

Some of the central difficulties and limitations related to this kind of social learning are in turn related to the contexts within which they are working. They are vulnerable to institutional, organisational or administrative logic and their limitations for imaginative thinking, and therefore, different potentials can be met with strong opposition and structural hindrances from authorities. This is, for instance, as we have seen, a frequent reaction from nature protection authorities, where questions of sustainability tend to be sector-related and thereby unable to grasp new and more profound ways of linking together different life dimensions. Another difficulty is related to the question of non-participation and the situation that it can be difficult to gather people around a common cause at all. At the core of this phenomenon, it is possible to identify a kind of resignation growing out of an increasing Enclosure and the erosion of community. When such processes of fragmentation do in participatory processes meet heavy opposition to or even the blocking of initiatives that might transcend a merely entrepreneurial logic, then participants may hesitate to make a new attempt.

No matter the limitations, the challenge of putting Commons (back) on the agenda can serve as an example of how the search for innovation raises questions that cannot be answered by most learning paradigms. In a new identification of what Commons could offer to the modern world, it is not only necessary to activate knowledge and experiences that are developed

within forms of practice from laypeople's everyday lives, but also to stimulate communication with critical reflecting insights from modern sciences. The output from such an interaction between laypeople and experts would not be negotiated between special interests, but could rather emerge as a new common knowledge—a common third—that might combine science and experience as one. Thus, the strength of Action Research is also that it essentially tries to address the fact that the modern world has lost the ability to self-reproduce a spirit of co-operation and community. It involves people in order to build up a responsible engagement in the long run and with a perspective that, in reality, makes possible the delegation of power to upcoming communities.

It seems that the time and possibilities for actions into the development of Commons are present right now. What we are witnessing around the world are aspirations towards new ways of thinking and living. A wide range of efforts to reconstitute community and better harmonise human lives with the health of our planet shows a growing desire for different ways of interacting and organising resources in order to reinvent the human capacity for cooperation and stewardship. In that sense, the scene is set for action, and seen as a social dynamic that arises whenever a given community wishes to manage a resource in a collective and sustainable manner, the idea of the Commons involves an inherent dynamic and openness to transformation. The coupling to Action Research can in this perspective be taken as obvious. As a methodological approach that is able to grasp such dynamics, help transform them into Commons and defeat the growing Enclosure of matters of common interests, the most exclusive role of Action Research may be to help to address the question of *what* is possible to imagine and to start doing it.

NOTES

1. In Denmark, an example of such a relic could be found within a niche of hunting, where you fish and hunt from small boats near the beach.
2. In Scandinavia, the universal and unique right to roam freely across the landscape—the so called "allemansrätt"—is in its most original form found in Sweden. Denmark is the Scandinavian country where the common rights have been restricted the most.
3. Foreign demand for English wool did for instance help encourage increased privatisation, as the wool industry was thought to be more profitable for landowners who had large farmlands. On the broader international level, colonialism created private property by enclosing the Commons and displacing and uprooting the original people in America, Africa and Asia.
4. Now the seeds, the medicine, the water that historically have been the common property of communities need to be bought at a high cost from giant businesses who own the patents and concessions.
5. The term "embeddedness" expresses the idea that the economy is not autonomous, as it must be in economic theory, but subordinated to politics, religion and social relations. Prior to the nineteenth century, Polanyi insists, the human economy was always embedded in society.

6. Peter Linebaugh, a historian of the Commons, has among others stressed the point that there simply are no Commons without incessant activities of *commoning*, of (re)producing in common.
7. Even though decisions were made jointly, historically, the Commons did also often exist within the context of feudal and patriarchal societies. In that sense, the aim is not to reproduce the Commons of former times.
8. The Dutch political scientist Marten Hajer can, for instance, be seen as an proponent of applying governance theories to landscape management.
9. The values and principles of Critical Utopian Action Research are more thoroughly described in the *Editors' Introduction* and *Chapter Three* in this volume.
10. The Minister of the Environment of the day was Hans Christian Schmidt.
11. The other methods in the process were thematic work groups and public hearings.

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2 Action Research for Emancipation
Social-Ecological Relations, Commoning and Basic Conceptual Questions

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at situating and rethinking Action Research for Emancipation in the context of a growing awareness of historical transformations of social-ecological relations and the effects of the combined crises of capitalist modernity on those relations. Though my elaborations are mainly concerned with the specific versions of Action Research that put meanings of emancipation at the core of the self-understanding of Action Research, the chapter also develops some general elaborations concerning the wider field of Action Research. For this purpose, I draw from a number of insights developed within different efforts to build a critical theory of society and from the popular experiences and praxis in some contemporary social-ecological struggles in the South American context. My starting point is to consider the contemporary awareness of the magnitude of historical transformations of social-ecological relations and the combined crises of capitalist modernity as processes leading to fundamental questions for the general meaning of Action Research. My argument here is that to properly take into account today's social-ecological questions (as questions about the fundamental social-ecological basis for any thinking about the future), we are forced to radically think about a new historical context for Action Research and in particular, for Action Research for Emancipation. What is at stake here is the very meaning of the emancipatory nature and future of Action Research, and thus the chapter tries to delve into some basic conceptual questions in this regard. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part elaborates on some basic conceptual questions concerning social-ecological relations and the crises of capitalist modernity and links this to meanings of commoning, labour and democracy as important conceptualisations to rethink Action Research for Emancipation today. The second part illustrates the theoretical points made in part one with cases of popular movements in South America and their social-ecological struggles. Finally, the third part brings some concluding reflections on education and conceptuality in the context of Action Research for Emancipation.

RETHINKING ACTION RESEARCH FOR EMANCIPATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

I have introduced this chapter with a couple of mentions to the question of the future because Action Research is deeply linked to the praxis of elaborating questions and working through ideas about the future. Here there has always been an explicit and implicit normativity concerning the necessary social changes that should be carried out and faced in relation to a present, which becomes an object of critique. Yet, the kind of critique and the future being thought and envisioned, and the scales represented in such thinking, always need to be explicitly and theoretically elaborated. In this context, to make sense of the separate meanings of *action*, *research* and *emancipation* with the hope of productively articulating and combining these three terms has been a way to concretely think about views on the future implied in Action Research. This has been explicitly or implicitly addressed by notions such as Emancipatory Action Research, Participatory Action Research and Action Research for Emancipation (Fals Borda & Rahman 1991; Carr & Kemmis 2003; Greenwood & Levin 2006).

Thinking about the future in this context relates to wider possibilities for emancipation and social changes, which in the past were often thought and discussed in order to create conditions and human relations where people could organise their individual and common lives through the collective production of new social relations. However, thinking about the future today is deeply and inseparably associated with radically thinking about future social-ecological relations and how they should be different in relation to what today is widely referred to as unsustainability. Within this context, climate change and environmental justice pose important new questions for Action Research (Ballard 2014; Scott 2014). Furthermore, a focus on Action Research for Emancipation forces us to consider that sustainability becomes a process that cannot be reduced to particular organisations, since this is essentially a process concerning society at large and, fundamentally today, a process that can only be fully thought as a global process. Here, the separations and divisions created by the historical development of capitalism get to the core of how we think about sustainability, and consequently, how we think about Action Research for Emancipation in this context.

Against such a background, the usual questions concerning sustainability, such as, for example, sustainability in *relation to what* and *for whom*, become fundamental. Thus, questions about the future of societies at large constitute a basic question for Action Research for Emancipation in the sense that the very meaning of emancipation becomes rooted in the current real possibilities of people to transform the current social-ecological relations in which they live. It is through the process of transforming those relations where basic processes that open up possibilities to create a different society are co-produced. Thus, to think about emancipation in today's historical conjuncture is very much about defining the material constraints

for human realisation, and such constraints can only be thought about in relation to a specific historical time. In fact, to recognise historically situated constraints for human emancipation has been a first step when proposing a different set of social relations for the realisation of human emancipation. In this regard, the history of forms of the critical theorising of society initiated by Marx continues being an essential intellectual moment to think about the question of emancipation.

One basic articulation in such critical theorising of society for human emancipation is the attempt to fully and deeply explain the historical specificity of the time where struggles for emancipation take place. As Marx elaborated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.
>
> (Marx 1972 [1852], p. 10)

In making our own history, as one can learn from Marx's theorising on agency and history, the characterisation of the specific historical time of social struggles is one of the most profound political acts. In other words, and as Fredric Jameson (1991) recalled years ago, the 1960s motto, "We have to name the system" used to make sense of struggles in the past continues being as valid as it was when coined in the context of other social struggles for emancipation. If we do not fully consider that the meaning of emancipation is today very much connected to the understanding of social-ecological relations and the planetary crisis of those relations, we are not able to fully understand and discuss what can be the fundamental challenges for Action Research for Emancipation today. Hence, emancipation for what and emancipation towards what kind of different world are two of the most fundamental issues that have to be addressed when thinking about new meanings of Action Research for Emancipation.

Implicit in what I have presented above, there is a central concern with what I call the social-ecological. When proposing the combined term social-ecological relations, I am trying to give justice to the increasing awareness of the impossibility of understanding social relations as separated from the ecological processes in which societies are part of and to which social dynamics contribute. This is also an attempt to go beyond the usual separation of society and nature while maintaining an analytical difference between what is the social and what is the ecological in the process of structuring social-ecological relations at the local and world levels. Thus, Action Research within the context of recognising the primary importance of thinking in terms of social-ecological relations means that today's Action Research should be oriented towards giving understandings and meanings to changes in relation to the way we produce and reproduce social-ecological relations. In addressing such a question, it is becoming more

and more accepted that one of the main problems in the way we produce and reproduce social-ecological relations today has to do with the logic of capital accumulation and the capitalist imperative of endless growth, where the production of exchange value along with capitalist inequalities have a fundamental role in the problematic set of social-ecological relations of capital or of capital as a social-ecological relation (Moore 2011; Harvey 2014). Yet when bringing capitalism into this picture, one risks ending in a capitalist-centric view of the current situation and also of the political challenges we face today. Thus, a more productive political strategy is to combine a critique of capital and also a search for a basis for alternatives coexisting with the development of capitalism.

One of the conceptualisations that can help to avoid a capital-centric ontology of the present is the term *commoning*. In conceptualising so, commoning can be a fundamental aspect within the context of thinking about Action Research for Emancipation and in relation to how we think about alternative social-ecological relations for the future. Commoning, and commoning in relation to Commons, is essentially a relational approach. It means that we have to think of the Commons as part of processes and as a question of praxis (see also Clausen in this volume). Historian Peter Linebaugh has offered some of the most important insights into the question of commoning and Commons. He puts commoning at the centre of the history of the *Magna Carta*, a legal text which is today usually invoked without proper consideration of the social-ecological struggles behind its origin (Linebaugh 2009). In reconstructing the history of the *Magna Carta* from below, Linebaugh shows that the *Magna Carta* is actually rooted in social struggles around commons and, in particular, in struggles around forests. Thinking in terms of commoning is also a way to rethink important political concepts. For example, Linebaugh argues that when thinking in commoning, one of the crucial conceptual differences that one should bear in mind is the difference between common rights and human rights. This is because:

> First, common rights are embedded in a particular ecology with its local husbandry. For commoners, the expression 'law of the land' from chapter 39 does not refer to the will of the sovereign. Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. You might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state. Magna Carta does not list rights, it grants perpetuities. It goes deep into human history.
>
> (Linebaugh 2009, pp. 44–45)

This brief historical and theoretical reconstruction linking commoning and labour as *processes and relations* creating and constituting Commons can give us important insights to elaborate analytical and normative tools to approach our present situation and to also rethink Action Research for Emancipation. Massimo De Angelis has further developed the notion of commoning as being about "*(re)production of/through commons*". De Angelis (2010) highlights the political relevance of linking commons to the verb commoning:

> To turn a noun into a verb is not a little step and requires some daring. Especially if in doing so we do not want to obscure the importance of the noun, but simply ground it on what is, after all, life flow: there are no commons without incessant activities of commoning, of (re)producing in common. But it is through (re)production in common that communities of producers decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things. Let us put the 'tragedy of the commons' to rest then, the basis of the economists' argument for enclosures: there is no commons without commoning, there are no commons without communities of producers and particular flows and modes of relations. Hence, what lies behind the 'tragedy of the commons' is really the tragedy of the destruction of commoning through all sorts of structural adjustments, whether militarised or not.
>
> (De Angelis 2010, p. 955)

By bringing these insights into commoning, and with the purposes of a wider discussion on Action Research for Emancipation, the following point can be made: commoning can give new means to propose concrete premises for a certain analytical normativity regarding emancipation. Such analytical normativity allows us to approach what we see today as reality and to analyse that from the standpoint of an alternative to what exists. Within this context, commoning is important also for the purposes of distinguishing between a normativity that operates within the limits of capitalism and a normativity that operates through a conceptualisation that transcends the conceptuality of capitalism. One implication of this is that for the purposes of thinking about Action Research for Emancipation, commoning can conceptually and practically become a fundamental moment when defining in political terms the structures and social-ecological relations from which we seek emancipation. Commoning can be used here for that purpose because it verbalises and also adds to our political vocabulary a way to analyse societies in terms of the lack of commoning. This means to politically argue for emancipation from societies that prevent, limit, and repress commoning but at the same time to search for commoning as an already existing process in our societies. This is very much about conceiving the relations between immanence and transcendence when politically thinking about Action Research for Emancipation. We can further develop this by

arguing that to think in terms of commoning represents today also a way to think about the possible role of commoning as an organising principle of a future social life, and more importantly for these purposes, the organisation of social-ecological relations through commoning. In addition, the link between the present and the future through the lens of commoning can be conceived in relation to what commoning is today in terms of a real process existing in parallel to capitalism.

Within this historical context, the question of democracy should be radically rethought as well. This is because the current awareness of an overall crisis in terms of how social-ecological relations are produced today is a question that challenges important meanings of democracy. As we know, ideas of democracy are qualified ones. Thus, to think about democracy in relation to commoning means to think about democracy with the goal of commoning, and commoning becomes a substantial aspect of how we think about democracy. The meaning of commoning also means a resignification of democracy through the incorporation of a substantive qualification in relation to both the means and ends of democracy. This contrasts with mere procedural conceptions of democracy and their contradictory position in relation to a normativity linked to the recognition of a social-ecological crisis resulting from the reproduction of capitalism. By proposing commoning as a normative process, democracy cannot be transformed into a formal procedure, but neither can democracy be understood as disconnected from the social-ecological relations where the praxis around commoning takes place. Here, and in the overall context of such elaboration, giving importance to historically constituted social-ecological relations is also a way to historicise the meaning of democracy in Action Research. To make sense of this, we have to briefly note that in the praxis of Action Research, claims about democracy have been a fundamental claim (see also the *Editors' Introduction* and Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). In fact, either explicitly or implicitly, proponents of Action Research conceive it as a process oriented towards, or realising, democratic ideals. In the words of Kemmis et al. (1982), "Action Research is an expression of an essentially democratic spirit in social research" (Kemmis et al. 1982 as cited in Hart & Bond 1995, p. 35). Yet, democracy has never been an easy concept to deal with. Awareness of the need to define democracy in the context of Action Research is exemplified in an introductory text to Action Research, where one reads:

> Our own view of these matters equates democracy with the creation of arenas for lively debate and for decision-making that respects and enhances the diversity of groups. We explicitly reject both the distributive justice and the consensus models of democratic processes. We take the diversity of skills, experiences, ethnicities, gender, and politics as the most valuable source of potential positive changes in groups. Consequently, we reject the dominant political view of democracy as majority rule, accepting Iris Young's (1990) critique of this view of democracy

> as one that rests on the oppressive actions of welfare state capitalism to reduce social justice to a limited redistribution of goods to those defined as disadvantaged. That view of democracy neither respects diversity nor seeks to enhance the capacity of the disenfranchised to act on their own behalf. For us, AR aims to enable communities and organizations to mobilize their diverse and complex internal resources as fully as possible.
>
> (Greenwood & Levin 2007, p. 10)

In line with the previous statement, we should note that democracy is one of those concepts that often appear in a qualified form or with an adjective. In fact, the word democracy is almost always accompanied by a qualification. Being one of the core concepts at the centre of concerns within fields such as political theory, political science, political philosophy, political sociology and history of ideas, to name just a few disciplines, democracy is theoretically a contested concept as well. In the context of political dynamics, democracy is also a notion that produces struggle. In this case, the struggle for democracy can be seen as the struggle for either a form of societal organisation or as a struggle for a certain form of government.

Therefore, any attempt to situate democracy within the context of Action Research needs to start by clarifying the concrete meaning that is given to the word democracy. Here there is also a need for a further fundamental clarification: is the word democracy being used to denote something that already exists, that should exist or that has existed? As a matter of fact, many discussions on democracy imply the desire to see a specific meaning of democracy concretised in social reality. Yet such a normative expectation is often made without identifying the actual democracy or system that should be replaced, reformed or improved. This means that we need to be aware of important historical issues concerning the idea of democracy. Within this context, ecological concerns have added a new dimension to the qualification of democracy. Surrounding the problematic politico-conceptual formation of the very concept of ecological democracy, there is a wider problem concerning what Goodin (1992) has put in the following terms:

> To advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantees can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sorts of outcomes?
>
> (Goodin 1992, p. 168)

A focus on the procedural character of democracy has permeated an important portion of the discussion on the prospects of democracy in facing contemporary ecological questions. Yet the issue can be seen as even more complex when we assume certain historical insights on the link between natural resources and the idea of democracy. One pertinent example to show this point is to consider how the very existence, extraction and unequal

distribution of oil have in fact created conditions of the possibility for democracy in the richer countries of the world in a process that Timothy Mitchell calls carbon democracy (Mitchell 2011). By using this term, Mitchell brings attention to how oil's socio-ecological trajectories have been a key process in materially making possible what we know as contemporary democracy in rich, Western countries. This direct link between what we can understand in terms of ecology-democracy relations implies a challenge to democratic theories operating without a proper concern for the material basis of political ideas and their realisations. John Dunn has put the issue in his conceptual reconstruction of the story of democracy as follows:

> How can equality be more than a cruel dream in a world in which some own and control and consume vastly more resources that others? How can it be so when they own and control these resources on a basis which, unless ceaselessly and skillfully overridden, ensures that the inequality re-creates and magnifies itself into an indefinite future?
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> (Dunn 2005, p. 69)

Thus, Action Research in the context of rethinking democracy via commoning should imply thinking the wider historical conjunctures and trajectories in which we think about democracy within and outside Action Research. Here we have good reasons to recall meanings of democracy as a social process of making things in common (Graeber 2013). Yet, as we saw earlier, there are important struggles operating inside the conceptualisation of democracy. We can conceive such struggles as communicative struggles where meanings about the basic process of thinking about the decisions of different people and in relation to resources or in relation to procedures or institutions to manage resources are played out (Alarcón 2015). Thus, the analytical and normative moments that any conceptualisation of democracy often brings into Action Research should be connected to other important concepts surrounding Action Research.

Of particular significance here is the concept of labour. As we read above, the labour process is a key moment in the real production of commons through commoning. To think about labour in relation to commoning and emancipation is also a way to ground a critique of labour as a category operating at the heart of capital. On the other hand, the resignification of labour in the context of emancipation is about thinking about a different labour which is freed from the wage system and freed from any coercion concerning the human use of labour power. Thus, the conceptualisation of labour is a fundamental task within the context of Action Research for Emancipation, and this connects with the important historical connection between Action Research and labour struggles.

The articulation of the previous points concerns some core issues for a conceptualisation of Action Research for Emancipation. Yet to fully advance insights in this regard, we have to look at processes rooted in the experience

of real struggles. Thus, the previous theoretical points will now be put in relation to the experiences of some popular moments in South America. In so doing, I will focus on the praxis dimensions of recovering the role of real struggles for emancipation in the definition of a contemporary meaning of Action Research for Emancipation.

ROUTES OF EMANCIPATION IN AGRO-ECOLOGY AND SOCIAL-ENVIRONMENTAL ASSEMBLIES AS POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN SOUTH AMERICA

Agro-ecological movements and social-environmental assemblies in South America can be understood today as social-ecological movements in the sense that they take as two inseparable levels or moments of their praxis what is usually referred to as the ecological and the social. Looking at the processes and experiences of struggles of such popular movements helps to illustrate some important praxis dimensions of what has been presented earlier. In what follows, I will approach agro-ecological movements and then social-environmental assemblies and movements.

One of the basic premises of agro-ecological movements in South America is to offer concrete alternatives in relation to the management of land and the use of resources. In doing so, agro-ecological movements aim at offering alternatives when addressing basic issues, such as, for example, food provision and livelihoods for rural inhabitants. These are popular movements because they start from the people's needs in the local territory and also because they conceive agro-ecology as a popular response to capitalist agriculture. Thus, they become movements that confront the main processes of corporate-driven agriculture in South America. A main dynamic organising the actions of agro-ecological movements is the process of making things in common. Though in many cases, agro-ecology is the practice of individual peasant landowners, commoning is present in the interaction of such peasants through peasant organisations and collectives. Thus, the basic process of moving from an individual interest in preserving agriculture to a collective shared interest with other peasants and farmers implies common material grounds to practice agro-ecology collectively. This brings together knowledge produced by different people and puts these knowledges in a common platform for action. Within this context, agro-ecological practice relates to commons such as water and genetic diversity as underlying commons for the development of agro-ecology. The knowledge produced in this context is co-produced in ways that cannot actually be understood without thinking about the connections between knowledge and material resources.

To understand what the agro-ecological movement proposes today in South America, we have to understand the dramatic changes in agriculture production brought about through the implementation of neoliberal capitalism in South America. In particular, we need to consider the relation of

agriculture to the neoliberal project as a project of the restoration of class power (Harvey 2005). Agriculture in this context continued being a key economic activity for the capitalist classes acting under the premises of the neoliberal project. In basic terms, neoliberal agriculture is about producing commodities for export and domestic consumption and of creating possibilities for large companies to accumulate capital and expand their operations to other countries. To have a dominating position in the countryside allows corporate agriculture to also keep the dominant position within the agriculture sector at large and also at the level of local and national political institutions. This model of agriculture is based on conflicts and is linked to major environmental crises in the South American countryside. Within this context, one of the possibilities for small holders, peasants and small farmers has been to work with alternative ways of doing agriculture. In this case, alternatives are conceived partly as the recovery of agriculture knowledge used in the past and also as the incorporation of knowledge produced by the praxis of scientists and experts that cooperate with these small holders or peasants today.

To get deeper into this praxis, we need to look at how these movements articulate agro-ecological principles. In the terms of Altieri and Toledo, two leading scholars in the field of agro-ecology who are actively connected to the praxis of these movements, the possibilities of agro-ecological science are very much rooted in the everyday practices and knowledge production of peasants and farmers, and so it is that everyday activity concerning land management and the use of resources that creates one of the differences in relation to the industrial and capitalist agricultural model. In trying to make sense of this dynamic, Altieri and Toledo (2011) have offered a presentation of what they call the epistemological innovations of agro-ecology. What is interesting here is the establishment of a clear political dimension of agro-ecology; additionally, the meaning of an agro-ecological revolution is given by a radical change in social and ecological terms as unified moments of a common struggle. In this sense, the politics of agro-ecology are shown as a political-ecological practice that is never disconnected from the social-ecological relations brought about by agro-ecological movements. Because of its popular character, the meaning of agro-ecology in the South American context contrasts with how agro-ecology is understood in other contexts, where a sort of scientific reductionism about agro-ecology is present, while in the South American context, agro-ecology is very much situated in the political actions of the agro-ecological movements. Thus, agro-ecological knowledge represents a form of standpoint epistemology. Two consequences of this are the following.

First, the politicisation of agriculture is not just an add-on to agro-ecology, since politics is actually a dynamic at the centre of agro-ecology, as this is a political manifestation of a current struggle. Second, agro-ecology in this context becomes a political project as well. Thus, the scaling up of agro-ecology in the South American context is very much linked to the combined

process of managing more land under agro-ecological principles and politically gaining influence in order to produce the expansion of agro-ecology as a political project of peasants and rural workers. One can theorise this as a struggle for the expansion of a way of producing things and also a way towards social organisation.

Two preliminary conclusions about agro-ecology and the implications of this for Action Research for Emancipation can be highlighted here. First, even when the people participating in agro-ecology do not call what they do Action Research for Emancipation, we can think and understand this praxis in the terms of Action Research for Emancipation. This is because there are important processes of action in combination with research that underlie the possibilities of emancipating producers in the land from the structures of the large corporations that manage and dominate agriculture today. Secondly, we see here efforts of emancipation from capitalist agriculture and its serious environmental problems and crises, and this is done in a way that pre-figures future possible agricultural social-ecological relations. Thus, in this context, emancipation obtains a concrete meaning, as it is very much linked to the material reality and the purpose of an alternative materiality around land use and the use of other resources. These two conclusions also allow the process of agro-ecology to be looked at in terms of its relation to the production of regulations and new possibilities to develop agro-ecology at structural levels. Two cases allow this to be seen in practice. First, at the international level, there has been an important endorsement of agro-ecology by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, who concluded that agro-ecology can be an important way to face food security issues (De Schutter 2010). Second, we have the case of rural municipalities adopting agro-ecology as one possibility for development at the local level (Alarcón 2015).

The potential for the engagement of Action Research for Emancipation in processes such as the agro-ecological movement lead us to think about linkages between Action Research for Emancipation in this context and the global-local link. This is because the possibilities of researching agro-ecology today and the aim of linking this to Action Research for Emancipation are a matter of thinking about the global dimensions of the local agro-ecological struggles. This requires epistemological and ontological terms allowing Action Research for Emancipation to be seen in cases evolving in relation to the dialectics of the local and the global. This means that Action Research for Emancipation can be thought of here as following the materiality of such a process and also as shaped in the process of changes. Another important connection between agro-ecological movements and what can be the new dimensions of Action Research is that agro-ecological movements are very much about the process of engaging academic researchers, activists and peasants in the production of such agro-ecological practices. Though many of these persons engaging in agro-ecology do not call what they do Action Research, we can gain insights from their experiences and connect

them to meanings of Action Research in the context of social-ecological transformations, the crises of capitalist modernity and the possibilities to think about the terms through which future commoning and emancipation are produced. A similar process can be seen in what has been called social-environmental movements and social-environmental assemblies in South America. To explore such movements will allow us to continue looking at the global-local dialectic of social-ecological struggles today and to find there important spaces of the production of knowledge and experiences to continue our conceptual search to build meanings for Action Research for Emancipation today.

Self-defined social-environmental movements and social-environmental assemblies are two more expressions of popular movements that have recently emerged in the South American context through the unfolding of social-ecological struggles. Two examples of such movements are the *Movimiento Socioambiental Valle del Huasco* in Chile (Social-Environmental Movement of the Huasco Valley—henceforth MSAVH) and the *Asamblea Socio Ambiental del Noroeste Argentino* (Social-Environmental Assembly of the Argentinean Northeast—henceforth ASANOA). In both cases, the people engaging in these movements and assemblies have self-organised practical resistance to the capitalist activities that affect their living conditions and have also participated in active mobilisations to change the situation and in doing so, have confronted both companies and the state. In the case of Chile, the MSAVH was successfully active in finally closing down a large pork processing industry which had dramatically affected the health and living conditions of the people living in the surroundings of the company's facilities (for a detailed analysis of the social-environmental dimensions of the pork production carried out by the same company resisted by the MSAVH, see Alarcón 2009). In the case of Argentina, ASANOA has actively resisted large mining which threatens, among other resources, the water resources that the people in the Tucumán area in Argentina regard as common resources and which are fundamental resources for their livelihoods (for a detailed analysis of the context in which this assembly organises resistance, see Svampa & Antonelli 2009; Misoczky & Böhm 2013).

These are assemblies and movements that have first resisted and then struggled against the social-ecological transformation of capitalist mining in the case of the Argentinean ASANOA, and the combined threats of mining and industrial agriculture in the case of the MSAVH in Chile. The conceptual shift these movements propose, e.g., from social movement to social-environmental movements, and from citizens' assemblies to social-environmental assemblies, is something that also represents a shift in the composition and forms of the struggle at the local level. These movements represent processes of alliances and coalitions of different subjects within a common framework given by the opposition or resistance to mining projects or agriculture schemes that threaten water resources, local living conditions and local resources that people value and consider of vital importance

for their subsistence. Therefore, the organisation of these movements and assemblies and the shift in conceptual terms they imply represent also an important dimension for a view on Action Research for Emancipation as emerging from the very site of social-ecological struggles. The point here is that along with these movements, important research is necessary in order to support what these movements argue for, and this is research that is often developed by the subjects forming these movements. Here we have popular knowledge created through the cooperation of individuals and also the cooperation of researchers who produce knowledge for the local struggle. In the case of Chile, this movement has been able to win important struggles. In these struggles, knowledge production has been both relevant and crucial.

The examples of popular movements presented above are very much connected to the insights about commoning and the struggles around the *Magna Carta*. In the context of the social-ecological struggles of global dimensions, these local struggles give important lessons for the rethinking of Action Research for Emancipation. In addition, these movements show how to expand the range of activities towards wider social-ecological relations. An approach to Action Research for Emancipation based on the praxis of popular movements is also a way to illustrate the theory-praxis dimensions therein. An important material aspect of this is that all these movements have engaged in struggles around land and territory. Such struggles are today of great political importance. As Fredric Jameson has recently stated, the central and fundamental role of land should again be put as a crucial political question concerning today's struggles for emancipation:

> Whether you think of the settlements and the refugee camps, some of them lasting a whole lifetime, or of the politics of raw materials and extraction; whether you think of the dispossession of peasants to make way for industrial parks, or of ecology and the destruction of the rainforests; whether you think of the abstract legalities of federalism, citizenship and immigration, or the politics of urban renewal and the growth of the bidonvilles, favelas and townships, not to speak of the great movements of the landless or of Occupy—today everything is about land. In the long run, all these struggles result from the commodification of land and the green revolution in all its forms: the dissolution of the last remnants of feudalism and its peasantries, their replacement by industrial agriculture or agribusiness and the transformation of peasants into farmworkers, along with their eventual fate as the reserve army of the agriculturally unemployed.
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> (Jameson 2015, pp. 130–131)

Within this context, the experience of the movements I have presented above allow us to have a world historical perspective on struggles on land which can help us to rethink Action Research for Emancipation and to

discuss some crucial new challenges for the resignification of democracy in the twenty-first century. I would argue that these movements can tell us about how we can today inform Action Research for Emancipation and discuss from an Action Research perspective some of the crucial challenges and the resignification of democracy in the light of commoning. Within this context, questions about education and conceptuality become fundamental moments when thinking about Action Research for Emancipation in the twenty-first century, which is already defined by the epochal social-ecological crises of capitalism. For this reason, I will conclude this chapter with some reflections on the very question of the meanings of education and conceptuality for the purposes of rethinking of Action Research for Emancipation, which I have outlined above.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION AND CONCEPTUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ACTION RESEARCH FOR EMANCIPATION

My emphasis on concepts and conceptuality expressed previously is based on the need to make sense of how we conceptualise processes in the context of Action Research. To further elaborate on this, I will draw insights from three authors that provide important insights for thinking about relations around human praxis and for the wider purposes of thinking about the meaning of the critical theory of social-ecological relations. Thus, it is necessary to elaborate here certain philosophical and theoretical dimensions of the very process and meaning of conceptualisation, conceptuality and the process of conceptualisation of concepts. Starting with Marx, we can observe how, in the words of Nancy Fraser (1985), there is a moment in Marx's intellectual production where the very basic meaning of critical theory is put forward. Fraser aptly recalled a letter from 1843, where Marx, addressing Arnold Ruge, expressed the goal of a planned publication as follows:

> We are therefore in a position to sum up the credo of our journal in a single word: the self-clarification (critical philosophy) of the struggles and wishes of the age. This is a task for the world and for us. It can succeed only as the product of united efforts.
>
> (Marx 1992 [1843], p. 209)

It is crucial here to note that that self-understanding of which Marx wrote takes place through concepts. In a more contemporary elaboration, we can look at Freire and Adorno to highlight moments in which these authors thought about concepts and conceptuality to give a certain understanding of theory-praxis relations. In Freire, we find a fundamental connection

between thinking concepts, action and research, where the fundamental relations between theory-praxis orientations for Action Research are established as follows:

> An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch. These themes imply others which are opposing or even antithetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. Thus, historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites. Nor can these themes be found anywhere except in the human-world relationship. The complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its 'thematic universe.'
>
> (Freire 2000, p. 101)

Thinking of Adorno, we can bring into this discussion his efforts to think about the conceptual and the non-conceptual and his focus on conceptuality. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno presents this as follows:

> That the concept is a concept even when dealing with things in being does not change the fact that on its part it is entwined with a nonconceptual whole. Its only insulation from that whole is its reification—that which establishes it as a concept. The concept is an element in dialectical logic, like any other. What survives in it is the fact that nonconceptuality has conveyed it by way of its meaning, which in turn establishes its conceptuality. To refer to nonconceptualities—as ultimately, according to traditional epistemology, every definition of concepts requires nonconceptual, deictic elements—is characteristic of the concept, and so is the contrary: that as the abstract unit of the noumena subsumed thereunder it will depart from the noumenal. To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics. Insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by such reflection. Reflection upon its own meaning is the way out of the concept's seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning!
>
> (Adorno 2004, p. 12)

The wider complexity implied in Adorno's thinking about conceptuality is something that we can understand in the context of articulating questions about non-identity and conceptuality as matters of importance for

social movements. For Werner Bonefeld, Adorno's thinking on conceptuality implies that:

> Conceptuality has to do with the recognition of reality—not with the analysis of concepts. Concepts are required to recognize reality. Conceptualisation goes beyond the immediate perception of reality in order to comprehend what is hidden in its immediacy or immediate appearance. What is appearance an appearance of, and what appears in appearance? Concepts belong to reality and exist through reality. They do not live a life of their own, detached from reality. A concept that has no content is a concept of no-thing. Conceptuality is thus the way in which reality is rendered concrete—it is our way of comprehending reality by means of thought and experience. It focuses the experience of reality and thinks from within reality. Concepts are thus moments of a reality that requires their formation, and it is the business of conceptual thinking to subvert the critical subject by denouncing its deceitful publicity according to which its thing-hood is either self-constituted or a natural phenomenon.
>
> (Bonefeld 2009, pp. 126–127)

Bearing in mind these aspects concerning how we conceptualise processes and moving these insights into the discussion on Action Research can lead to a range of fundamental theory-praxis tasks. First, the question of concepts and conceptualisation should be at the centre of the combined processes of thinking about Action Research and engaging in practical Action Research. Second, the agenda for Action Research for Emancipation, which is always a proposal about theory-praxis relations in a dialectical way, should today take the contemporaneity of the concept of social-ecological relations and crises of social-ecological relations as core elements when thinking about the wider terms of Action Research. Here, we have to make sense of the fact that many of these issues are of a global nature today. Thus, and theoretically speaking, we need to connect Action Research to the theorising of social-ecological relations, and at the same time, we need to theorise the possibilities of global Action Research, which is something that implies major challenges for Action Research for Emancipation. At the same time, the theoretical implications thereof are that the only way to think about Action Research for Emancipation today, or if we wish to use a qualification in terms, of true emancipation, is through radical thinking about social-ecological relations in their global dimensions.

As presented above, to think about social-ecological relations in historical terms and to move this thinking to the core of how we conceive the tasks and prospects of Action Research for Emancipation forces us to address a number of concepts. In elaborating and theorising on the concept of social-ecological relations, we open up a wider conceptual discussion within the context of Action Research and its assumptions

about democracy. Theoretically conceptualising and historicising social-ecological relations allows us to unpack concepts that are today mainly framed in terms of sustainability, sustainable development, collapse, survival and the like. This is because within the process of thinking and bringing into Action Research a concern with social-ecological relations, concepts such as sustainability and sustainable development, for example, and concepts pointing to absolutely negative processes such as, for example, collapse, must be thought of as historical questions about what social-ecological relations are today and the logics and dynamics of capitalism therein. In this sense, to historicise social-ecological relations is directly linked to thinking about capitalism as a historically contingent process. Because it is a historically contingent process, we can always struggle and move through such contingency and produce agency to create a different world. In this regard, commoning as a normative objective in the process of creating a different world gives a certain dimension for the task of Action Research for Emancipation today.

At a very abstract level, we can think about the combination of Action Research for Emancipation as a moment in the transition toward something else, and it is also a moment of thinking how we can expand processes of commoning. Because commoning is something that happens and *has* happened historically and in parallel to capitalism, one can elaborate on commoning as something that can move our way of thinking and combine speculation on possibilities for the future with more immanent ways of thinking about the forces that exist today and that can help us to envision a different future. Commoning and Action Research are thus mediated by this attempt to create a contemporary meaning for emancipation. It is very obvious that thinking in these terms implies that conceptualisation should occupy a prime place in our understanding of Action Research. This is because concepts such as, for example, labour and democracy, form conceptual relations operating inside the conceptualisation of Action Research.

I chose those concepts for our conceptual discussion on Action Research for two main reasons. First, Action Research can never be isolated from those concepts that allow us to think about reality today and to also make sense of normativity. Secondly, I argue that Action Research for Emancipation has always been linked in one way or another to those concepts. In other words, Action Research for Emancipation should address the conceptual problems implied in those terms. Thus the issue here is that in connecting Action Research for Emancipation to a certain way of understanding struggles around commoning and social-ecological relations is a way to think about the conceptualisation implied in the concepts of democracy and labour explored above. What I am trying to say here is that implicit to the understanding of Action Research for Emancipation is an attempt to conceptually think about the wider terms through which the process of Action Research is practised. Then, a meaning of the political dimensions of Action Research will emerge. Here, and by conceptually discussing Action Research

for Emancipation along with other key concepts of today's specific political situation, we can gain a more historically situated approach to Action Research for Emancipation.

Such an approach allows us to distinguish between analytical and normative moments in the conceptualisation of democracy in relation to Action Research. To focus on the concepts of labour and democracy serves to renew the agenda of Action Research for Emancipation and to think of theory-praxis relations in a dialectical way. In this process, all such concepts become qualified and this qualification of concepts means that efforts to think about Action Research for Emancipation must be consciously connected to the fundamental concepts that have historically articulated meanings of Action Research. Here, a crucial conceptual articulation emerges from the need to think about education in this context. I focus on education here because the history of Action Research has been fundamentally determined by the role of Action Research in educational settings and Action Research has been widely thought about for the purposes of education. A crucial question that arises here concerns a concept of education for Action Research for Emancipation. I cannot think of a better place to explore this connection than in a combined reading of Adorno and Freire. In his lecture from 1967, "Education After Auschwitz", Adorno argues, "The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection" (Adorno 2005, Kindle Locations 4895–4896).

Adorno's dialectical understanding of education means recovering the thinking of the non-identity and the structural dimension of education and the agency dimensions thereon. In turn, Freire's well-known book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is also guided by a notion of dialectics. Here, the meaning of dialectics is used to highlight what is permanent and what changes in relation to structures.

> What makes a structure a social structure (and thus historical-cultural) is neither permanence nor change, taken absolutely, but the dialectical relations between the two. In the last analysis, what endures in the social structure is neither permanence nor change; it is the permanence-change dialectic itself.
>
> (Freire 2000, p. 179)

In his critique of banking education, Freire elaborates on liberating education, and at one point, he presents what for him education, as the practice of freedom, should look like:

> Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations

> with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.
>
> (Freire 2000, p. 81)

What interests me here is to note a very important moment in the articulation of Freire's quoted reflection above. In following his argument, Freire tells how:

> In one of our culture circles in Chile, the group was discussing (based on a codification) the anthropological concept of culture. In the midst of the discussion, a peasant who by banking standards was completely ignorant said: 'Now I see that without man there is no world.' When the educator responded: 'Let's say, for the sake of argument, that all the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained, together with trees, birds, animals, rivers, seas, the stars . . ., wouldn't all this be a world?' 'Oh no,' the peasant replied emphatically. 'There would be no one to say: This is a world.' The peasant wished to express the idea that there would be lacking the consciousness of the world which necessarily implies the world of consciousness. I cannot exist without a non-I. In turn, the not-I [sic][1] depends on that existence. The world which brings consciousness into existence becomes the world of that consciousness, hence the previously cited affirmation of Sartre: "La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup"
>
> (p. 82)

The example used by Freire shows us how a working-class peasant was actually elaborating in the way that Sartre has also elaborated. Moreover, this illuminates the process of reflection of a labourer who is operating at the same level as that of a professional philosopher. There are many lessons to be learnt from this example, but for the purposes of concluding this chapter, I will focus on the following: in building meanings for Action Research for Emancipation we should, as Freire did, engage with the labour of those people who today are already producing alternatives on the ground or laying the basis for alternatives futures. This is a form of political engagement which connects the contemporary process of building a basis for Action Research for Emancipation. This has been, in historical terms, a condition of possibility for the production of politically situated meanings for Action Research in South America. In fact, meanings of Action Research in the South American context have often been linked to these kinds of political movements, where a strong link between Action Research and political mobilisation can be observed. Our current time is ripe to rethink Action Research for Emancipation in relation to real social-ecological struggles and thus to advance a proper historical understanding of Action Research for Emancipation today.

NOTE

1. The 'not-I' is considered by the author of this chapter to be an error in the English translation. It should have been 'non-I'.

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3 Critical Utopian Action Research
The Potentials of Action Research in the Democratisation of Society

Birger Steen Nielsen and Kurt Aagaard Nielsen[1]

In this chapter, we discuss how Action Research could contribute to the democratisation of society. We have in a Danish context throughout three decades developed what we call Critical Utopian Action Research. It is still primarily based in Denmark, but with ramifications for Norway and Sweden, and even countries of the Global South, as well. This is a kind of Action Research committed to the initial democratic impulses of Lewin and Freire, but it has its specific inspiration from the German-Austrian writer, journalist and grassroots activist Robert Jungk, and theoretically, it is based on Critical Theory in the tradition of Theodor W. Adorno. It favours the emergence of social imagination, based on everyday life experiences and utopian thinking, without reducing the critical perspective. This constitutes its potential for democratisation.

CRITICAL UTOPIAN ACTION RESEARCH: THE INSPIRATION FROM ROBERT JUNGK

When we started working with Action Research in the early 1980s, we brought with us a decisive inspiration from Robert Jungk,[2] and especially his *Future Creating Workshops*.[3] Jungk once said that the future is too important to let the experts be in charge of it. That didn't mean that he had a naïve faith in the opinions and ideas of laypeople, but he did have a certain confidence in "everyman's" potential and wish to take responsibility, not only for their own life conduct, but also for what we might call *the common affairs*—if they were asked and if they were given the opportunities to do so, that is. As he saw it, creating a common awareness of the urgent problems of society and encouraging and relying on the participation of "everyman" in the forming of society was key to a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future.

The Future Creating Workshops should be seen in this perspective. Jungk was convinced that they would demonstrate that *different futures* are thinkable and possible, that they would evoke and strengthen laypeople's self-confidence and thus make up a source for creating citizens' initiatives,

actions and broad involvement in the transformation of society. He imagined *permanent workshops*—as a prolonging of Future Creating Workshops—which might lead to *social inventions*, i.e., social and cultural renewals that reach a societal level, thus explicitly transcending a purely "local" level.

Future Creating Workshops should aim at enriching people's everyday lives, finding answers to their difficulties and problems based on their wishes and dreams. But Jungk realised that this is not possible if such endeavours are isolated from endeavours to change the conditions of our existence at a societal level too. So, the Future Creating Workshops were conceptualised as *part of* a renewal of democracy—of societal institutions and of everyday life—from below, political in a basic sense. He considered such renewal to be *personal and societal learning processes*, well knowing that open and responsible attitudes, ways of thinking and the *courage* to give up resignation are not self-evident, but fragile and have to be cultivated.[4] Based on experience, they need collective—stimulating and supportive—milieus and a broad spectre of societal recognition, response and co-operation. The Future Creating Workshops alone could not provide for that, but they might contribute to it.

His mistrust of experts, on the other hand, was not based on a general mistrust of scientific or academic forms of knowledge as such, nor an underestimation of their importance. Quite the contrary. He worked for many years as a journalist of science and maintained strong connections with renowned scholars and scientists all over the world. He was a close observer of ongoing research, especially within the natural sciences, both with regard to its constructive capacity and—not least—with regard to its critical potentiality, which in the latter decades of his lifetime became increasingly evident and necessary in relation to the environmental and sustainability crisis. But he was sceptical of the dominant societal tendencies to detach and isolate scientific and scholarly kinds of knowledge from the horizon of everyday life and society as a whole and its instrumentalisation for one-sided, particular purposes.

When scientific research due to particular interests economically and organisationally is set free within a "greenhouse" it may, in a certain sense, flourish, but at the same time it easily loose its ties and obligations to the society as a whole, even to human life as such, and turns into a threat instead of a promise. This was, ultimately, the lesson from the *Manhattan Project*,[5] but also from the many kinds of research, small-scale or large-scale, which after the Second World War have been financed and organised either directly or indirectly in relation to state, corporate or other powerful interests. Jungk fought such tendencies, but without even the slightest touches of populism and anti-intellectualism. In his younger days, he expected much from the specific "spirit" of scientific and research communities, but he learned that such communities were in themselves no guarantee for openness and a commitment to recognise a responsibility for the broader possible impacts of the research. And he considered a new kind of reintegration of the ideas and

wishes of laypeople related to everyday life, with scientific and scholarly knowledge a precondition for a democratic, just and sustainable renewal of society.

We have held more than a hundred Future Creating Workshops in many different parts of Denmark and with very different groups of people. This made up the basic ground and horizon for our *Critical Utopian Action Research*, which we, in co-operation with friends and colleagues, developed through a series of projects over three decades, while at a theoretical level, we reflected on our experiences from the perspectives of *Critical Theory*.[6] Future Creating Workshops are not conceptualised and could not in themselves be considered a form of research. And we did not intend to transform them into that. That would be a misunderstanding of their character and potential as a political instrument, making them accessible and practicable without a specific educational or institutional background. On the other hand, we did not either intend to transform research into a direct political instrument. That would be a reduction of the specific *potential* of *non-regulated critique and general knowledge creation* which characterises free research and, indeed, Action Research too.

What we have tried to develop is a specific kind of democratic Action Research, centred around the emerging of the *social imagination* and gradual *social learning* (this being the heritage from the Future Creating Workshops), which could initiate and support the development of citizens' ideas and practical initiatives for a more sustainable future *and* at the same time *through* this very process be able to show and concretise the democratising potential inherent in our everyday life experiences, thus bringing up a specific and locally based, but nevertheless also *general knowledge*. And such knowledge, then, may flow back into the ongoing societal transformational processes, in fact being an important, if not necessary dimension of their qualifying and strengthening. We see creating general, overarching knowledge of potentials and possible forms of democratic societal transformation in its multitude of dimensions as an important matter of science, research and scholarly work, and our Action Research should be a contribution to this. But of course, this kind of knowledge creation is not necessarily related to the existing research institutions. You might even say that these institutions have to be transformed or at least in a much more decisive sense than is the case today, be opened up to make room for research and knowledge creation of this kind.

Critical Utopian Action Research differs in specific dimensions from other contemporary forms of Action Research. We consider it a substantial and legitimate renewal within the tradition from Kurt Lewin, emphasising and further developing the democratic and social commitments of Action Research as fundamental to a prosperous and peaceful societal development, these dimensions seen as an integrated unity. Critical Utopian Action Research is our contribution to the necessary discussion of the possible role and responsibility of Action Research in today's difficult societal situation,

where the question of sustainability has been added to the classical constellation of assignments that Action Research has to address. As we see it, the question of democracy should be at the heart of the discussion, both as the pivot of a sustainable transformation of society and as inherent in Action Research itself.

ACTION RESEARCH AND DEMOCRACY: THE CONCEPTUAL LEVEL

It may be true that most, if not all, kinds of Action Research could be related to a "search of a world worthy of human aspiration", as Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury put it in their introduction to the *Handbook of Action Research* (Reason & Bradbury 2006 [2001], p. 1), and that some kind of *participation* in general holds a central place in Action Research. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that Action Research is in fact committed to a *democratic* perspective, at least not in the radical sense you could find in the work of Robert Jungk. In his perspective, democracy should not just be seen as a formal way of making decisions. It carries with it a much stronger qualitative, namely an *emancipatory* index. Democracy is a *sine qua non* for a free human life in our historical time. It is a "way of living", as, for instance, Oskar Negt puts it (Negt 2010); it is connecting the "search for a world worthy of human aspiration" much more decisively and unambiguously to democratisation than is the case in many other forms of today's "change agendas", including some of those committed to Action Research.

Democracy is not just a *dimension* of societal transformation, but its very *meaning*. It is not just a *goal* for our transformational aspirations, but *the way itself* through which this transformation can take place. Democracy is the name for citizens' self-regulation and cultivation of their common life conditions. In this sense, it *is* of course certainly also a way of *deciding*—in freedom, by yourself together with your fellow citizens, when it comes to common affairs. Of course, such kinds of decision-making must be related to different forms and levels of societal institutions that, however, and this is a crucial point, to a great extent will have to be (re)invented.[7] But if we seriously accept that democracy has to be reinvented, then in our present historical situation, democracy means that "ordinary people" must—as *citizens—start creating their future*. That's the beginning, and out of such beginnings (plural), experiments with developing new societal institutions of democracy can emerge. This was the idea of Jungk which we have brought with us as a horizon for our Action Research. *Democratisation* is at the very core of societal transformation, and is in fact its central productive force, if this transformation is going to be sustainable in an inclusive sense, i.e., bringing economic, ecological and social questions together. Freedom, equity and equality must come together in a mutual practical care for our living conditions. An inclusive, sustainable transformation couldn't be ordered

from above. If it is to have a chance, it must be based on "ordinary people" taking fundamental responsibility for their personal conduct in life *and* for common affairs as well—in interplay with renewed societal institutions. You could see this as *a categorical imperative* for our time. This is *participation* in a radical sense, which differs from the ways this concept later on has made a career within governance, managerial and marketing concepts, but also within Action Research.

This radical idea of democracy "from below" should not be seen as a "radicalist" or an "activist" concept, but rather as an endeavour to take the inherent promises of the welfare state seriously, consequently pursuing its goals. Therefore, it also implies the kind of broad opening to and confidence in "everyman" that characterises Future Creating Workshops. The perspective of the welfare state was to promote social justice, equity and equality—this was originally understood primarily in a class perspective, but in the 60s and 70s, due to the "new social movements", it widened out with gender and ethnic perspectives, too, although these perspectives remain contested. And although the welfare state certainly had a strong tendency to turn citizens into clients of the state, building up a massive bureaucracy, it was at the same time also related to ongoing discussions of the possibilities of *widening democracy* to include both corporations and institutions.[8] Of course, there was never a societal consensus on this. It made up a demarcation line between "left" and "right", but within this constellation, it was for a period so dominant that even within "the right" there were timid openings towards a broader democratisation. Certainly the concept of democracy in itself as a common good, which should be defended, was not openly contested.

Robert Jungk's concept of Future Creating Workshops could be seen in this perspective, taking the idea of widening democracy by word.[9] The impact of his thought was that the *spreading of democracy* to all societal levels was, at one and the same time, a goal and a way to obtain this goal. When the spreading of democracy could be seen as a goal (and not only as a means to a goal), it was because democracy was thought of as a *social form* of free exchange and co-operation amongst citizens taking care of their common affairs. In this perspective, the core of democracy is not as much seen as formal decision-making (at a societal level: free elections, parliamentarianism; at a social level: making decisions based on free discussions and—if voting is considered necessary—on the principle of "one man, one vote"), although it *is* important to have generally recognised rules for decision-making. Rather, it is seen as the free and comprehensive communication and co-operation of mature[10] citizens taking care of common affairs at very different levels of societal life.

This radical concept of democracy is not modelled on capitalist market logic, and therefore it also represents another kind of public interchange (based on co-operation) that is different from the so-called bourgeois public sphere.[11] And inevitably, it will challenge the basic legal and structural forms that are dominant in society. In fact, the idea of spreading democracy as *the*

impact of democratisation was interpreted in substantially different ways when it came to the question of whether it could be considered compatible with capitalism or if it should rather be seen as transcending capitalism.[12] This was the discussion, central to this period, of the possible meaning of "social democracy" in a fundamental sense and not as an attribute of a specific political current. But what is of importance here is not this difference, but the fact that in the first decades after the Second World War and extending into the 1980s there was a broad discussion of these matters in Western countries, which meant that there was an—not consensual, but nevertheless broadly shared—idea of an *internal relationship* between the concepts and initiatives of *social change* and *growing democratisation*, i.e., of strengthening the influence and autonomy of "everyman" or "ordinary people" in relation to their everyday life conditions.

This was the atmosphere within which we developed our Critical Utopian Action Research. This was *our* way of intervening in this societal agenda, which at that time was certainly undergoing a process of change, also in a more radical sense than we—like most others—then realised. (We shall return to that later.) The rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, which we ourselves had taken part in as students, had reached a crossroads. Whether they had come to an end or were in a transformational phase was impossible to say. In this situation, we were—as young scholars—trying to renew our orientations, looking for a meaningful way of working at the university without narrowing the horizon that had opened up to us. Our meeting with Robert Jungk and his concept of Future Creating Workshops came as a gift to us. In its emphasis on practical change, it was in line with the aspirations of "68": the *petrified* domination structures of society (a phrase going back to Marx) should be broken up; *societal change* seemed almost *in itself* characterised by a progressive, even emancipatory index.

In Future Creating Workshops, an action dimension had priority and appeared as relatively unproblematic, as it seemed inscribed in an agenda where an encouraging of increasing commitment among "ordinary people" appeared to be a clue to the desirable and necessary democratisation. At the same time, due to its *anti-authoritarian* emphasis on the necessity of democratisation *from below*, Jungk's approach made up an alternative to the strong elitist tendencies that, within the rebellions, had more or less pushed the original anti-authoritarian impulse aside—not least within the students' movement at the universities—and it had also dominated the traditional political left. Due to its anti-authoritarian nerve, however, it was also characterised by an awareness of the fact that democratic changes must take their time. They cannot be enforced if they are to be really democratic. This is especially important if you also take the necessity of an exchange of different forms of knowledge—daily experiences and aesthetic, scientific and scholarly knowledge—into consideration.

These different dimensions obviously contain strong tensions, if not contradictions. Jungk himself was aware of that and in fact, the Future Creating

Workshops and the idea of permanent workshops were meant to deal with this. We had this in mind when we were developing our Action Research, and it became an explicit intention for us to place dealing with these tensions and contradictions at the core of our work, since we were well aware that they could not be avoided but rather had to be made a permanent working object. Roughly speaking, two main difficulties could be pointed out. One concerned the subjective side of the change processes, while the other concerned the objective side.

First: creating ideas and projects and also trying to transform them into practical initiatives seemed to be relatively easy steps to take for the participants of our Future Creating Workshops and Action Research projects. But being able to stick to them for an extended period of time, transforming them into a more or less permanent task and learning process and to endure difficulties and obstacles that you meet trying to turn democratic visions (even in a modest form) into reality, that turned out to be a major challenge. It was only where Future Creating Workshops were or became integrated into existing reform-oriented milieus that this problem did not seem to arise.

Second: these subjective difficulties correspond with but could not simply be understood as an immediate effect of the massive resistance that democratisation initiatives were met with, and are today *increasingly* being met with, not only in the form of negative reactions (including indifference and unwillingness) from authorities of all kinds, but also in the more tricky form of structural impediments which are more difficult to identify and overcome. We have named this the problem of "reality power". The very "nature" of society as it appears seems to deem radical democratic alternatives as "unrealistic", as not being part of this world. There is no room for them—although they might be wished for and even considered necessary. Only that which exists is possible or, with the notorious statement of Margaret Thatcher, the so-called *TINA*-syndrome—*T*here *I*s *N*o *A*lternative.

Here, the subjective and objective sides are intertwined, and that constitutes the tricky nature of reality power. It is not possible to say where one or the other start or end. But together they constitute the problem of resignation or lack of courage that Robert Jungk wished to address and that today continues to make up the central challenge for Action Research and in a broader and more fundamental sense, for sustainable societal change at all. Our Critical Utopian Action Research was, as mentioned, conceptualised as a way of trying to deal with this. But we want to emphasise that these difficulties were and are not only related to Future Creation Workshops or to a radical change agenda as such. If we look at the perhaps strongest Action Research tradition in Scandinavia—sometimes named "The Dialogical Tradition",[13] we will find parallels between the difficulties. Working especially within working life and certainly following a consensus-oriented line, this kind of Action Research has also faced similar difficulties. The obtained improvements and steps towards a more permanent participation within corporations couldn't be kept alive or further developed as soon as the

specific projects where they had been developed ended. We and the Dialogical Tradition have followed different paths in our endeavours to overcome the experienced difficulties, including very different theoretical and practical interpretations of democracy, but our different answers are related to the historical challenges that should be considered a common platform for ongoing discussions.

ACTION RESEARCH AND DEMOCRACY: THE PRACTICAL LEVEL

In the following, we will try to clarify some essential dimensions of Critical Utopian Action Research as a practical working method. Practically, it differs from many other kinds of Action Research due to its specific emphasis on a *workshop* method taken by word. Our Action Research combines different kinds of workshops that in their basic structures, however, all could be seen as variations of the logic of Future Creating Workshops.

Workshops as an Anticipation of Democracy

We found that a decisive quality of the Future Creating Workshops was that they did not only have democratisation as their subject or goal, but that they practically followed the principle that *democracy is the way to democratisation*, this being their impact as a method. Stressing *democratisation*, we also say that we do not know what democracy in the penetrating sense as sketched above may turn out to be. Spreading democracy is necessarily also an invention of *new social forms*. The Future Creation Workshop in itself is a small-scale *new social form*. Democracy could not be fixed as something you should "implement", but can only be conceptualised as a *utopian horizon* for our mutual endeavours, as something permanently *unfinished*. That became a guiding line for our Action Research. But—and that is the turning point—if a utopian horizon should be concrete and binding, it must be *practically anticipated* in the actual situation, here and now. We have tried to follow this path in our Action Research. In this sense, all Future Creating Workshops and all Critical Utopian Action Research could be considered *experiments* with democracy as a way of working.

That is why we have made the *workshop* dimension a key element in our Action Research. At the same time, we try to give this concept back some of its original *work quality*, which is mostly lost in the watered-down versions of today, where nearly any kind of group discussion might be called a "workshop". Democracy should, in our perspective, be based on the *co-operation*[14] of people regarding how to handle their common affairs, trying to elaborate ideas, principles and so on into practical drafts. That's the idea of Future Creating Workshops, and that's what we have tried to expand and develop in our Action Research.[15] The point from which all such

co-operation starts and to which it should return is *the everyday life*. Every democratic idea and practice, whatever level or dimensions of society it may regard, must find its *measures* in its relations to and impact on people's everyday lives. This is by no means self-evident. In the democracies that we know of, you may say that they have always had to *legitimise* themselves in relation to their impact on people's living conditions, but that does not mean that people's everyday lives have in fact been taken seriously as a source of the development of democracy itself. This is, however, the idea that we, following Jungk, have placed at the centre of our concept.

Thus, the aim of the workshop activities is the co-operative creation of the *social imagination*. Social imagination is a term that partly points to the object or product side of the workshops and partly to the subjective, creative side. As to *the object side*, it includes what is being sketched, elaborated and planned in the form of imagination, ideas, suggestions, models or ways to take care of common affairs, which could be called *social* not only in the sense that they deal with social matters, but also—and more basically—in the sense that they do this in a way and with a perspective that stresses the *quality* of the drafts being elaborated as *in itself social*. The emergence of this social quality is a potential, inherent tendency in the co-operative work due to its foundation in the participants' everyday life experiences. But that doesn't mean that a social quality automatically emerges from the work. This happens—or *may* happen—gradually, but not linearly, and is always characterised by strong contradictions. But this inherent social tendency is supported by the overall character of the workshop arrangement, which we call its "appeal or encouragement structure". The appeal has nothing to do with a moralistic appeal, "Now you have to be social!" On the contrary, it is an appeal to the participants' interests, but in a specific sense. The workshops address the participants as *mature and responsible citizens* that are able to take care of their common affairs and imagine new, concrete forms of doing so—whether it is the development and regulation (management) of their community and natural surroundings or of their work and production, including its quality and impacts for themselves, but also in a wider societal perspective. Without literally introducing the workshops this way, we invite the participants to ask themselves and each other the concrete utopian question, "How do we want to live?" regarding the specific theme they have come together to work at. This is more or less a forgotten question, but it is *the* question of democracy.

This kind of invitation or appeal differs from invitations that address participants as, e.g., wage earners, consumers, voters, members of interest groups, stakeholders and so on. In such invitations, they are reduced in advance to specific social categories within the existing social order and their interest perspectives are similarly narrowed to *particular* dimensions, potentially putting them in an oppositional or a competitive relationship to their co-citizens. Of course, all citizens have specific interests, ideas and life perspectives: they are not just citizens. And these differences could and

should not be reduced to a common denominator. That's not the point. On the contrary, democracy—and citizenship—should be considered a social life form where a versatile spectrum of interests, outlooks on life and practical ways of living could be furthered *within* a framework of mutual responsibility for the common affairs. But such a versatile spectrum could not just be identified with interests related to existing social categories, being parts of the existing capitalist order (and its formal democracy) and partly deriving the logic of their particular interests from this order, with its antagonisms of the particular and the general, the individual and the collective. Rather, the perspective would be a new kind of unity of collective and individual dimensions, where the flourishing of each side is related to the flourishing of both of them. That is the only way of paying each other respect. When we address the participants as citizens, we try to speak to them—and have them speak to each other—in agreement with such mutuality between individual and collective dimensions, citizens being individuals that share common life conditions and perspectives. The anticipation of democracy within the workshops is primarily related to establishing a social space, where this quality is anticipated and therefore also *experienced*.

Everyday Life Experiences

When we say that this kind of work or co-operation is based on the participants' everyday life experiences, this should be understood in the following way: as we see it, everyday life experiences are characterised by a specific structure that implies a specific knowledge form.[16] In modern societies, a historically new form of everyday life has emerged. You could even say that everyday life as such, in a specific qualitative sense, is a dimension of modern societies. In modern societies, it is, in a radically new sense, left to the citizens themselves to create *coherence* in their daily lives and in their life conduct as such, a coherence that is not given or prescribed beforehand, although of course it is also strongly influenced by societal structures and institutions and cultural orientations. Forming your life conduct—individually and collectively—thus becomes a permanent life task, and you could say that everyday life *is* this task. This task is related to personal life conduct, but potentially it also includes taking responsibility for common affairs and ultimately, the regulation of society. Thus, inherent in the "local" everyday life horizon there is, potentially, a general, societal horizon as well.

What is rather formally described here as creating coherence has also a substantial side that could be seen as a striving for *happiness, a meaningful life*: modern, everyday life has an emancipatory index, a "promesse de bonheur" as it was called in the tradition of the Enlightenment. Everyday life experiences (being the provisory results of the daily, ongoing attempts to come to terms with and integrate all the different experiences and forms of knowledge stemming from what you meet and are involved in) are related to this task of creating coherence and take on the colour of this historically new

life expectation. That gives them a character or quality of being "drafts on how to live". That constitutes their specific knowledge structure that differs from, for instance, scientific or scholarly forms of knowledge, which follow systematic or disciplinary logics.[17]

It is due to this structural quality ("drafts on how to live") that everyday life experiences make up a *potential source* of the *social imagination* which is developed through the co-operative work concerning the specific issues of the workshops—this being the processing *subject side* of the term social imagination, which is regarded as a *creative and productive force*. If the everyday life perspective is adhered to throughout the work, all ideas and proposals will (also) be measured relative to their impact on daily life, i.e., to their *social* character. The way the workshop activities are organised systematically supports this dimension, thereby also furthering participation as an experience process.[18] You could consider this the learning dimension of our Action Research, which we have conceptualised as a specific form of *social learning* that differs from other contemporary concepts of social or organisational learning exactly in the point that "social" in our concept has kept the meaning of "social" as we know it from the everyday life phrase of "being social", a dimension of meaning that the dominating contemporary concepts have abandoned. "Being social" implies more than just a kind of interest in and helpfulness towards others. More profoundly, it is related to the experience (learned through co-operation) that only in interplay with others could you unfold your potentials, discover new sides of yourself and therefore, together with others, begin gaining a stronger self confidence in your mutual and common forces. This is an experience of *autonomy* and *dependency* as dialectically related.

Future Creating Workshops

Future Creating Workshops constitute a specific social space that furthers the development of the social imagination. Because this imagination is developed through co-operation with others, it also furthers an emerging *courage* which is required in order to pursue your wishes and ideas and especially the dimensions of them that transcend them as only private or particular. We have described this social space as a kind of "free space", not in an absolute sense, but relative to the necessities and restrictions of everyday life, including working life. In the workshops, this free space is basically constituted by the separation *and* interplay between *three phases*, each of them characterised by a one-sided perspective.[19] A *consequent critique* is followed by a *utopian work imagining and developing ideas and wishes* (both critique and utopian work being obviously one-sided), and it ends up with a *realisation phase*[20] that is not dedicated to pointing out and choosing the ideas and plans that could be considered realistic, but those ideas that are important to you the first time round, no matter how realistic or unrealistic they may appear. The question you ask is, "How could we begin turning

our wishes and ideas into reality?" That is the specific one-sided perspective of this third phase.[21] The task then is to begin answering the question: how could we begin bringing these wishes into reality? In this sense, the Future Creating Workshop for a while challenges the "reality principle" or the "reality power"—well knowing that is has not disappeared and that you will have to confront it afterwards—establishing a new beginning, stepping aside from reality power, trying to redefine (some of) the premises that usually appear unquestionable—all this in order to create spaces or situations, perhaps projects where you, to a certain degree, could be the subjects of your practice.

This working structure not only favours the development of unusual ideas and plans, it also has a specific relation to *experience-building* because the three phases in their interplay incarnate a *qualitative time structure* where past, present and future come together in a relationship of reciprocity and tension.[22] It is due to this experiential dimension that the initial theme or horizon of the workshop by the participants and through their co-operation could eventually be transformed into a *common third*, building a platform for ongoing co-operation. A specific subject–object structure is established where the objects of the common work—for instance, an experimental factory or plans for local regulation and administration of parts of the natural surroundings (examples that are taken from our projects)—are coloured by and become intrinsically related to the personal life perspectives of the participants while—the other way round—the life perspectives of the participants are being opened up to these potential, overarching or general areas and practices.

Critical Utopian Action Research: The Model

Within Future Creating Workshops as singular arrangements, this structure is strongly oriented towards elaborating concrete ideas for further practical steps. The action and change dimensions are in the forefront, while the dimensions considering knowledge forms and the building of experience are in the background, not made thematic or dwelled upon as such. As mentioned, however, the experiences with Future Creating Workshops have shown that although they are very good at creating ideas and plans for practical initiatives, these ideas and initiatives have often turned out to be vulnerable when they are brought back to everyday life. At best, they mostly have made up the ground for singular practical reforms, initiatives or project groups, thus far from unfolding their potentials. To us, such vulnerability became more obvious as the call for Future Creating Workshops from existing milieus dedicated to some kind of democratic renewal was ebbing away in the last half of the 1980s. Fewer Future Creating Workshops were called to life, and many of them were more related to modest interests in renewals, maybe even (for instance, within a group of colleagues of an institution) just to a wish to discuss their situation and experiences in a more free and

creative way than the usual meeting or seminar forms could provide.[23] These kinds of Future Creating Workshops could definitely be meaningful, but it should not be a surprise that their level of ambition, including their potential practical change perspectives, in the first place at least, differs from the original idea.

Robert Jungk himself had been aware of this potential vulnerability more or less from the beginning. He saw that it couldn't just be related to actual changes in societal conditions or to the "Zeitgeist", but more basically, to the question of possibilities of and barriers to creating the social imagination as such in our society, including the *character* and *range* of ideas and plans elaborated and especially the difficult—if not blocked—relation between particular and general dimensions. Thus, a main difficulty seemed to be the opening up of the particular dimensions to their latent general—societal or universal—dimensions, something that could be seen as the key problem in relation to setting free their potential for democratisation. The *encouraging gesture* of the Future Creating Workshops was substantially related to this question. He soon realised that this difficulty could not be met alone within the Future Creating Workshops, and that was why he came up with the idea of *permanent workshops*.[24] We grasped this idea as an inspiration for our Action Research. We wanted to keep the basic appeal or encouraging structure and have it permeate all aspects of the Action Research while at the same time trying to reinforce important dimensions that were not—and could not be—built into the Future Creating Workshops, such as establishing a new kind of social meeting between citizens and experts, scholars or officials, thus also bringing different kinds of knowledge together. The result was the invention of our Critical Utopian Action Research as a model that is characterised by a combination of three steps or "arenas" that follow after and build upon each other, although not in the strong sense of *phases* (critique, utopia, realisation) that characterise the progression of Future Creating Workshops, but rather as necessary *dimensions*.

We developed the model through practical experimenting in different Action Research projects, trying to find appropriate answers to the questions and difficulties that arose. The model could briefly be sketched as follows: an initial *Future Creating Workshop* (or workshops, depending of the theme of the workshops and the number and makeup of participants) is followed by what we call *Research Workshops*. The outcome of this combination of different kinds of workshops might be one project or a multitude of different kinds of initiatives, but no matter what, the third step consists of presenting the ideas and outcomes to the public, trying to create forms of *Alternative Public Spaces* that could overcome the traditional reduction of the participants into a more or less passive, consumptive audience—although you should also have the possibility to be *that* if that's what you prefer. In *all* of the steps of Action Research, the appeal or encouraging structure of the Future Creating Workshops should be kept, although practically transformed. Compared to the Future Creating Workshop, the *model character*

of the two other steps differs. The model character is still related to the leading principles of the Future Creating Workshop (the appeal structure, the mutual relation of critique, utopia and realisation, the creating of a common third and so on) and to the relations between the three steps that are far from arbitrary. Basically, there is in the overall structure a necessary progression from one to the other, but within larger Action Research projects, the three steps—regarded as arenas or dimensions—could be intertwined and combined in different ways. And while the Future Creating Workshops have a firm structure, following specific working rules, the Research Workshops and the Alterative Public Arrangements require a far greater level of organisation related to the initiatives' or projects' *specific history and context*.[25]

The *Research Workshop* is conceptualised as a way to expand and strengthen the utopian-based ideas, projects and initiatives, primarily with regard to their *knowledge* and *practical* perspectives. And this is, at the same time, a way of opening a discussion on *the quality* of the ideas and plans. Wishes could also be seductive and citizens have to consider whether they should stick to the ideas and plans, primarily based on their wishes, or whether they should be rectified. This has a moral (and an aesthetic) dimension, but certainly a knowledge dimension, too, because the question of *quality* in this case is intimately connected to the question of the *impact* of plans and initiatives. The basic idea of Critical Action Research is, as mentioned above, that the citizens' ideas and initiatives have to be related to everyday life as their ground and horizon. That makes up *the* criterion for their democratic character, as opposed to, e.g., technocratic, bureaucratic or economistic plans. But being related to an everyday life perspective is *in itself* insufficient. It does not guarantee the substance of the proposals (whether they are worth pursuing or not). Within a framework of a Future Creating Workshop (characterised by an intensive but short process), the ideas and proposals outlined will necessarily have provisional and very open-ended forms. Of course, this could be compensated in the following work, but a substantial elaboration would in most cases need a dialogue and exchange with knowledge of different character. If you ignore this, the result will easily be a lack of substance which also more or less inevitably will render such initiatives, if not helpless, then at least in a defensive position when it comes to the question of bringing them into reality.

Of course, everyone organising a Future Creating Workshop is aware of that and the workshops always end up sketching the next steps necessary to overcome this weakness, asking which kind of supplementing knowledge and alliances are required. But if the following up on these questions takes place within the context of a traditional institutional and everyday life context, the most usual result is a strong "normalisation" of the ideals and proposals, draining them of their critical and utopian surplus, simply due to the predominance of the perspectives of the "professional" knowledge as such with its flavour of a more valuable or real knowledge and also due to the higher status of the experts, advisors or administrators (even

the personally obliging ones) mostly practically being bound to the perspectives of "reality power". Then, what was suspended within the free space of the workshops is rapidly restored afterwards. At best, the results that *will* be achieved could be very reasonable, definitely improvements, but probably without a transcending dimension—measured up to a more far-reaching democratic agenda. This should not be taken as an underestimating of "small steps" as such. Most initiatives will, in fact, start with and include a lot of "small steps", all of them being muddy and filled with compromises. The decisive point, however, is whether these steps will remain open to and eventually prepare a realisation of the critical utopian democratic potential that is inherent in them—or whether this potential is pushed back into a pure latency.

Research Workshops

We have developed the Research Workshops as a way to integrate the necessary supplementary knowledge and, at the same time, as an alternative way of building up networks that include specialists, professionals, administrators, researchers, scientists, artists, etc.—but related to the utopian horizon established in the workshops.[26] We try to do this within a practical framework, a workshop of a specific kind with a constellation of working techniques that in new forms bring the basic orientations of the Future Creation Workshop into play. Here, the utopian-oriented ideas and proposals could systematically and in varying perspectives be confronted with and learn from "professional" kinds of knowledge and insights that would be necessary for them to relate to or perhaps even incorporate—but in a way that does not destroy the character of the utopian-based ideas as "drafts on how to live", i.e., their relation and obligation to an everyday life perspective.

The Research Workshop constitutes a kind of *social meeting* that, roughly speaking, is designed as an inversion of the traditional and dominating meeting between laypeople (citizens) and experts, administrators, etc. Instead of the normal practice, where citizens at best get an opportunity to comment on and object to proposals planned by experts or professionals, the relation between them is reversed here. The experts are asked to comment on the proposals developed by the citizens, to shed a critical and constructive light on them, suggesting revisions, further developments and so on—but all of this within a horizon obligated to the utopian, but everyday life related question of, "How should we live?" This is a way of getting closer to Robert Jungk's claim of reintegrating scientific and scholarly knowledge in a life-practical knowledge, based on everyday life experiences.

When such integration succeeds—albeit only in moments—then the ideas and proposals of the citizens are decisively strengthened, their self-confidence and courage to carry on grow, and the possibility of a more permanent co-operation in trying to bring (dimensions of) their wishes into reality comes closer.[27] This is in fact what we have experienced in Action

Research projects—ours and others'—within the tradition of Critical Utopian Action Research.[28] Of course, this kind of social meeting between citizens and experts could be realised in very varying forms, reaching from a more traditional and narrow way of exchanging to a more unusual and free way of co-operation. Mostly, such co-operation only gradually emerges, especially if there are more connected Research Workshops that allow the experts to find their own way into achieving the kind of reorientation of their knowledge and its societal impacts that is required if it should really make it up for an offer of co-operation. The citizens' ideas and proposals are being worked through as to a variety of perspectives and both with regard to their substance and quality and to their practical possibilities and challenges. It is our experience that especially a focus on the question of their more general and overarching potentials could be kept and developed and thus could contribute decisively to a clarification and elaboration both of their societal democratic and sustainable and their existential dimensions (their impact for the personal life conduct). This may sound very, very serious, but in fact it takes place—and *must* take place—within a basically playful, humoristic *and* of course serious atmosphere, characterised by an openness of the exchanges that we—also when they take on a practical co-operative form—would call *hermeneutic*: "question-answer-question". In this basic sense, hermeneutics is constitutive for democratic relations.

The Research Workshops constitute a *dynamic centre* within our Action Research, while at the same time, they fully depend on Future Creating Workshops (that could take on different forms) as their precondition, and in a substantial way also correspond with public arrangements as necessary mediating steps if the ideas and initiatives elaborated in the workshops should be practically opened up to and integrated in everyday life, especially in relation to their democratic potentiality. Both within the Research Workshops and within the public arrangements, the possibilities of establishing connections to and co-operation with other citizens' initiatives emerge and could be systematically looked for and established. In this sense, it is built into our model of Action Research that what starts as an Action Research project could, as an *inherent* dimension of the research project, gradually be transformed into autonomous initiatives, independent of a specific relation to institutionalised research. In this process, the relations between researchers and participants also begin to change, potentially opening up to another form of continuing co-operation and friendship. This applies not only to the action researchers, but for (some of) the experts too. Experts that accept the conditions (rules) of the Research Workshop will experience how this social meeting also raises questions about their expert knowledge, evocating a reflection and probably also a renewal of its relation to and impact on everyday life and society as a whole. They themselves will also leave the workshop (slightly) changed.

We would say that *the Research Workshop is our most important invention within our work with Action Research*, but experiences with it in

different contexts and under different conditions are still relatively few. It requires some institutional resources and it is not as easily established as a Future Creating Workshop. It might easily be re-traditionalised into a conventional way of having experts supporting ideas and projects, thus changing them to fit into the existing conditions. But we think that it has already proved a promising potentiality that could be grasped and developed into a real social invention (further to this, cf. *Chapter Eight* in this volume).

Where we and others have had the possibility to realise Action Research projects following this model, we have witnessed considerable progress in dealing with the identified weaknesses and vulnerabilities and definitely also in relation to the overarching democratic and sustainable dimensions and potentials of the initiatives. If you would open up the perspective to the international discussion on transformational alternatives to neoliberal globalisation, you could say that some Critical Utopian Action Research projects have developed initiatives that could be understood as a (re)formulation of the idea of *Commons* from a Scandinavian tradition.[29] Commons represents an alternative both to privatisation and to state regulation as well, and is in fact based on people's self-regulation of their common affairs. But Commons should also be considered as a possible new kind of *societal institution* at different levels. The specific combination of ideas related to everyday life experiences, the co-operation between different kinds of knowledge and the public obligation matches the perspective of Commons very well. But of course, this combination in itself does not ensure that the ideas and initiatives can gain a foothold and become part of a societal transformation. But looking for such assurance would easily overload the possibilities of Action Research, and it is hardly a proper measure for the "success" of Action Research projects—although they will also have to be looked at in relation to this question.

Our own awareness and interpretation of what is going on in (our) Action Research has to some extent been renewed. You might say it is a question of new balances and dynamics. The action perspective—that people come together in order to find practical solutions or renewals—is still absolutely important, a perspective you couldn't weaken. But our awareness of the specific relation between the action perspective (and thus the outcome, the results) and the dimension of creating the social imagination has new accents. Now we would further emphasise the importance of the specific free space as a space that encourages everybody's *listening*—to each other and to oneself, a *receptive* dimension, in other words. And we more clearly see the crucial relation between receptivity and creativity. In a way, the most important quality of a Critical Utopian Action Research project might be that the participants *stop in their usual steps*, opening up to see the world anew.[30]

The fact that we have widened out the Future Creation Workshop into a kind of permanent workshop seems to have been an unintended precondition for this. When, in the Future Creating Workshop, the participants know that they will have the possibility of continuing their work in additional

arrangements and arenas, the temptation to enforce the realisation or action perspective and therefore perhaps put some of the more utopian wishes aside will no longer be that prevalent. Therefore, this stopping opens up the space for a stronger emphasis on and awareness of the potentialities of the general, overarching dimensions of the proposals and makes a stronger focus on their potential contribution to democratisation easier to keep in mind—a focus that, if elaborated, also sheds an encouraging light back onto the specific ideas and (project) plans. But in order to estimate the importance of what we emphasise here, you have to take the actual societal situation and its challenges to Action Research into consideration.

ACTION RESEARCH AND DEMOCRACY: QUESTIONS AND CHALLENGES OF TODAY

Compared to the societal situation in the early 80s, when we started developing our Action Research, today's situation has changed. The crisis is today evident at all important societal levels. It includes the question of natural sustainability, extending from climate change to pollution, and the destruction of ecological diversity, but also the question of economic and social sustainability, now a problem that directly concerns the existence of millions of people, also in our own Western countries and thus turning back to the historical capitalist centre, instead of being exported to its periphery, as to a major extent was the case previously. This should make the necessity of a societal change agenda, and a radical one too, obvious, and it should also make up the horizon for the agenda of Action Research—and research in a general sense, too.

But it is not that simple. The problems may appear so overwhelming that they seem very difficult to approach for ordinary citizens (and researchers), and therefore a denial and resignation are predictable answers. And this is all the more so *at a societal level*; despite the urgent need for a basic change, there is very little—if any—resonance and support for alternative or transcending ideas and initiatives. The responsible politicians and economic leaders seem to deny the problems in their real range, even continuing to use more and more of the very instruments that are a constitutive part of the crisis itself. At the same time, however, there *is* also an awakening interest in a search for new beginnings and other objectives and thus also a growing interest for an acceptance of Action Research that is no longer just considered a peripheral phenomenon within research. That exposes Action Research to considerable contradictions and choices to be made, which we will suggest should be seen in the following perspective.

Compared to the described political atmosphere that still existed in the 1980s, a very significant change has—gradually and more or less unnoticed—taken place. *Democratisation has vanished from the dominating political and societal agenda*, at least in a sense that transcends democracy as a

formal—electoral and parliamentary—form of decision-making. This shift is closely connected to the increase in the influence of *neoliberalism*, starting back in the 1960s and 1970s and eventually gaining a hegemonic position as the dominant political-economic ideology and practice at a societal level. The hegemony is expressed in the fact that what is a specific theoretical and political way of understanding and regulating our common affairs (at all societal levels), appears as self-evident, simply a matter-of-fact, instead of being seen for what it is: the expression and result of the radical neoliberal change agenda. The basic options of the neoliberal agenda appear pre-political, and therefore, they cannot be challenged. And one of the key elements of neoliberalism is the attack on the very idea that the economy, and also societal life in a broader sense, could be democratically, i.e., collectively regulated. Instead, it should at all levels be regulated by economic efficiency logic and a competitive spirit, in line with the overall economic agenda of the neoliberal globalisation. The perspective is now *less, not more, democracy*. A search for new forms of self-governance at different levels is more or less unanimously substituted by claims for leadership and management.

Intimately connected to the neoliberal dismantling of the agenda for spreading and deepening democracy, a new agenda for social change and participation has taken form, completely different from the one still very much alive when we started doing Action Research. Neoliberalism is anything but laissez-faire. It is a strong agenda for strategic change, an activist concept. Today, the old critical metaphor of petrified societal structures that should be broken up appears obsolete. Permanent change and innovation now dominate the societal agenda, as described by, e.g., Richard Sennett (Sennett 2006). But it is a change that obtains its goals and criteria from an abstract, itself a substantially empty "innovation" agenda, the logic of which is increasingly formed by the demand of global competitiveness.

Within this agenda, "innovation" is basically inscribed in a search for renewals—innovations—of the predominant *productivist growth regime*,[31] instead of searching for alternatives to it that are necessary if the crisis is to be overcome. Thus, the innovation perspectives are as to their quality not *intrinsically* linked to the social and material character, to the demands and potentialities of the situations or contexts which they societally and existentially are inscribed in and should provide new answers and solutions to. This has far-reaching consequences because it constitutes a break between people's life experiences and aspirations and their involvement in social (change) activities ("innovations"), predominantly within their working life. "Social innovation" is not based in social imagination developed from the everyday life experiences in the sense presupposed by Jungk. In a strategic perspective, it is definitely meant to influence people's life conduct, but not to promote solidarity and civic responsibility.

This new agenda replaces the democratic agenda, while at the same time marketing it as a new kind of involvement of citizens. And, in fact, people *are* being involved or perhaps, rather, it is demanded that they are in a new

sense. This goes most obviously for people as employees, but also as consumers and as clients of the welfare state, even as "responsible citizens" in local communities. New moral dividing lines are drawn between those who are fit and willing for more or less permanent change and those who are not. Activity and involvement are required and are centred around an unconditional availability, primarily (directly or indirectly) related to the demands of the labour market and culturally flavoured by a "libertarian paternalism", as Guy Standing puts it, pointing to the political style of Tony Blair as an archetype of this (Standing 2009). This is a playing field for corporate management, human relation strategies, professional consultancy work in its myriad forms.

Politics, too, changes. The traditional forms of representational democracy lose importance in favour of different kinds of involvement of people, mostly in the form of stakeholder groups, but also as specifically chosen individuals, who are consulted because of their special knowledge or as anonymous individuals invited to "citizens' hearings", for instance in relation to nature management or local planning. This is *governance* instead of traditional bureaucracy, but is basically still controlled top-down and without public transparency in the decision-making process. Programmatically, at least, "new public management" is going to be replaced (or completed) by "new public governance". But this seems in no way to be a movement towards more self-governing.[32] Thus, through the last decades, people have been involved in or subordinated to seemingly endless changing or restructuring processes penetrating more or less all life dimensions. This means that *change itself has taken on a new character*. Change as such has lost the emancipatory or at least progressive perspective it once seemed to have, as we have discussed above. Inevitably, that has consequences for the notion of "action", too.

The potential impact of this for our everyday lives and everyday life experiences is far-reaching. If democratisation vanishes from the political societal agenda, it also vanishes from the horizon of our everyday life. To the degree that this becomes predominant, our self-understanding as citizens will be undermined in favour of a conglomerate of self-understandings as wage earners, consumers, voters, etc. following different particular interests in different situations. This is an abstract form of freedom, without overarching *human measures* that we can personally relate to. If we understand everyday life as the task of creating coherence in our lives, the consequence of this change will be destructive. Richard Sennett has—related to work experiences—talked of a "corrosion of character" (Sennett 1998). Changing the notion of Sennett a bit, we could talk of a risk of the *corrosion of experience building itself*, both at a personal and a cultural level.

If the quality of action and change as such is de-coupled from personal and collective autonomy and therefore begins to lose its character of something you could experience and reflect upon as belonging to you (action) and carrying the traces of you (change), you couldn't create experiences and

would no longer be able to create coherence in your life. This is so because the dynamic *inner relation* between the three basic dimensions of human time experience—past, present and future—disappears. This relation is not natural and self-evident, but has to be recreated anew throughout your life. Instead, you have a predominant present that is at one and the same time borderless and vanishing. The result is that *you are not ever really here*. Probably the strange feeling of always being pressed for time that today is so dominating and which is much more far-reaching than the real (definitely growing) time squeeze people encounter in their work could give reasons for, and could be related to, this more basic corrosion.[33] This is alienation in a new and radicalised form.

This new constellation has changed the situation of Action Research. Basically, an "action perspective" and a "change agenda" *as such* couldn't be said to carry an emancipatory index with it in the way we imagined and also experienced some decades ago. This also applies to any "innovation agenda" as such. Its potential democratic horizon is not the same as it was earlier, something immanent, a more or less latent dimension that could be expected to emerge and take form, if the concrete ideas and initiatives would just have the possibility of being unfolded and to some degree realised. Such earlier aspirations may always have had a touch of overestimation of these possibilities, a flavour of wishful thinking (this was from the very beginning a critique of our concept), but often—not always—these aspirations were confirmed as real emerging tendencies in the participants' work.

We have to take into consideration that dealing with potentialities has a dialectical character. What from a "realistic" point of view may appear as an overestimation, may in the practical workshop situation function as an encouraging of exactly those potentialities that would remain latent without this kind of encouragement and exaggeration—this being, in fact, a key assumption of our approach, both in a methodological and epistemological sense. Thus, encouraging questions have an evocative character. But what is evoked is not just a result of evocations. There must be reciprocity between the latent potentials and the evocative encouragement. The preconditions for such reciprocity are weakened, however, in the changed societal situation, as described above. Therefore, in today's Action Research, you have to work deliberately with (establishing) this reciprocity as a key task. A democratic horizon as part of the modern life expectation has not vanished from our everyday life, but it is strongly questioned as a real possibility and probably weakened as to its experiential foundation.

Looking back at our experiences from the last decade, we can see how these changes have influenced our Action Research and also—gradually—led to the described change in our awareness of the importance and interplay of the different dimensions of the co-operation in the workshops and outside them, and of the relations between the social imagination taking form in the workshops and the practical endeavours to bring wishes and plans into reality. This is the question of a search for new balances and dynamics emerging

in the field of tension and energy between the poles of experience building at one end, and practical (local) initiatives opening towards a democratisation of society at the other end.

Recently, we have elsewhere dealt with the question of the social imagination and experience building (Nielsen & Nielsen 2015). In our final reflections in this chapter, therefore, we will concentrate on the other pole.

TOWARDS A PLURAL ECONOMY, AND THE ROLE OF ACTION RESEARCH

Confronted with the difficulties of many (if not most) Action Research projects trying to overcome either the status of (marginalised) singular projects or being absorbed in everyday life routines and logics when the official project ends and the researchers and the attention created through the project vanish, many action researchers have seen a stronger integration of their Action Research into existing institutional and organisational frameworks as a possible answer, including the possibility of achieving another *scale* and a level of *critical mass*. We have been sceptical of this, not because we reject any such integration, but because it—as we see it—often, at best, comes too early. The projects and initiatives are not prepared for it and therefore they will pay a high price for this recognition and admission ticket to "reality", being subjugated to reality power.

And if you, from the very beginning, try to build such integration into Action Research—as seems to be the case when you bind the projects narrowly to an innovation or governance agenda—the impact is very probably going to be a reduction and transformation of social imagination where it is robbed of its transcending dimensions, both in a societal and existential meaning. At least, this is a considerable danger. This is due to the *a priori limitation of the horizon* into an organisational or institutional perspective. "Society" does not simply vanish, but it is reduced to just one (interest) perspective among others and may then—as an outside "environment" of the organisations or institutions (for instance, within a region)—be represented as a "partner". As we see it, this seems to be the case in the "Triple Helix Model" (cf. the discussions in eds Gunnarsson et al. 2015). Society is turned into something external, the participants are not addressed as citizens, their experiences are not related to their overarching, general (societal and universal) dimensions and the basic democratic potentials are left behind.

People are very likely to be involved and specific innovations might also include improvements due to the integration of "local knowledge", but a more basic responsibility as related to a recognition and self-consciousness *as citizens* is hardly to be expected. Maybe, in this way, Action Research (and action researchers) could gain a stronger societal integration and continuing influence, but does this go for the (shifting) participants, too? And what is the character of this influence, especially if it is integrated into an

innovation agenda intimately related to a never-ending optimisation of competitiveness within "the global economy"? As we see it, there is a risk that Action Research in the end might be transformed into a dynamic innovation agent, absorbed in the dominant societal agenda as, for instance, lined up by OECD (the international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (cf. for instance OECD 2002). The *democratic change agenda* as originally related to Action Research is weakened, if not given up entirely. Maybe this is reflected in the name giving, where "Interactive Research" increasingly is preferred to "Action Research", thus leaving the transcendent perspective inherent to the dimension of "action" behind.

We fear this may turn out to be a dead end if you consider a growing responsibility by "everyman" for common affairs a necessary and initial part of a real sustainable renewal of society. As one possible alternative answer, we want to point to the concept of a *Plural Economy.*[34] Plural Economy is narrowly related to the idea of spreading democracy to include all our basic, common affairs, as discussed above, but it has other points of emphasis, too. Moving towards a Plural Economy could be seen as beginning a *re-embedding of the economy into society*—referring to a concept from Karl Polanyi (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). In a generalised capitalist economy, a part of the overall economic reproduction of society is defined as "the productive sector" and separated from the "rest", consequently defined as "the reproductive sector", the relation between these two sectors now being that of a hierarchy. Reproductive activities are no longer recognised as essential parts of "the economy", but are at best regarded as necessary preconditions for "the economy", and therefore devaluated as to their societal importance. "The economy" is, as a tendency, liberated from any borders that might be an obstacle to its expansion. This is dis-embedding and leads to productivism, the long-term impact being the sustainability crisis. Sustainability could only be achieved if the economy is re-embedded into society and if the reproduction of society, our whole way of life, is given top priority. Such re-embedding would be the transformation of productivist economy into a *Life Economy*, as Lippe calls it. The Plural Economy is not already a life economy, but it is opening a way to it. Although a Life Economy certainly also would be a Plural Economy, including many forms of economic activities, a Plural Economy in the present situation could be seen as a compromise where new forms of economy coexist with capitalist forms. This is unthinkable as a harmonious coexistence, but it constitutes a possible way of transition, inevitably characterised by strong tensions.

Basically, we will have to transform our way of thinking about economy. We should conceptualise economy much broader than we do today, and it is especially important to overcome the antagonisms of economy and culture and of production and reproduction. The horizon should be an economy that does not destruct communities and Commons, but instead supports and strengthens them and—as to the Commons—encourages their (re)establishment. This would go hand in hand with a new meaning of "societal

richness" and would be an alternative to the destructive combination of the productivism and consumerism of today. We think this could be considered the dynamic centre of a democratisation of society, because democratisation today could not be thought of as an epiphenomenon (giving people a little more influence on their near-life situations), but must be identical with the development of a practical responsibility for the common affairs and therefore be at the centre of a transitional process. Moving towards a sustainable societal economy is only possible as a democratic process. This is "the everyman project"[35] that Robert Jungk had in mind.

In our societies, one urgent aim is to protect existing societal areas from being transformed and integrated into the expanding capitalist commodity production, either directly or indirectly, due to administrative (and not explicitly economic) rationales and logics (cf. Clausen in this volume). This is, for instance, of the utmost relevance regarding the ongoing dismantling of the public and universal welfare institutions. Of course, such protection should have the character not of restoring, but of *renewing* these institutions, (cf. Ahrenkiel 2015).

Another aim is to establish and support co-operative or self-regulated, basically non-profit-oriented ways of producing and non-bureaucratic[36] ways of managing our common affairs. The creation of new forms of Commons might be part of this. For instance, in relation to nature and landscape management, this would be obvious, but also in relation to establishing co-operative production enterprises and a renewal of welfare institutions where—in both cases—a Commons perspective could transcend "alternative" enterprises and institutions as relatively isolated units, opening them up to broader exchanges and co-operations. It should be stressed that as a *Plural* Economy, very different forms of economy would have to coexist without one of them dominating all the others, as is the case within the existing capitalist economy. Moreover, capitalist enterprises would—at least for a long time—be part of a Plural Economy, but they would also have to change and would end up being modified with regard to their dominant logics of productivism. Reform initiatives in this direction *within* capitalist enterprises would also be a very important and necessary dimension of a societal reorientation. As a *societal* transformation, this would require a dialectics of self-regulated experiments from below and societal promotion, support and legal regulations. [37]

Through exemplary projects and initiatives, Action Research could make substantial contributions to such a transformation. And the other way round: *within* such projects, opening up to a horizon of Plural Economy could function as a way to strengthen the participants' awareness of the transcendent perspectives of their work, their ideas and initiatives. In this sense, the Plural Economy should not be thought of as a new perspective being brought into or added to local, delimitated projects and initiatives from the outside, but as *an inherent potentiality* of theirs being brought to awareness. This would be transcendent in the way that experiences growing

out of the work with local initiatives (their possibilities, difficulties and hindrances), could be related to and kept in their *localisation* and rooted in everyday life as a decisive nerve of the mutual endeavours. They might even be transformed into a "genuine historical experience", in the sense of Walter Benjamin.[38] This could be said to imply a *wider scale* in a *qualitative* sense. Especially important is the development of an awareness of the many different activities brought to life in most Action Research projects as part of a *sustenance* (but not static) *economy*, understood in a broad sense as a Life Economy. Looking at the activities in such a perspective changes the awareness of the interplay of the very different forces that in fact constitute our communities and ways of living in complex mutual dependencies. [39]

We know of many Action Research projects where the horizon of their endeavours and results could be seen as pointing towards a Plural Economy, although neither participants nor researchers have reflected on it in this way. We think that making this *economic* dimension—in the sense of a *Life Economy*—explicitly thematic might decisively help to strengthen and elaborate the integrative and transcendent impact of the ideas and initiatives of such projects. The economic dimension makes clear how the many different existing and potential activities of a community are interconnected, and how they all (potentially might) contribute to the overall recreation of the community, this being the integrative impact. Within the horizon of the Plural Economy, different local initiatives could be stressed *as* local initiatives, without being overloaded with "societal meaning and obligation" in an untimely manner (and the participants in no way being appointed some kind of avant-garde) *and* being opened up to their potential broader importance as small but exemplary anticipations of societal re-embedding, this being the transcendent impact. This might be of invaluable impact for their self-understanding and confidence.

There are already many beginnings or openings into this direction, initiated inside or outside Action Research. It is not a speciality related to Critical Utopian Action Research. And that's the point. Such openings emerge everywhere, regardless the contextual conditions of their beginnings. You just have to look for them. In most cases, however, they are quickly closed down again. What Action Research can do is to deliberately cultivate and evoke such general (societal and universal) dimensions of necessarily delimited local projects and initiatives. Critical Utopian Action Research is meant to do so.

When we ascribe such potential to Action Research, we see it as connected to its *research dimension*. As research, Action Research projects attend to no specific interest perspective, but on the contrary, precisely to a general, overarching perspective—while at the same time, and this should be underlined, this overarching perspective should not be identified with an *abstract* general perspective *above* the individual and specific perspectives, as for instance it historically has been ascribed to the state, or, as in communist countries, to the party. A general perspective, in our understanding, rather points to our

mutual—and potentially universal—interdependence and relatedness. Philosophically put: this is our belonging to the world, the pattern which connects (Bateson).[40] As researchers, it is also our task to be aware of and support this perspective everywhere where it is emerging in the participants' work in order for it to be kept on the agenda and further developed, this being a precondition also for the blossoming of their specific perspectives. This is why our role as action researchers definitely transcends the function of process facilitators or specialists of (democratic) methods to which it is sometimes reduced and in our perspective, misunderstood.[41] What we are pointing to is not a politicisation of research in a traditional sense. The task of research and researchers is not to *bring in* societal or political perspectives, but to help them emerge from within the social imagination based in the participants' everyday life experiences. Within Critical Utopian Action Research especially, a further refinement of the Research Workshops and of the public arrangements, combined with an intensified interchange between separate projects and initiatives, would be decisively important if this path should be successfully followed. This is not a shortcut to overcome the actual difficulties for an Action Research obligated to democratisation, but, as we see it, a practicable way for the *project of encouraging* people today.

NOTES

1. Kurt and I planned this chapter together before he became seriously ill and died in April 2012. Now I alone have finished it along the lines that we drew together, but it relates so strongly to our common work that Kurt and I appear as co-authors. In the light of Kurt's death and indirectly referring to talks we had shortly before his death, I have broadened our originally planned discussion in the chapter in the sense that it now also presents a personally reflected story and the status of our work with Action Research, emphasising what, in our view, may be our most important contributions. The chapter could with advantage be read together with *Chapter Eight* in this book and Nielsen & Nielsen 2015. (BSN)
2. Robert Jungk was born in 1913 and died in 1994. He became world famous due to his books from the 1950s on the atomic bomb and its consequences and on the upcoming future planning (Jungk 1952, 1956, 1959). He was deeply engaged in the anti-nuclear and peace movements of his time and began to report from "the workshops of the new society" (Jungk 1973, 1988). In 1986, he received the Alternative Nobel Prize.
3. In 1981, Jungk and Norbert Müllert published their book on Future Creating Workshops, developed into a simple model through more than a decade of experiments (Jungk &Müllert 1981). The official English translation of "Zukunftswerkstätten" is "Future Workshops", but "Future Creating Workshops" was the English translation favoured by Jungk himself.
4. He considered courage the subjective key element in a democratic transformation. For him, courage was not something that is given. He found the dominant culture in our society contrary to encouraging, and as a counter program to this, he conceptualised the Future Creating Workshops as a way of *encouraging* people, of overcoming resignation. When I translated his pamphlet from 1988, "The Project of Encouraging" (German: "Projekt Ermutigung"), we

discussed the title which I—especially as to the word "encouraging"—found difficult to translate literally into Danish. He told me that in the first place he had thought of calling the booklet "The Principle of Encouraging", thus relating it to Ernst Bloch's "Principle of Hope", while at the same time stressing the practical dimension of "courage" as the key problem—instead of the more abstract "hope". He ended up rejecting "principle". Neither courage nor encouraging could be considered a "principle" in the sense of a cultural or anthropological constant, something we could just "have" or "follow". In the present political situation, it had to be seen as a *project*, (therefore also encouraging instead of courage), and that is: an assignment for us to discharge, a cultural work. (For linguistic reasons, however, I nonetheless ended up choosing "The Principle of Courage" ("Modets princip") as the title of the Danish edition, which he accepted.) (BSN)

5. The Manhattan Project is the name of the project that made it possible to construct the atomic bomb. In 1942, the *Manhattan Engineer District* was built. Here, science, military, technology, industry, culture, politics and economy were brought together in a project of unheard-of dimensions and with Robert Oppenheimer as head of the science dimension. Jungk considered this project a kind of archetype of Western modernity due to its combination of immense creativity and destructive potential.
6. We worked in different constellations together with Peter Olsén and Kirsten Paaby. Our major projects are presented in: Nielsen et al. 1999; Olsén et al. 2003; Nielsen & Nielsen 2006; Nielsen & Nielsen 2007. Methodological introductions to our concept could be found in: Paaby et al. 1988; Nielsen & Nielsen 2005, 2006; Nielsen & Nielsen 2010. Our Critical Theory is in line with the tradition, especially from Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, and close scholars of Adorno such as Oskar Negt, Alexander Kluge, Rudolf zur Lippe and Regina Becker-Schmidt.
7. Thus, a renewal of democracy should not be identified with an idea of "direct democracy".
8. In the Scandinavian countries, there were broad public discussions on economic democracy, employers' councils, co-operatives and so on.
9. We want to emphasise this substantial dimension of the Future Creating Workshop, as it is often considered—and misunderstood—as a mere technique or method in a traditional sense that might even be used for purposes with no interest in democratisation.
10. In English, Kant's *Mündigkeit*—the key concept of Enlightenment—usually is translated into *matureness*.
11. This is comprehensively elaborated by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Negt & Kluge 1972) and is one of our main theoretical inspirations, matching Junk's more practical concept very well.
12. Such differences were, for instance, obvious when it came to the discussion of different models of economic democracy.
13. Björn Gustavsen is one of the best-known protagonists of this tradition. For a classical text, cf. for instance Toulmin & Gustavsen 1996. Also cf. the discussions in eds E Gunnarsson et al. 2015.
14. We might as well talk of "collaboration". The reason why we prefer "co-operation", however, is that this term, as we see it, carries a stronger historical range of associations with it, referring to a tradition of co-operative, democratic initiatives with which we want to associate our Action Research. "Collaboration", on the other hand, today appears as a technical pedagogical or organisational concept (a "tool") that is practically stripped of its historical dimension.
15. Our emphasising the workshop dimension as a key element of our Action Research has led to a critique that we should reduce Action Research to a

specific *method*. But, as should be obvious, our argument is substantial, not just one of "method", and perhaps such a critique should probably be seen as reflecting a traditional, purely formal understanding of "method".

16. This interpretation is developed by bringing together perspectives from Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Henri Lefebvre and Oskar Negt.
17. The efforts to establish coherence and achieve a meaningful life under the present conditions inevitably also imply an activating of defence mechanisms, such as reducing, putting aside or even denying unpleasantness and difficulties. Anxiety is inherent to modern life conduct. Experience building is, itself, to a certain degree obscured and hindered, and therefore, everyday life experiences are contradictory and restricted.
18. This experiential dimension is examined more closely in Nielsen & Nielsen 2015.
19. This shifting one-sidedness shapes a situation where the participants, so to speak, could step behind or besides the ambivalences that in everyday life so often short circuit the experience building and a more free mobility.
20. We prefer this for the more instrumental "implementation", used in the English translation.
21. This way of working in the workshops is promoted by a series of practical rules and techniques, which, however, we cannot describe here, as we have little room to exemplify this kind of work. These technical rules secure a playful and simple atmosphere, characterised by transparency and equality, and they are very important in creating the kind of *free space* that is characteristic of workshops related to Critical Utopian Action Research.
22. In Nielsen & Nielsen 2015, this is elaborated a bit more.
23. For a while, Future Creating Workshops became very popular, and they were also integrated into the repertoire of consultancy work, with all the contradictions following from that.
24. In our tradition, Mette Bladt has, in her PhD project with so-called deviant young people in Copenhagen, developed the concept of a permanent workshop in a very inventive way (Bladt 2013).
25. An innovative way of working with alternative public spaces is described in Tofteng & Husted 2015.
26. We call these workshops *Research Workshops* because they represent a specific way of systematically and critically investigating and working through the citizens' ideas and proposals (this being the basic nature of "research"), not because of the participation of professional researchers and experts as co-operative partners in this process.
27. An important side of this is that a successful co-operation between experts and citizens within the Research Workshops is very likely to be transformed into network relations that the citizens in their future work could recur to.
28. Cf. Ahrenkiel 2015; Egmose 2015; Nielsen & Nielsen 2015; and other chapters in this volume.
29. In Scandinavian countries, the so-called "allemansrättan" ("freedom to roam", literally: "everyman's right") has a very long tradition. In *Chapter One*, the concept of Commons is presented and discussed by Laura Tolnov Clausen; also cf. *Chapter Eight* in this volume.
30. Cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2015.
31. Productivism and consumerism are each other's precondition and they constitute a destructive societal dynamic.
32. Within political and administrative practice, "governance" has to some degree substituted "government" or maybe they have rather merged into an opaque unity. Especially within the EU, governance in the 1990s and 2000s gained ground as a political way of dealing with challenges stemming from the new

global political economy. Keywords are governing by building on broad partnership and network constellations. Such constellations mainly consist of powerful stakeholders and interest groups, but could also include more alternative NGOs. It's a paradise for lobbying and it tends to short circuit *public* political discussions and decision-making. Governance increasingly plays an important role at very different levels of political administration, today especially in relation to innovation agendas, and it widely holds a progressive image. "Collaborative governance" (for instance: eds O'Flynn & Wanna 2008): could it sound better? Especially within regional and local contexts, it *may* open spaces for dialogues with municipalities, which we also ask for and try to establish in our Action Research. Basically, however, we find it a mistake to consider it an exponent of some kind of democratisation logic. A German anthology on "Democracy and Governance" presents a broad and differentiated critical discussion on governance (eds Demirović & Walk 2011).

33. We have become aware of this in our practical experiences with Action Research. Throughout the last decade, it has been increasingly difficult to have people come together for a workshop even for one whole day, not to speak of the 1½ days that in the decades before was the norm: "They couldn't afford the time for it".
34. The concept of Plural Economy has different sources. It is narrowly connected to ideas of solidarity economy, moral economy and the like; for one kind of overview, see for instance eds Hart et al. 2010. *Our* main theoretical inspiration stems from Rudolf Lippe (latest: Lippe 2014). We have written on Plural Economy in relation to two Action Research projects of ours on democratic nature management (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, 2007, and *Chapter Eight* in this volume).
35. This is the English title of his book *Der Jahrtausendmensch* (Jungk 1973 [1977]).
36. Although formally critical to traditional bureaucracy, the new forms of governance reproduce basic bureaucratic logics, including strong hierarchical structures and forms of control.
37. Such dialectics is different from the idea of singular experiments that hopefully will have a "snowball effect", as we have sometimes seen the idea of exemplary projects interpreted, although, of course, they certainly could be directly inspiring to others.
38. The idea of "historical experience" is discussed in Nielsen & Nielsen 2015.
39. In *Chapter Eight* in this volume, we discuss experiences from our Action Research in relation to these perspectives.
40. This corresponds with a general research dimension of another kind, as you could say that Action Research in our understanding through and across its many different projects investigates *the potentials of everyday life* as to its capacity for the renewal of society.
41. Cf. for instance Pålshaugen 2014.

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Part Two

Citizens' Initiatives, Hopes and Difficulties

Experiences With Action Research in Scandinavia, London, Latin America and Africa

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Introduction to Part Two

Hans Peter Hansen, Birger Steen Nielsen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Ewa Gunnarsson

In the first section, Laura Tolnov Clausen primarily exemplified her initial discussion of the actuality of the concept of Commons with questions of nature conservation and landscape management, fields that are also in the foreground of the contributions of this second section. The understanding and handling of nature conservation and landscape management as separate sectors or objects for juridical, administrative and policy logic and practices, however, is a specifically modern phenomenon, characteristic in its systematic separation and *isolation* of different dimensions of our whole lives and life conditions from their broader contexts and interdependencies (thus also related to the basic dis-embedding problem). As soon as a Commons perspective is brought in play, or when you, practically, in critical Action Research projects, take a starting point in the citizens' everyday life, with its concerns, fears and hopes, this modern logic of separation and isolation is contested. This does not imply that, for instance, the question of nature conservation could or should not be dealt with as a *relatively* specific problematic—but not abstracting from its broader embedding. This is a significant dimension of the sustainability problem, pointing to the decisive importance of combining the sustainability agenda with a democratisation perspective—and notably not only at a traditional political level, but also at the level of *citizens' everyday lives and self-regulated initiatives*. The contributions of this second section with different perspectives and emphases deal with this reflecting experiences with Action Research from very different parts of the world.

The section is opened by Hans Peter Hansen, Erica von Essen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah with their *Chapter Four*, "Citizens, Values and Experts: Stakeholders and the Inveigling Factor of Participatory Democracy". In their discussion, they address a profound democratic challenge in modern society that is of the utmost relevance both in relation to realising a Commons perspective and in relation to Action Research as practical approach, and certainly also in relation to the above-mentioned problem. It is the question of how to overcome the dominance of one-sided technical and instrumental rationalities in order to include the full spectrum of existing rationalities, which is absolutely necessary when it comes to the point where ideas and

perspectives from Action Research projects should influence the development and implementation of public policy. This question is also touched on in Nielsen and Nielsen's chapter on Critical Utopian Action Research in the first part, but by Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah, it is comprehensively developed. Using contemporary Natural Resource Management (NRM) as their context, they show how stakeholder governance has become an institutionalised approach for inviting public voices to speak on natural resources in modernity, at the expense of the reproduction of citizen-based democracy. This stakeholder model precludes the full spectrum of rationalities in societies from being expressed. The implications of voices failing to be heard in this way present challenges in modernity and thereby also in the social sciences. The chapter provides a brief genealogy of the stakeholder approach, tracing its roots in business administration and its liberal preoccupation with defending predefined stakes from public interference. This reproduces strategic stakeholder rationality in participants, who are fundamentally encouraged to view others in terms of adversaries with fixed interests. The chapter presents two cases from the Scandinavian NRM context, where stakeholder governance resulted in systematically distorted communication. Action Research holds the potential as well as the responsibility for developing real democratic alternatives to stakeholder governance, addressing the participants as citizens. Following this horizon-broadening capacity of Action Research could be considered a necessary, even paradigmatic shift.

The chapter by Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah could be said to mediate the more general conceptual discussions in the first part with the following chapters in the second part, which all describe and reflect on practical Action Research experiments in different parts of the world. It addresses power structures at the practical level of democratic changes projects and makes up an experience-based conceptual democratic horizon for the following discussions of the citizens' hopes and disappointments emerging from such initiatives. The chapter explores the rationality gaps between everyday life's logics and concerns and the different logics and concerns of institutional systems and their representatives.

While all the rest of the chapters of the second part discuss Action Research experiences located in Northern Europe, mostly Scandinavia, but also London, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah, Nícía Givá and Hans Peter Hansen in *Chapter Five* widen out the perspective, discussing Action Research and Commons initiatives in Nicaragua and Mozambique. In both of these very different cases, a worldwide, very important question of nature management is addressed: that of protected areas (typically in the form of national parks, as is the case in the projects discussed) vis-à-vis the local people living close to these areas. Whether such protected areas are more protected with or without human inhabitants has remained a debated topic, despite the acknowledgement of the fact that people live in protected areas or on the edge of national parks in a majority of such sites. Without neglecting existing contradictions and power relations, the Action Research initiatives,

based on Systemic Action Research, here described and reflected upon have created community learning arenas and democratic agoras where there was active participation of park authorities and residents along with other actors in facilitated workshop settings. The chapter sheds light on the opportunities and challenges of working with Action Research to study the dynamics of public institutions and society in general in nature management settings characterised by, among other things, poverty, while trying to change or move these dynamics in the perspective of Commons. The chapter shows the relevance of the general problem discussed in *Chapter Four* also for settings with quite different characteristics than those of the Scandinavian settings referred to there. It is made transparent how institutionally driven governance mechanisms in these cases have contributed to large divides being maintained between conservation goals and the livelihood claims of park inhabitants. The authors show how the Action Research projects in two national parks have opened up the possibility of co-management as a future perspective—but without neglecting their more or less inevitable difficulties and shortcomings.

The two following chapters bring the discussion "back" to Scandinavia. From somewhat different perspectives, both of them enlighten central dimensions of the questions of the conflicting relationship between different logics in NRM discussed in *Chapter Four* and specified in relation to the sites in the Global South discussed in *Chapter Five*. Both *Chapters Six* and *Seven* demonstrate considerable difficulties in dealing with this conflict, while at the same time pointing to unexhausted and also unused potentials, namely citizen participation and opening up the horizon of political and administrative authorities aimed at creating new forms of dialogue and co-operation.

Mikaela Vasstrøm, in her contribution (*Chapter Six*), focuses on the participatory potential in environmental planning (officially often rhetorically highlighted), exploring *how* participatory endeavours are played out during a specific planning process concerning wild reindeer protection vis-à-vis local community interests and engagement in the Setesdal Valley in Norway. At the centre of her discussion stands the question of whether this particular nature protection planning process opened or closed the potential for communication between different planning actors in the formal planning arena and with local communities, as well as at the level of the citizens. With references to Critical Utopian Action Research, Vasstrøm facilitated local community workshops as part of the overall process, trying to explore the community perspectives of nature protection in relation to the citizens' everyday life perspectives. She shows that both openings and closures for deliberative democratic participation could be identified, and that the tensions between these contrasting tendencies were to a high degree due to different understandings of knowledge and nature, as well as to contradictions within the constituent planning rationality.

Likewise, *Chapter Seven*, by Helle Nedergaard Nielsen, Hans Peter Hansen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah, could be said to address the problem

of openings and closures within NRM planning processes; however, the authors explore it from different perspectives. Their starting point is the EU Water Framework Directive that is constituted by two pillars: "good ecological status" and "public participation". They elaborate on the intrinsic contradictions of the Directive: on one side, it expresses the normative democratic premises of contemporary Natural Resource Management and the attempt to create a more inclusive management system. On the other side, it is also an expression of underlying internal contradictions in terms of democratic practises. It thereby comprises one of the most important sustainability challenges for politicians, governmental agencies and citizens in Europe. The chapter illustrates the magnitude of this challenge by presenting two different strategies of implementation, one represented by Denmark as highly centralistic and strategic, and one represented by Sweden, which is more decentralised. They argue that both strategies fail to meet the democratic requirement and to constitute a democratic alternative to the traditional technical-instrumental Natural Resource Management approaches of the past. This is contrasted with experiences from an Action Research project in Sweden, where local citizens and researchers (including the authors) together created a different and deliberative space for Natural Resource Management, allowing for the integration of multiple values and rationalities existing outside the dominating strategic interests and experts systems. By not construing participants as merely stakeholders, as is systematically criticised in *Chapter Four*, but in allowing them to participate as citizens on an equal basis in society, this experiment transgresses traditional methods for public participation, such as consultations and public hearings.

In the above discussions, the question of the relation between community building and endeavours moving towards a sustainable transition emerges as essential. The last two chapters—each in their own way—focus on this relation. Birger Steen Nielsen and Kurt Aagaard Nielsen in *Chapter Eight* reflect on experiences from two Critical Utopian Action Research projects, both of them situated in rural districts in Denmark and integrating local community development with nature management. In their discussion of the outcomes of these local initiatives, which, after more than ten years are still going on and developing, they try out the relevance and adequacy of the theoretical concepts put into play in this book. Plural Economy and Commons are considered by the authors to be decisive elements of the re-embedding of economy into society, while re-embedding is seen as the key to overcoming the sustainability crisis. In many change projects, among them several Action Research projects, practical anticipations of Plural Economy and Commons could be identified. It is this potential that the authors of this chapter want to bring into consciousness. This is thoroughly discussed in relation to two Danish Action Research projects on democratic Nature Management, based on Critical Utopian Action Research. Two important dimensions of the discussion concern first the question of the specific quality characterising such anticipations as they are elaborated on in the so-called Research Workshops

developed in this kind of Action Research, where different knowledge forms are brought into dialogues, and secondly, the question of their societal institutionalisation. The chapter ends by addressing the concept of "a human nature", referring to the Marxian idea of "a humanisation of nature and a naturalisation of man", as a practical yet utopian way of overcoming the current crisis. The main theoretical inspirations come from critical theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Rudolf Lippe.

Finally, Jonas Egmose in *Chapter Nine* moves the discussion of the relation of community development and sustainability into the heart of an urban setting, London, reporting from an Action Research project enabling local citizens to make visible their Commons in a deprived urban area in North London. Faced with the challenges of social deprivation and fragmentation, the residents took part in a community-based Action Research project, aimed collaboratively to explore what it was like to live in the local neighbourhood and develop shared visions for alternative futures. Using a wide span of creative methods, the project fostered a number of themes involving very different groups of citizens. The author argues that a main characteristic of the themes might be understood by the notion of (social) Commons. The themes were not only local, but had also societal dimensions. However, it is also shown that these Commons often remained unspoken or invisible in the context of urban deprivation, and the local residents did not find that they were taken adequately care of at a community, municipal or societal level. Concluding the discussion, the author suggests that the methodology of Critical Utopian Action Research as a permanent workshop might enable communities themselves to articulate and act upon common concerns and also enable professionals' local community development acting in better correspondence with these concerns.

Our general *Introduction* ended up addressing citizens' initiatives as stretched between hopes and difficulties. The chapters in this second part offer rich descriptions of and reflections on these inevitably conflicting poles, thus bringing them more strongly and more precisely into our awareness.

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4 Citizens, Values and Experts

Stakeholders and the Inveigling Factor of Participatory Democracy

Hans Peter Hansen, Erica von Essen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah

One of the most profound challenges faced by modern society is how to include the full spectrum of existing rationalities in the development and subsequent implementation of public policy. Only through a more participative approach than the one used today is this possible, an approach that can not only ensure better inclusion and the integration of the existing values, experiences and various types of knowledge in society, but one that can also detect and define desirable futures as a response to the eco-political crises of contemporary society. Indeed, international consensus affirms the virtues and political buzz around public participation. Unfortunately, however, conceptions on its virtues, including what they are or should be, diverge. To the extent that participation is defined by governmental institutions, it is often implicitly defined from a purely governance perspective, and it thus becomes a matter of ensuring that the most influential stakeholders somehow are taken into account. Stakeholder participation has arguably reached paradigmatic status in modernity as the means by which societal goals and their public plans are realised. Indeed, it is difficult to legitimise a policy or plan today without dutiful adherence to the stakeholder model of governance, either in the form of co-management partnerships, representative delegations or expert assemblies.

Seeing participation not only as a normative and legitimising feature of modern society, but as one, if not the most fundamental challenge of modernity, this chapter examines stakeholder governance with a critical lens that exposes the limitations of the approach. In so doing, illuminates the need for an alternative approach to public participation that is both conceptually and practically radically different.

We begin this chapter by positioning democracy and public participation in a broader societal perspective to expose some of the democratic challenges emerging in the wake of modernity. Taking the context of Natural Resource Management (NRM) as our point of departure, we describe how the inherent democratic challenges of modernity have played out within this particular sector and how the notion of public participation from the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, not just rhetorically but also institutionally, has become one of today's most inveigling buzzwords.

Departing from the Scandinavian NRM context, we illustrate in the second section the potentially far-reaching consequences of proceeding with a stakeholder agenda. Such consequences, we argue, encompass both managerial and political dimensions insofar as members of society experience themselves as marginalised from governance processes directly or indirectly, and how this has implications for their everyday lives. Some outcomes of marginalisation may be particularly extreme as frustration over the loss of voice and dialogic update in policy intensifies in social groups.

In the third section of this chapter, we provide a more elaborate analytical critique of the stakeholder governance as contemporary society's go-to response within the repertoire of public participation. This is done by positioning stakeholder governance within a Scandinavian history perspective. Through this positioning, we show the stakeholder model of governance is a perversion of democracy and which has been purchased at the high cost of marginalising a crucial horizontal mode of public engagement and political participation, understood as participative and deliberative modes of democracy (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Gould 1988; Gutmann & Thompson 1996; Habermas 1996).

The fourth and final section of the chapter delves deeper into the empirical context of Scandinavian public participation in NRM. Its rationale is to provide select policy examples on how more radical and innovative political initiatives on public participation from within the governmental NRM system have capsized due to the institutionalised domination of "stakeholderism". Within this, we show that stakeholder governance is not just in itself problematic from a participative and deliberative point of view, but it also constitutes a barrier towards more radical improvement of the horizontal dimension of democracy along with its promise of the inclusion of the full spectrum of rationalities existing in society.

We conclude the chapter by discussing the democratic challenges ahead from an overall societal perspective, the responsibilities of science, and finally, potential contributions by Action Research to overcoming the challenges.

CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY

With the historical transformation of Western societies to what we today refer to as modernity, a new kind of rationality gradually replaced old belief systems. Here, truth was previously defined by the emperors and by God; now, it had been supplanted by the growing belief that human beings themselves, as rational, autonomous subjects, are capable of controlling nature and their own life situations. This was an emancipatory process leading to secularisation, democratisation, institutionalisation and individualisation. As part of this transformation, science, technology, industrialisation and capitalism became new powerful means, not just for controlling nature, but also for defining "the truth" in the lacuna left by the old belief systems. With the domination of these new means of power, one can argue that the

emancipatory hope awakened by modernity was compromised by a new religion and that new systems of totalitarian mechanisms have supplanted the pre-modern ones. One can further argue that the new religions and steering logics of today are of a subtler character, since they are not personified to the same extent as the old ones, but interwoven and empowered in vertical institutionalised legal and democratic structures. A consequence of the dominating steering logics is that we all seem to be caught up in an inevitable dystopic future desired by no one, and in which we at the same time have lost our ability to articulate alternatives. Regardless this dystopia is the eco-political crisis, climate change, depletion of nonrenewable resources, decrease of biodiversity or social crises, such as the increase of socio-economic inequality, the erosion of democracies justified by terrorism or motivated by nationalism, we are in a historical situation in which no collective futures are being produced as responses to the crises. Stated otherwise, there are no spaces available for us to define the Commons collectively in its material or immaterial form based upon other values than those offered by the dominating steering logic of contemporary society. This duality to Commons can be understood as the material comprising the natural resources forming the basis for human reproduction, while immaterial denotes the collective future in which we as human beings are interdependent.

One of the fundamental democratic problems of modernity is the imbalance between what can be referred to as the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of democracy. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argued that the role and function of citizens have been diminished because the public sphere has increasingly been dominated by a rationality represented by the power holders, meaning experts, interest groups, governmental institutions and the market (Habermas 1962). The particular rationality dominating today is constituted by an instrumental, technical, scientific and market-oriented steering logic suppressing other existing rationalities in society (Elling 2008). As a corollary of this, only those actors capable of mastering the discourse and logic of this particular rationality rule, and they do so at the expense of the vast majority of people to whom alternative, life-world rationalities are the primary lenses. Apart from excluding immanent solutions to the common challenges, which are obscured by the dominant rationality, this colonisation also creates apathy or even resistance towards the established political system, often sowing the seeds for political populism, radicalisation and violence (Honneth 1995).

A main historical and analytical tenet of Habermas is that the legal and representative (vertical) political legitimacy of modern societies also depends on a moral and participative legitimacy (Habermas 1996). One could call it the horizontal dimension of democracy to distinguish it from the pyramid structure of representative democracy. From a Northern-European point of view, the horizontal dimension of democracy has had a relatively prominent position in political philosophical discussions for the past 60 years. To account for this, one can argue that the question raised at the end of Second World War in many parts of the world, how it was possible for the

totalitarian regimes to overrun established democratic systems, yielded at least two opposite conclusions which to this day have shaped the political cultures on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. In the United States, one dominant democratic conclusion on the war was that the Nazism and fascism of Europe illuminated the danger of delegating too much power to the "masses" (Pateman 1970). To preclude something like this from happening again, people's democratic participation was advisably restricted to the ballot box, where could choose among select political elites to carry their voices. In this sense, the foundation for citizens to be reduced to "political consumers" was heavily outlined with this conclusion.

In Northern Europe, scholars and also the previous members of the resistance movement arrived at an opposite conclusion: the totalitarian experiences from the Second World War had illustrated the importance of the quality of a political culture, including the active political engagement of people as citizens (Koch 1945/1960; Rasmussen & Nielsen 2003). In Germany, many scholars, such as the father of Action Research, Kurt Lewin (see also the *Editors' Introduction* in this volume), and many of the scholars directly or indirectly associated with the so-called Frankfurt School, such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Jürgen Habermas and several others, such as Hannah Arendt, who personally had experienced the totalitarian consequences of the Nazi ideology gradually taking over Germany, dedicated their professional lives to understanding the qualitative aspects of cultivating a political culture in society.

From this historical perspective, some of the political dynamics we are witnessing today evoke memories of the totalitarian dynamics of the past. Hence, they call upon our obligation as scholars to unveil, understand and contribute to the cultivation of the political culture and decision-making process in public policy.

The Call for Change

From the end of the Second World War, the rhetoric of public participation has provided the optimistic impetus for changes ahead whenever our formal political institutions have failed. One example was within physical planning during the 1960s, when public hearings were institutionalised and which brought participation up front like in one of the most-cited papers, Sherry Arnstein's "A Ladder of Participation" (1969). With the growing environmental concerns in the 1970s and 1980s, the rhetoric on public participation grew within another field, NRM. With 172 governments and more than 2,000 representatives from non-governmental organisations participating in the so-called Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1991 (or more formally: the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), the virtues of public participation once again provided the optimistic impetus for change. The Earth Summit was linked to the report "Our Common Future" (United Nations 1987)—or the so-called "Brundtland Report"—an analysis as well

as a critique of the existing economic and political system. But the document was also an expression of a possible alternative future. The social and environmental externalities of the capitalist market system and the consequences of social, ecological and political injustices over natural resources was for the first time in human history addressed as a *common* challenge (see also Clausen in this volume) on a global political scale. At the summit, the international community, via several declarations and conventions, agreed to create a more sustainable future. This ambition required the engagement and support of all members of society and resulted in a new agenda of involvement and participation of citizens within environmental planning and management. Sustainability was hereby implicitly defined as more than just a strategic concept; it was in fact a democratic concept (Clausen et al. 2008). As such, sustainability added a new political perspective to how we communicate on environmental issues that also explicates a political awareness of the relationship between the social and the physical world. With international agreements such as the "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" and "Agenda 21", followed by other international conventions and directives, such as the Aarhus Convention, the Landscape Convention, the Water Directive, etc., participation has become an institutionalised phenomenon that politicians and governmental agencies are obliged to integrate into the development and subsequent implementation of public policy. Some refer to the emphasis on participation as the *participative turn* within the environmental arena (Saurugger 2009), and in its wake, a sizeable participation industry has developed, comprising consultants and literature offering public institutions and civil organisations a variety of old and new participative and facilitation techniques, methods and concepts. As the boundaries between scholarship and consultancy have blurred, new governance and network theories have emerged committed to strengthening the legitimacy of governmental institutions, which took public participation into new conceptual terrain (see, for example, Matti & Sandström 2011).

One impetus for participation has been that its implementation leaves a lot of space for interpretation (Toker 2004; Saurugger 2009), resulting in, among other things, diverging expectations and outcomes of such processes. One of the manifestations of this is that despite institutionalised rhetoric on participation as a virtue, conflicts and deteriorated trust and acceptance still characterise many domains of public policy and the NRM policy in particular. Indeed, many countries and groups of people experience a lack of recognition and voice, and feel excluded from political matters relevant to their everyday lives.

IF PARTICIPATION IS THE ANSWER, WHAT, THEN, IS THE QUESTION?

The lack of a clear and agreed-upon direction for the use of participation and the absence of actual democratic changes on the ground accentuate the

existing institutional ambivalence on participation, as expressed in Sherry Arnstein's classic article "A Ladder of Participation" from 1969:

> The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.
>
> (Arnstein 1969, p. 216)

Participation has even been described *The New Tyranny* (Cooke & Kothari 2001). The wealth of rhetoric around participation is sure to vex both politicians and civil servants even within well-established democracies, who might ask themselves, "What is the point?" Despite the practical difficulties in implementation associated with democracy and with defining what participation actually is or should be, we will argue that some core democratic principles are at stake here. Bringing in two Scandinavian examples, we illuminate a few of these stakes.

Denmark became the scene of a growing environmental awareness during the late 1970s and saw a substantial increase in grassroot involvement, followed by a political "green majority" in the Danish parliament and the internalisation as well as institutionalisation of the environment in the 1980s. The political development brought Denmark to the forefront of environmental policy development, and during the 1990s, Denmark became leading in the world in the wind turbine industry. It also played a significant role in the development of the UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the so-called Aarhus Convention of 1998), which is widely held today as a significant contribution to the implementation of the objectives of the Earth Summit. Despite these environmental merits, a political countermovement emerged in Denmark during late 1980s and 1990s (Jensen & Hansen 2007; Læssøe 2007; Hansen 2012). This countermovement challenged the moral legitimacy of NRM policy and gained support with a number of concrete cases in the media in which citizens purported to be marginalised and patronised by the authorities. The movement pointed to the cracks in the foundation by exposing what appeared to be a self-contained administrative system of environmental management that failed to take into consideration the needs and opinions of citizens. The seeds had been sown for the political opposition in Denmark to challenge the social democratic government and, with the promise of a more inclusive and communicative NRM policy, the Liberal Party of Denmark and the Conservative People's Party won the parliament election under Anders Fogh Rasmussen in 2001, with parliamentary support from the right-wing populist Danish People's Party.

To what extent the crisis of legitimacy surrounding environmental management contributed to this political shift of power in Denmark in 2001 is hard to say, but there is little doubt that the image of a centralist and paternalistic environmental policy and management provided a compelling backdrop for change. Although the new government (2001–2011) failed to

deliver on its promises of more inclusive NRM policy (Hansen 2012), the environmental policy was disarmed institutionally as well as financially with the political shift (Hansen 2012). The disarmament of the environmental policy in Denmark had far-reaching implications that resonated beyond the borders of the country because it opened the door for the author of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, Bjørn Lomborg, who in 2004 reached the status of the most influential people in the world (*Time Magazine* 2004).

A parallel and more concrete Scandinavian NRM case where the feeling of exclusion and lack of involvement has led to a political setback is the case of wolf management in Sweden and Finland. Both countries have for a number of years tried to balance the legal requirements of the European Union on the one hand, and the domestic conflicts emerging from the impact wolves have on people's everyday lives, in terms of attacks on livestock, fear of the safety of children, etc. The whole situation has been increasingly radicalised over the past years, to the extent that it has become exceedingly difficult to manage due to the illegal killing of wolves and threats on officials' lives (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 2005). Studies have shown that opposition to the present management regime is widespread and that there is considerable sympathy—especially among the Finnish population—towards those people engaged in illegally killing wolves (Pohja-Mykrä & Kurki 2014). In both Sweden and Finland, the premises, processes and authors behind the policy appear remote, unjust and insensitive to citizens' needs and realities. And, as further stated by the the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (2007):

> Few witnesses dare to step forward [. . .] confirm the uncompromising tone existing within wildlife policy turning civil servants into targets [. . .] The lack of legitimacy is also reflected within the police where conflicts of loyalty have occurred.
>
> (p. 11) (Our translation)

The ongoing wolf situation in Scandinavia can be seen as an example of what the German scholar Axel Honneth has labelled a *brutalization of the social conflict*:

> We could today just as well speak of a social pathology: for those who are cut off from access to the established spheres of recognition such a situation means no longer having an avenue down which to gain self-respect by participating in the life of society. One part of the struggle for recognition, namely that conducted from below by the members of the so-called 'underclass', therefore now takes place in the brutalized form of merely battling for public visibility or compensatory respect: because one is no longer included in the official, societally sanctioned arenas where respect can be acquired, the focus is on wresting social recognition outside the entrance gates by non-normed means.
>
> (Honneth 2012, p. 17)

The above two examples from the Scandinavian context are just a few of the many cases across the world that illustrate the political importance of protecting and cultivating a horizontal dimension of democracy that grants uptake to citizens' voices. The examples also illustrate that with more than two decades of institutionalised rhetoric calling for more participative environmental policy, the transformation of the traditional expert-dominated governance system towards a more participative practice has been obstructed by severe difficulties along the way.

The fact that the "participative turn" emerges from a critique of existing institutional procedures, and their ultimate violent or populist culminations, leads to the conclusion that participation requires more fundamental changes to public governance. It cannot just be "business as usual". The described difficulties leading to these changes indicate the existence of more profound dynamics of democracy in which participation cannot just be assigned a random institutional role. A critique often levelled toward the governmental practice of participation is that it serves to fulfill instrumental requirements of legitimacy at the expense of a more substantial participative practice (Borgström 2012). It hence fails to offer a fundamentally different alternative to the elitist authoritarian governance tendencies of today. In turn, it fails in bridging public planning and management with the full inclusion of the multiple rationalities existing within society based on the everyday lives of the citizens or on a productive harnessing of their values, experiences and knowledge.

Within NRM today, participation is typically tantamount to "stakeholder participation", equating those who participate with "stakeholders". We argue in the following that this is not an answer to the democratic outcry for more (or better) participation, but in fact a reproduction of the exact same problem we are trying to overcome by engaging the public. Neither is it fundamentally different from elitist authoritarian governance. On the contrary, it is a way of governing which in Scandinavia has roots back to the late 1800s and which has characterised many societies since the 1930s and 1940s.

In what follows, we briefly summarise how the stakeholder model earned its wings in NRM. Against this development, we levy a critique based on combined empirical field observations and literature reviews that centres on: 1) The disciplinary and political tradition of the model and subsequent orientation towards output efficiency, 2) its *de facto* promotion of "stakeholder thinking" (defined as strategic and relational), 3) its potential reproduction of conflict, interest polarisation and privatisation of common issues like wildlife and other natural resources, issues that in themselves invite substantial complexity and contestation (Gollagher & Hartz-Karp 2013). We draw from Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* in explicating the systematic distortions in communicative practice between participants in stakeholder fora through a novel equalisation of stakeholder and strategic rationality on the one hand, and citizen and communicative rationality

on the other hand (Habermas 1984). To this end, we pay attention to an emerging discussion on democratic freedom as one that is contingent not only pre-given wills, but on will formation through the right kind of participative processes (Rostbøll 2008). These are horizontal and citizen-based fora, comprising openness to diverse rationalities. The inability of the current stakeholder approach to realise the premises for this brand of democracy indicates that we need to re-evaluate our unwavering faith in stakeholder governance. This is especially the case in divisive societal issues that tend to be vulnerable to dominating actors, agendas and steering media (see also Sriskandarajh, Givá and Hansen and Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume).

RISE OF A PARADIGM

The stakeholder way of governance does not hail from a democratic tradition. It can, however, be categorised ad hoc as belonging to the purview of the liberal theory of democracy. In this political philosophy, democracy is a means to aggregate individual interests towards political decisions that are consistent with the demands of liberal equality. This is immediately reconcilable with strategic organisational thinking, as articulated by Argandoña (1998): the common good of any enterprise is best served when the members (stakeholders) can promote and achieve their personal aims. Democratic authority, according to this model, turns on the basis of principles that can be abstracted from political practice, including negative rights of individuals in relation to those of: 1) other citizens, 2) the state apparatus. Indeed, the *process* of democracy has no independent value per se. Hence, in contrast to the republican and deliberative theories of democracy, the liberal model emphasises private autonomy as stemming from citizens being permitted to pursue private interests relatively free from interference. Indeed, freedom from interference is tantamount to the libertarian's understanding of democracy, where negative freedom of this kind is defined as "the absence of obstruction to or interference with motion of activity" (Rostbøll 2008, p. 34). This is connected to such thinkers as Hobbes (1588–1679), Bentham (1748–1832) and Mill (1806–1873).

There are three important implications of the stakeholder model being subsumed by a libertarian democracy. First, participation necessarily becomes a means by which an individual seeks to further his or her private interests, preferences and desires. Second, participation also becomes a "cost" incurred to the participant against the promotion of his or her stake (typically defined as money or property), whereby the protection of private interests constitutes the goal. Third, the interests of individuals are construed as privately determined and apolitical belongings and not, in fact, the result of any public democratic process insofar as opinion formation goes. Indeed, such positions have been constituted *a priori*, typically through production interests, and now need defending from others and the minimisation of

interference both by the state and by other competing members of the enterprise. There is, in this way, little scope at the outset for a potential transformation of opinions in the intersubjective process of deliberating with others, thus proscribing any potential for common visions. Indeed, one can argue that the premises that promote strategic action among stakeholders preclude what may be understood as the more dynamic co-construction of *stakeholding* in participation. This is the idea that individuals actively construct and promote their stakes in relation to others and that though such social interactions, new stakes and transformed relationships can potentially emerge (Ison & Watson 2007). However, stakeholding fundamentally depends on deliberation and a readiness on the part of participants and institutions alike to enter such a co-constructive process, something that is sorely missing. As we contend, however, the fundamental capacity on the part of citizens to do so may be in place, but it is contingent on the neutralisation of institutional power structures to be productively harnessed.

The stakeholder model in itself, as contended, did not originate with any sort of democratic intent. Indeed, the stakeholder model was popularised within business administration and business economics in the 1980s (Freeman & Reed 1983). Here, it emerged as a legal notion seen as a way for "shareholders" to denote persons holding value (money or property) to which more than one person can stake claims. A brief archaeology of the stakeholder concept prior to its popularisation in the 1980s has been attempted by scholars, notably Ramirez (1999) and Clayton (2014). Recent investigations suggest that the word stakeholder can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century, when it denoted the third party entrusted with the stakes of a bet, again involving monetary goods. The term stakeholder was first formally defined in 1963 by the Stanford Research Institute as comprising "those groups without whose support the organization would cease to exist" (1963, p. 89). To much herald, it expanded the notions of shareholders as the only group that management needed to be sensitive towards, and this has also been credited with laying the groundwork for organisational ethics like Corporate Social Responsibility.

In spite of its enlarging of the boundaries of responsibility, the idea of the stakeholder was—and remains ultimately—a theory on enterprise about who shall control benefits and interests. The enterprise simply constituted a nexus of private agreements as transactionally negotiated (Brummer 1991). There was some egalitarian merit to the adoption of the stakeholder beyond the narrow "shareholder" concept:

> All persons or groups with legitimate interests participating in an enterprise do so to obtain benefits and there is no prima facie priority of one set of interests and benefits over another.
>
> (Donaldson & Preston 1995, p. 68)

To lay the groundwork for more ethical business practices, Freeman (1984) noted that stakeholder management emerged as an organisational

strategy emphasising relationships and ongoing dialogue through the supply chain in a way that could integrate ethics. However, a lack of normative basis and an orientation towards output efficiency unarguably laid the bedrock of the stakeholder approach and imposed limits on its ethical concerns. The literature emphasises the turn to stakeholder management, in large part, for the following reasons: 1) to maintain a good reputation with external groups affecting the organisation's ongoing success, 2) to attain performance objectives through more strategic decision-making, 3) to secure competitive advantage, 4) to protect against lawsuits and juridification (Donaldson & Preston 1995). The conclusion of this is that stakeholder thinking is fundamentally and implicitly managerial, orientated towards strategic outcomes and performance objectives.

How then, did this highly managerial corporative strategy earn its wings within NRM? While Freeman advocated for the integration of the stakeholder approach into more disciplines, there was in fact a delay before it became established in environmental planning. This was in large part due to the fact that public participation in this sector generally lagged behind participation in, for example, education, working life and public policy. Growing demand for public participation—catalysed in the 1960s and intensifying in the 1970s—was responsible for some of the first institutionalised participative processes in these fields (Pateman 1970). The rationale for decentralising decision-making authority to relevant public actors and citizens can be said to have been twofold. First, there were pragmatic—or instrumental—motives for doing so, including the acknowledgment that such forms of governance were better equipped to legitimise public decisions and policy. Thus, efficiency and compliance with plans could be attained and output legitimacy was secured. Herein we find an unarguable parallel to stakeholder management within the business administration tradition, whose objectives with the approach also centred on maximising performance and profit by serving the interests of the enterprise through promoting private interests.

Second, a normative justification could also be heard for public participation, though often drowned out by calls for efficiency. This rationale adhered to far loftier ideals whereby participation by the public promoted public sovereignty, the collective ownership of common resources and the cultivation of citizenship and citizen autonomy for the intrinsic virtues of these pursuits. This was not immediately reconcilable with stakeholder governance. Here, a preoccupation with ensuring better performance through compliance with regulations prevailed. Indeed, it was a pragmatic and efficient way of organising the kind of representative democracy necessary for large, complex societies. In a libertarian vein, it presupposed that individuals can, as stakeholders of a constituency, a stake or a preference, both promote and protect a priori interests settled in their respective constituencies or private lives.

While stakeholder governance proliferated with other sectors, it was not until Rio and the 1990s that calls for public participation in NRM were truly answered. In some ways this was curious, given that ecology

and science more generally had been the purview of amateurs up until the nineteenth century, before the professionalisation of science (Miller-Rushing et al. 2012). Nevertheless, the stakeholder approach quickly gained credence within this sector as decentralisation brought issues back into civil society. Since then, stakeholder participation has generally been assessed through the application of typologies that distinguish the degree to which stakeholders are engaged, including Arnstein's ladder of participation, where the rungs go from tokenistic non-participation to citizen-empowered fora. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to review the ways in which stakeholder governance has been applied to diverse environmental issues, we engage in the following section with some pathological tendencies of stakeholder models. We identify some typical tendencies of the stakeholder approach in NRM with the objective of tracing these to the tradition enumerated above, and to negative implications in terms of democracy.

Stakeholder Praxis: Forces Challenging Governance

We trace the pathological tendencies of stakeholder models of governance to the tripartite of issues coherent with our theoretical premise, namely, the libertarian tradition with which it has allied, instrumentality as understood by Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action (TCA) and its marriage with a relational approach from social psychology often linked to consultancy. In so doing, we argue that shortcomings of stakeholder thinking lie both in its fundamental logic and structure, but also with the types of schools and traditions with which it has locked on to in recent years.

We first concede that representative democracy is a necessity for complex, large societies. Indeed, it offers the constitutional premises for the legal protection of citizens and ensures that political preferences on common issues are met (Rawls 1971). When this vertical dimension is expressed in stakeholder governance, moreover, citizens may find comfort in the fact that they are not made to deliberate themselves, but can leave politics to more skilled orators or those who feel more strongly on the issues debated (Parkinson 2003). This means, however, that citizens with greater potential for attitude transformation and "stakeholding" are weeded out on a fundamental level in favour of more strategic and rhetorically empowered actors in the form of stakeholders. Once in the stakeholder forum, the vertical orientation to democratic praxis is retained. It is so, primarily, because at the end of the day, aggregation determines the final outcome. Given that what we suggested was a privatistic orientation to stakeholder fora and the *de facto* "cost" of participation incurred towards one's private interest, it is hence possible to confine one's opinion in the private realm and protect it from deliberative scrutiny and from the perceived threat of other, adversarial political actors, with whom transformative relationships are possible. Elster (1997) argued that public attitudes under these conditions are spared exposure to the public act of critical evaluation—which included giving, weighing, accepting or

rejecting reasons for a claim—and construed as off-limits to the participative process given negative freedom. In effect, stakeholder fora with strong adherence to the aggregation of votes reproduce private stakes and prevent stakeholders from "stakeholding" or, even better, engaging as citizens.

To this end, there are many forces that fundamentally undermine stakeholding and the suspension of private stakes towards the common good. These include individualism, privatisation and marketisation (ecosystem services). On the former, Daemen and Schaap (2012) contend that:

> The public is realigning itself. People are bonding less with the local community and becoming more individualistic. (p. 12)

This phenomenon is particularly manifested in developing nations, where communal, citizen-based institutions are being eroded as a result of post-colonial policies that heavily favour individual and commercial interests (Leach 1999; Wood 2008). Coupled with a trend away from communal management towards what is in many cases the privatisation of the environment—with national parks a prominent example (Armitage 2005)—individualism and other forces challenge the potential of citizens to reach a common understanding and a shared view of common resources.

Another one of these forces is marketisation (or "commodification" in some literature). With reference to Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* (1979), one can argue that the roles of citizenship, publicity and community have been eroded as stakeholder governance is increasingly initiated on the part of the government (Hansen 2012). King and Cruickshank (2010) frame this in the need for citizens who are there for the long haul to engage governments (which have a high turnover) rather than the other way around. Following the forces of marketisation, we have been witnessing in recent decades an outsourcing of engagement methods to specialised consultants. In Scandinavia, the Technology Council in Denmark is one such example which became internationally known for their Consensus Conferences (Joss & Duran 1995). In 2005, they introduced the Citizens' Summit model as an engagement method for public participation in relation to a participative process on national park processes. However, in practice, the Citizens' Summit model saw the bulk of the responsibility reside with public servants and the consultants who arrange such events, and the model was characterised by manipulation. More importantly, the process did not match the rhetoric or the notion that such an approach to governance in any way promoted a sense of civic autonomy or motivated citizens to take ownership of plans over their local environment (Hansen 2012).

The third force that challenges stakeholding and with it, the potential of NRM policy making in modernity, but which is in fact promoted by stakeholder governance, is fragmentation. Taking Bohm's (1980) discourse on fragmentation and wholeness as his point of departure, Isaacs (2002) suggests that one of the most pervasive influences on society at large has been

the fragmentation of thought, which he likens to a virus that has infected all manner of human endeavours. It is argued that we increasingly divide our experience into isolated parts. Framed within the context of stakeholder governance, then, experts in various fields struggle to engage across their specialties. But more importantly, fragmentation is particularly felt when citizens come together and plan for the future. Rather than reason collectively, stakeholders defend their isolated part and fail to inquire into others', with such parochialism often resulting in the polarisation of opinion and conflict. This fragmentation of thought and practice, Isaacs argued, should be regarded as a consequence of an incomplete view of reality. Mendelberg (2002) discussed this ancient social dilemma and argued that such pursuit of narrow self-interest, while rational for the individual, is harmful and irrational for the collective. With this in mind, one may question the ability of stakeholder models—which are premised upon the fragmentation of private interests and most importantly, the preservation of this state of affairs—to realise collective goals.

Returning to the observation that initiating stakeholder governance is frequently the purview of the central government, a paternalistic element underlies this participation. Although Reed et al. (2009) conceded that stakeholder constitution can sometimes be bottom-up reconstructive, it is, in the majority of cases, either a top-down implementation or an analytic construct by researchers, consultants and other experts, rarely arrived at by the citizens who are shoehorned into these stakes. To this end, many NRM projects still offer little transparency as to the constitution of stakeholders. In those cases where citizens themselves undertake a stakeholder analysis, the procedure reproduces the essential pathologies of the stakeholder model in the general sense. One can consider as an example here the card sorting processes or actor-matrix alliances where participants are asked to divide the arena into discrete stakes and formulate adversaries and allies (Hare & Pahl-Wostl 2002). A strategic rationality is promoted at the onset, even if it is under the guise of a bottom-up emancipatory democratic form of governance.

To this end, the adversarial and relational trend to stakeholder management has made great strides in the recent decade insofar as it is popularly employed by consultants. Indeed, it has engendered an industry of new experts on communication practice, centring on conflict management, consensus building, mediation, negotiation, communication and strategic manipulation to pursue aims. The intersubjective relationship between "you" and "me" is brought to the forefront at the expense of the substantive. These post-structuralist approaches commonly draw insights from social psychology. One slew of such approaches, the agonistic school within governance, has harnessed the potential of messier, conflictual approaches, arguing that NRM needs dissent rather than consent (Peterson et al. 2006; Mouffe 2009). Hence, actor-group matrices link participants in relations of conflict, complementarity and cooperation. They emphasise weak or strong bonds between stakeholders, and promote the constitution of networks to

further one's interests. Common to such approaches is that they invariably place a strong emphasis on the relational, as opposed to the substantive emphasis of NRM. In so doing, they potentially entrench negative and value-laden dynamics between actors (Reed 2008). The enterprise is inveigling and lucrative, but obscures common, recognisable interests. The task of stakeholding, denoting the transformation of relationships to others, should thereby be to resist the temptation to focus on this co-constructive, inter-subjective process of relationship and network building and instead concern how fixed, adversarial relations can become "unlocked" to make room for substantive stakes to be brought to the forefront of deliberation.

What, then, are the societal implications of what we collectively call "stakeholder" or "strategic rationality"? What happens to Commons when it is challenged by this form of governance? In Habermas's TCA, the consequence is the colonisation of the lifeworld by the instrumental rationality of the system apparatus and of the strategic rationalities of individualist stakeholders. Here, arguments are now less responsive to reason and instead ruled by steering media (money, rhetoric, influence, etc.). The result, ultimately, is that projects and policy are arrived at while lacking the necessary legitimacy. At best, coupled with robust enforcement, they may command compliance, but there is no citizen ownership of these Commons. What this means on a societal level is that with the further colonisation of the lifeworld, available rationalities are restricted and shifted back into parliamentary circles (Habermas 1962). The private interests of stakeholders are dislodged from the purview of the public sphere and implicitly made subject to state control. In this development, citizens have become passive consumers of mass media rather than a politically active sovereign capable of tending to common issues, much like voters electing representatives through a ballot box. In effect, the development has entailed the loss of horizontal communication between citizens and the domination of vertical communication between mass media, state and consumers. Furthermore, in this predicament, the public is essentially left to approve expert-based government decisions (Samuel-Azran 2009). This is in contrast with a view on democracy and public participation that takes into account both procedural criteria and which protects the individual's libertas (the ideal freedom) from the rule of law and arbitrary interference (Pettit 1999). Specifically, we require a mode of participation in NRM that ensures both public and private autonomy. The former authorises citizens to engage in collective law-making on Commons, while private autonomy protects citizens from undue interference, which, we argue, must be understood as the state and its media, and not deliberation as such.

Stakeholder Governance From a Scandinavian Perspective

As previously mentioned, the stakeholder concept stretches far back in history, but is a relatively young concept within governance. We point towards

two paradoxes here. The first and already stated one is that the concept of stakeholder is necessarily detached from the usual terminology of democracy. Theoretically developed from the twentieth-century business administration pursuit for cooperative success, it has now been given a new task within a new field where monetary goods form only part of diverse stakes: that is, to strengthen participative and deliberative processes in society. As such, it is more in line with the notion of New Public Management, which started to dominate public administration in the 1980s and 1990s as the antecedent for the neoliberal ideology in contemporary society.

The second paradox is that stakeholder governance as a practice does not constitute a new governance approach within a Scandinavian context. On the contrary, the inclusion of the significant power holders of society in policy making and subsequent policy implementation goes far back to the origin of the so-called Nordic Model, which was the basis for the Scandinavian welfare system. One of the main pillars of this model has been the agreement of a shared responsibility between employers and employees. As an example, in Denmark, this agreement hails from 1899, and since the parliamentarian situation in the Scandinavian countries more or less has balanced the interest of those two actors for the last 100 years, no significant political decision was possible from the 1930s and no political decisions could be forwarded without taking the interest of organisations of employers and employees into account (Hansen 1985). Gradually, this Danish model of stakeholder governance was expanded to include other interests (Hansen 1985). Despite differences in the historical trajectory, the inclusion of various interests in policy making goes for Norway and Sweden as well. In terms of distribution of welfare and mitigation of conflicts, it is evident that the Scandinavian stakeholder governance model has been one of the most successful in the world.

To conclude this section, we do not wish to suggest that the intentions behind stakeholder participation are pernicious institutional inventions, nor do we wish to suggest that the plurality of governance forms accommodated within the umbrella of stakeholder participation are devoid of any democratic merit. In fact, we take seriously the claim that the model offers some way towards accruing both instrumental and normative legitimacy in its pursuit of collaborative plans and in providing citizens with a voice. We do argue, however, that within the present historical situation, it falls short of realising these interrelated goals of legitimacy, in large part because democracy in its citizens' participative and deliberative modes was never built into its original motivation, conceptually or in practice. Further, we contend that the structure and tradition of stakeholder governance frequently reproduces the same problems it is called upon to solve—namely, the call for alternative, everyday rationalities to replace solely institutional rationalities bounded by instrumental reason and guided by steering media like money, power and administrative authority. At worst, stakeholder thinking is fundamentally susceptible to systematically distorted communication between participants

because of the way in which it is set up, and the instrumental logic to which it necessarily adheres. Such distortion does not only contribute to democratic deficits and impair the legitimacy of plans and agencies by taking plans further away from the public; it also obstructs attempts to include people as citizens trying to identify and address the material and immaterial Commons in a transformative way (see Clausen in this volume). In what follows, we provide two main examples from the Scandinavian context of how this obstruction plays out.

SYSTEMATICALLY DISTORTED PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

From time to time, usually in response to dissatisfaction with current premises, attempts are made to include citizens in more radical and genuine participative ways. Such initiatives are often put forward by individuals or groups of citizens in response to urgent political needs at local and national levels. Occasionally, however, we see governmental institutions initiate new and more or less radical democratisation attempts, either on the policy level or in relation to specific initiatives within certain problematic areas of governance. The experience of such attempts, however, is that they fail, not due to the incapacity of or conflict amongst the citizens participating or who are supposed to participate, but due to institutional barriers and the interference of stakeholders on various levels in the decision-making process. Some of the cases presented in this volume illuminate these institutional barriers in relation to specific contexts, such as nature conservation in Nicaragua, wildlife management in Mozambique, wildlife management in Norway, the national park context in Denmark and the water management context in Sweden and Denmark (see Sriskandarajah, Giva and Hansen; Vasstrøm; Nielsen, Hansen and Sriskandarajah; and Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). Despite the diversity of environmental, political and cultural contexts, it is possible to identify the same type of stakeholder interference institutionally reproduced by particular interests, either within governmental agencies or by interests outside of governmental agencies, but that have been given a certain say and thereby a certain power.

In the following, we exemplify the described problem by describing two cases from Sweden in which a more radical democratisation was planned from within the governmental system itself but was never implemented due to resistance from stakeholders. In one case, the resistance and inertia came from within the governmental system; in the other case, the resistance came from stakeholders within as well as from outside the governmental system.

Failed Attempts to Reform the Swedish Nature Conservation Policy

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the wolf management situation in Scandinavia—as well as in other parts of the world—is highly conflictual,

and in Sweden, it has eroded the legitimacy as well as the wildlife management abilities of Swedish authorities (von Essen et al. 2014). In 2010, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency was in the process of revising the wolf management policy, and Hans Peter Hansen was asked by the agency to lead a desk study on the socio-economic aspects of wolf management. In the wake of this work, the agency requested his advice on a policy revision regarding ways forward for including citizens affected by wolf management. At a meeting on the 16th of September 2010, he suggested to the agency a radically different approach to the existing one, which, after some consideration, was accepted by the then-head of the wildlife unit.

The suggested approach was based on experiences from two previous Critical Utopian Action Research projects in Denmark (see Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume) and on the idea of inviting all of the interested citizens in the affected areas to take part in a two-year facilitated process that offered the participants the possibility of developing their own management plans for the future wolf management policy. The entire process was to be facilitated and documented by external, experienced facilitators. It was to be guided by four principles:

1) The process will insist on a visionary horizon as opposed to the traditional dystopian horizon.
2) The participants are committed to focus on the issue, not the persons!
3) The process will optimise participation and responsibility through a citizen-oriented approach, not a stakeholder approach, and all participants will only speak for themselves.
4) The process will include whatever expertise is identified as needed by the participants.

Furthermore, the participating citizens would be committed to present their drafted ideas and thoughts to the wider public before finalising the concluding reports.

The indicated main reason why the head of the wildlife unit was attracted to this quite radical model was due to the authorities' long-lasting negative experience with the existing policy, which was unsustainable in political, social and ecological terms. The head of the wildlife unit expressed that if the proposed model turned out to be a success, it could become a model in other problematic nature conservation contexts. At the same time, she was well aware of the political risks proposing such a radical plan, and she expressed this awareness in the following statement: "Let's try this, even if there is a high risk that we will be thrown under the bus" (our translation from a personal note from a meeting at the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, Stockholm, 16th of September 2010). The prediction, as it turned later out, was not unfounded in this case.

There was no naïve belief or expectation that the proposed model would solve all problems or that all resultant management plans would be

seamlessly implemented. As such, the process could not beforehand claim the commitment of the governmental agencies, the government or the Swedish parliament to follow the management plans developed by the citizens. Further, if the approach were applied, many groups of citizens would potentially be established, and although the idea was—along the way—to merge groups with similar ideas, several reports with different and perhaps even contradictory management proposals could be produced. Also for that reason, it would be impossible to implement all ideas. On the other hand, it was also believed that it would be difficult for politicians and authorities to simply neglect the management plans. It was furthermore speculated that it would be possible to identify some common significant aspects of the produced ideas and plans for the future management which in fact could be implemented.

As a result of the decision of the head of the wildlife unit, the proposal on citizens' participation was integrated in the proposal for the wolf management, which was then sent out for a public hearing. During the public hearing process, several stakeholders expressed aversion to the idea. Two of the most critical stakeholders were the Swedish Hunting Association and the county government. The Swedish Hunting Association replied, saying that giving non-landowners and non-hunters a say in the wolf management issue was a terrifying prospect (SEPA, memo from stakeholder meeting, 29th–30th September 2010). Despite the discontent from one set of stakeholders, the head of the wildlife unit insisted on keeping the proposal, but at some point, some of the county governments made a united initiative which forced the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency to indefinitely abandon the proposed citizens' participation model in the wolf management policy document. In addition, the government had expressed concern that a two-year citizens-focused process would be too long in relation to the pressure from the commission of the European Union on Sweden to comply with the requirement of the Habitat directive to ensure that the Swedish wolves attained a "good ecological status". Paradoxically, however, the case could be made that the failure to engage in a new initiative due to its drawn-out nature manifests precisely the kind of institutional inertia that generally distorts or hampers political engagement on divisive issues. We observe, in accordance with the literature (see Markovitz 2005), that this inertia is both a built-in feature of the system *and* a more pathologic resource which actors who have no interest in deliberation or compromise can harness to block proposals. A consequence of this is often entrenched polarisations and unwillingness on the part of the system to change to accommodate new ways of planning. This was certainly reflected in the opposition by entrenched stakeholders to the new citizens' initiative. Because of inertia and resistance, then, the proposed citizens' participation was instead made optional, meaning that it in reality was not implemented.

A requirement commonly identified in citizen-driven, initiated and/or focused NRM projects is the need to have a say, being listened to and to be

taken seriously by the authorities, particularly on matters of direct relevance for citizens' everyday lives. This observation corresponds well with Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, emphasising the intimate, social and political needs of all human beings (Honneth 1995). As mentioned by Clausen and Nielsen and Nielsen (in this volume) in relation to the national park process in Denmark, the local people of the island of Nyord developed and presented a model of direct local involvement in the future administration and nature management of the nature in their area. The model was based on a call from the involved citizens in all of the so-called National Park Pilot Projects in Demark that expressed their desire to have a say in the everyday administration and management of the areas that were being considered as national parks (Hansen 2012). The direct involvement and influence seems to be a universal precondition for local communities also taking on the NRM responsibility on an everyday basis (see also Sriskandarajh, Givá and Hansen and Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). Five years before the failed attempt to initiate citizen participation within Swedish wolf management and a few years before the National Park Pilot Projects in Denmark, local involvement and influence was in fact put high on the agenda of Swedish NRM policy, not by local communities and citizens' groups, but by the government itself.

After the Swedish parliament election in 1998, the political mandate of the social democratic government under Prime Minister Göran Persson was extended for an additional four years. Prime Minister Persson appointed Kjell Ingemar Larsson as Minister of the Environment. Although the Social Democrats have not historically identified NRM as a central issue, Larsson was especially interested in nature conservation and outdoor recreation and responded positively when members of his staff suggested the need for a more citizen-oriented nature conservation policy (Hansen & Peterson forthcoming). One of the main arguments offered for establishing a new policy was the fact that the Swedish state budget on biodiversity (which included nature conservation) had increased rapidly from approximately 200 million Swedish kroner to two billion Swedish kronor. The policy and guidelines had not changed in proportion to this emphasis, prompting an internal memorandum calling for greater focus on the local level, viewing nature conservation as an engine for local development and for local participation, and dialogue as a precondition for successful nature conservation. The new policy faced strong resistance from civil servants at the level of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Naturvårdsverket), and, due to the particular constitutional system of Sweden, it took several years before the Swedish government officially managed to present probably one of the most radical democratisation policies in the Western world. The new policy was presented at a conference in 2005 as a 10-point program emphasising not just local participation, but also citizen-driven governance locally (Hela Sverige ska leva, URL 2015a). The new 10-point program was followed by a number of official documents from the government, which included the

implementation of a nationwide educational program for NRM officers on "Dialogue, Local Participation and Local Management" (our translation).

Partly due to a change in government in 2006, and partly due to the aforementioned hesitation and resistance at the level of the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, the strong rhetoric on local participation in general and local management in particular was gradually removed from the agenda and was not in any way further institutionalised. At a conference on local NRM management in the Swedish national parliament on the 20th of May, 2015, several participants from local citizens' initiatives expressed their disappointment with the experienced institutional barriers in their attempt to take responsibility for the material as well as for the immaterial Commons on the local and regional levels (Hela Sverige ska leva, URL 2015b).

The failed attempts to democratise the Swedish NRM policy described here illuminate the powerful influence on public governance of stakeholders at the expense of citizens' participation and deliberative democratic processes. Despite all good intentions at various governmental levels as well as at the level of civil society, the political domination of strategic interests prevents society from developing new democratic means to more profoundly deal with the eco-political crises of contemporary society. One can furthermore argue that the stakeholder dominance of Western democratic political systems holds the risk of gradually eroding the cultural reproduction of democracy by marginalising the majority of citizens. The consequences of marginalisation in terms of making societies vulnerable to political populism and totalitarian tendencies are historically well documented.

An important lesson one can take from the primacy of "stakeholderism" at the expense of citizens within sector areas such as NRM is that democracy and participation are not just arbitrary concepts. Whatever model is chosen and whichever practice is applied do set out the direction for the political development of societies. Thus, the main question is what political future we want for ourselves and for our future generations. In fact, it is only with the articulation of this that the Brundtland Report's concept of sustainable development is given any sort of meaning beyond the gear or speed at which we proceed toward the future, by answering the question: development *towards what*? If we really want all citizens of society to develop and exercise a sense of ownership and responsibility for material and immaterial Commons, then stakeholder governance constitutes one of the perhaps most pervasive constraints of contemporary society.

TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

The focus on the intersubjective relationship brought in with "stakeholderism" has to a large extent been mirrored within sociology, political science and economics. The intersubjective aspects of social action are indeed

valuable, but one can also argue that the scientific community for a long period of time has failed its responsibility also to address the necessary cultural and political reproduction of the Commons. As stated by Nielsen and Nielsen:

> The foundations of 'The Common Third' have to be defined and tested in the exact perspective of the life conditions of human beings including the dialectic of the differentiated cultural and material dimensions which—in particular when we talk about nature—in a very definite way connect the local with the global.
>
> (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, p. 20, our translation.)

In the beginning of the chapter, we argued that the active involvement and participation of the citizens is one, if not the most crucial, challenge of our time, since there are no longer other mechanisms in society guiding us into the future. The Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman refers to this situation as *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2000), meaning that we—especially in the western part of the world—have all become travellers, no longer rooted in one geographical context and over a lifespan bound to one kind of job, one kind of sexuality, one kind of political conviction or religious belief, one family, etc. Because of the increased mobility and new means of communication, we are at the same time confronted with many divides and, together with our lack of clear values, we experience a sense of insecurity that creates anxiety, tensions and even hostility between human beings. According to Richard Sennett (2012), our only chance of survival as democratic societies is to reinvent a new kind of collective sense and to cultivate a political culture based on dialogue, a dialogue that is: 1) informal, 2) conditioned by a willingness to listen, 3) committed to collaboration. "Stakeholderism" is contrary to this kind of dialogue and in line with the described weak cultural reproduction of the horizontal dimensions of democracy in society, it is obvious that the type of dialogue called for is not there and is therefore something we have to invent.

As exemplified in this book, Action Research scholars in Scandinavia are systematically experimenting with establishing new arenas of commoning via dialogue, understood as physical and mental spaces in which we as members of society—citizens—can identify the material as well as immaterial Commons, a specific kind of social space or *Community Agoras* (see also Sriskandarajah, Givá and Hansen in this volume). The purpose is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, thus rejecting modernity, but to get the values back into political reproduction society, acknowledging dialogue as the only space for balancing the common pool of knowledge, experience and values. What many of these Action Research projects so far have revealed, without neglecting the numerous existing difficulties, is that the most significant barriers towards the identification of the Commons are not to be found at the level of the citizens, but in the intersection between the

horizontal and vertical political structures. Action Research might in general have been reluctant to engage with the institutionalised power structures of society, but as also illustrated in this book, there are multiple examples where action researchers have taken up that challenge to confront the institutional and structural challenges and barriers of "stakeholderism".

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5 Bridging Divides Through Spaces of Change

Action Research for Cultivating the Commons in Human-Inhabited Protected Areas in Nicaragua and Mozambique

Nadarajah Sriskandarajah, Nícia Givá and Hans Peter Hansen

INTRODUCTION

Institutionally driven governance mechanisms in place in many protected areas, including national parks, have contributed to large divides being maintained between conservation goals and the livelihood claims of park inhabitants. Park authorities struggle with the lack of legitimacy for their traditional expert solutions, while park inhabitants, often representing low-income communities with inherently weak positions, live with restrictive rules, unmet promises, lack of trust, uncertainty and the fear of eviction. How to deal with such conflicts has remained a debated topic within conservation literature. In this chapter, we outline the experience of working with two such situations of national parks inhabited by low-income communities, one in Nicaragua and the other in Mozambique. Both parks are relatively recent in origin, though they differ enormously in size and complexity.

Zapatera Archipelago National Park in Nicaragua is a class II protected area created in 1983. Zapatera Island and a small number of islets surrounding it form the national park. With an area of 52 km^2, Zapatera is the second largest island on Lake Nicaragua, which is the largest lake in Central America at over 8,000 km^2. Legally, the only activities permitted on the island are research, environmental education and interpretation, sustainable tourism and recreation. It is not supposed to be inhabited by communities and the only infrastructure allowed is that for the promotion, monitoring and control of the park. Yet, seven communities of people from previous times of cattle ranching on the island by private owners constitute the local inhabitants, all in all 1,000 people or so, with low levels of income.

Limpopo National Park (LNP) in Mozambique is part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP), which integrates the Kruger National Park in South Africa and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe. LNP occupies about 1.3 million hectares crossing three districts in Gaza province, with a buffer zone comprised of 235,000 km^2 (16.5% of the LNP). It hosts 44 villages with a total of 35,000 people, and the area they inhabit has

subsequently been called Multiple Use Zone (MUZ) instead of a buffer zone, where people's livelihood needs and conservation and tourism objectives meet. Thus, under the practice of recognising a MUZ, the LNP management policy allows people who live in the buffer zone to use its natural resources for a restricted set of subsistence purposes. The erratic and scarce rainfall turns LNP into a drought-prone area that is vulnerable to food insecurity. On the other hand, being a wildlife and tourism-oriented park, there has been positive wildlife population growth, which increases pressure and tension at the people-wildlife interface in the MUZ.

Taking an Action Research approach in our study of the two parks enabled the creation of social spaces for the park management, resident communities and other actors to come together, envision alternate futures to mainstream conservation practice, explore other understandings towards imagining the Commons in human-nature relationships and seek avenues for change and co-management. The approach was characterised by its deliberative, emancipatory and democratic point of departure, while maintaining a dialectic perspective on the role of knowledge, experience and values. Facilitated workshops as the main method iteratively led to the active engagement of park authorities, residents and other actors in these mediated spaces of power and mutual learning, leading to substantial shifts in positions by all actors. While we could say that the potential for deliberative processes in cultivating the Commons has been established in this work, the capacity for this to bridge the divide, transform the deeply entrenched structures and norms of conservation agencies and create the necessary institutional change for systemic governance remains a challenge to be overcome.

In this chapter, contrasting the dominating governance perspective on how institutional systems can increase their legitimacy, we will take a community perspective and examine the role and potential of community learning arenas or *democratic agoras* that have been created at the community level as a framework for institutions in Natural Resource Management (NRM) to enable the attainment of better environmental goals, more dynamic processes of deliberation and higher levels of engagement among of citizens, experts and authorities, despite their different rationalities.

SPACES OF CHANGE: TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN CITIZENS, AUTHORITIES AND EXPERTS

The tensions within NRM are part of a general societal problem, one of the most profound sustainability challenges faced by contemporary society being how to activate the resources of its citizens in the development and subsequent evaluation of public policy. From the point of view of public institutions, the problem is often defined as a question of legitimacy. During the past two decades, a variety of governance strategies have emerged trying

to overcome the legitimacy challenge (Rhodes & Heywood 2002), promoting analytic categories such as networks, interest groups, stakeholders, conflict management, consensus building, etc. (especially regarding stakeholders, see Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). One prominent response to the growing pressure has been decentralised bodies that "involve" various citizens groups and organisations. However, the establishment of a more participatory policy strategy via various decentralised bodies does not always seem to activate a broader spectrum of human resources in society, nor does it seem to lead to the expected legitimacy.

From a citizen and community perspective, the problem, in fact, appears different. Individual citizens and local communities tend to see NRM institutions as paternalistic and they feel being subject to marginalisation and exclusion when it comes to their existing knowledge, experience, concerns and hopes for the future. Under such conditions, the reaction from these citizens and communities can be everything from apathy and legal or illegal activism to political radicalism.

Contrary to the dominance of the institutional perspective, little has so far been done to deal with the problem from citizens' and the communities' perspectives. This has been so even in the Nordic countries, despite the long tradition of a high degree of citizen-driven democratic processes for change. From the late nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, cooperative movements (especially of smaller farmers) played an important role as the democratic space for the creation of social and environmental changes. During most of the twentieth century, the civil society of the Nordic countries has been self-organising in endless numbers of democratic networks, mobilising citizens in all kinds of economic, recreational, religious and political activities at the community level.

Due to the changed economic systems, sociodemographic changes and more institutionalised and centralised power structures of society, many of these previous democratic structures have been gradually eroded. Today, few structures exist to utilise the responsibility and human resources of local communities in the overall struggle for a more sustainable future. This has been so despite the fact that the international society has, from the Brundtland Report onwards, continuously emphasised the necessity for activating people across traditional institutional sectors in creating a better and more sustainable future (Brundtland 1987). Instead of being the starting point for change towards a more hopeful and sustainable future, it can be argued that sustainability has been institutionalised as a dystopian *risk strategy* that protects economic growth against its own externalities (Sachs 2000; Clausen et al. 2010).

These aspects of the management of nature as well as the sustainable use of natural resources in Nordic, European and international contexts have become a core area of research under the rubric of Environmental Communication at SLU, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The projects described here are situated in this milieu. A main point in this work

has been to reconsider conservation approaches alongside people's livelihood needs through bringing back the notion of the Commons. This is being attempted via experiments with social learning and citizens' participation, while allowing for various types of rationalities and articulations related to the human-nature interaction to be brought out. The perspective is to open up space for linked actions that address both biophysical and socio-cultural components, hoping to create a "double dividend" through improvements in resource management as well as in basic human needs. In reviewing collaboration, learning and multi-level governance in a dozen or so NRM situations, Armitage et al. (2007) concluded that co-management, understood here as shared decision-making power between state and local users, was a purposeful power-sharing arrangement. For them, adaptive co-management as a concept that further emphasises the learning and capacity-building dimensions moved actors towards transformational processes. The focus of capacity and institution building could be placed on actors from multiple levels beyond the usual two, namely the community and the governmental institutions. They found that co-management and adaptive co-management research indicated the absence of consistent methodological approaches, or criteria for measuring success.

In synthesising their review, they offered criteria, such as the degree of power sharing, trust and respect, shared vision building, horizontal and vertical links and networks and ways of bridging different knowledge systems as some of the ten most useful criteria in the maturation process of adaptive co-management arrangements in NRM. More recently, Plummer et al. (2012), in a systematic review of over 100 published studies of applied experiences and scholarship of adaptive co-management, commented on the difficulty of reaching robust evidentiary insights and argued for the need for adaptive co-management scholars to pursue theoretical development in rigorous ways that facilitate empirically based cross-site comparisons.

Though deliberation as an approach to communication in group situations has been linked to NRM contexts, as Zachrisson (2012) has noted, most often, deliberation has been treated as being synonymous with communication within a participatory setting and not being viewed in terms of its specific quality or its link to deliberative democratic theory. Emphasis on the deliberative as well as the democratic ideals is what we take from theory and the opportunities such democratic deliberations offer for citizens to reach deeper levels of understanding through facilitated debate and discussions about their common issues in NRM (Meadowcraft 2004). Reaching reasonable and well-informed opinions leads them to revise their preferences and deal with their differences, thereby allowing deliberation to also act as a conflict resolution mechanism. As noted in the literature, deliberation is an understudied aspect of co-management institutions and the common pool theory, and deliberative democracy itself is criticised for lacking empirical studies. Therefore, the two streams of theory and practice, NRM and deliberative democracy, have great potential to

cross-fertilise each other (Zachrisson 2012). This is also what informs our two national park projects.

The conception of protected areas as an important mechanism for protecting biodiversity, as places of high social and economic value, and as a means for species and habitat management and recovery, has led to the creation of more than 100,000 sites covering 11.5% of the earth's land surface over the last four decades (Dudley 2008). Decades of experience with these designated ways of mitigating threats to biodiversity, in combination with the lack of legitimacy of traditional expert solutions, have increased the need for new democratic perspectives on nature and landscapes and for reinventing the notion of the Commons. The establishment of protected areas and different kinds of national parks has to be seen in this perspective. Ways of creating spaces of change must be found, and we consider Action Research a promising tool for that.

ACTION RESEARCH IN NRM

Theoretical Preconditions

Following different theoretical traditions, including Critical Theory, American pragmatism, phenomenology and systems theory, we have to understand the *human-nature relationship* in a different way in order to overcome the one-sided instrumental use of nature which has led to the present sustainability crisis. Human beings are a part of nature and human culture, including economics and production. From that viewpoint, an alternative to the present problematic understanding of nature as mainly a resource for societal development could be developed into a more sensitive and "humble" relationship as the basis of sustainability (zur Lippe 1987; Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). In theories of *ecological modernisation*, the one-sided nature domination is modified by a reflexive culture, but the conceptual dualism between nature and culture has not been overcome (Hajer & Wagenaar 2003). Following Ostrom (1990) and Shiva (2005), a renewed focus on the concept of Commons could be a practical way to overcome this dualism.

In this discussion, the tension between *protected areas* (PAs) and *community livelihoods*, as typically found in relation to national parks, highlights what is at stake. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defined a PA as an "area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means" (cited Dudley 2008). While the debate about whether PAs are more protected with or without human inhabitants is not settled, Hawken and Granoff (2010) have recently argued for the need to move beyond the people-park debate and reimagine the concept of parks itself. They articulate

the complexity of parks and PAs as both imagined places premised on the idea of pristine and untouched nature separate from humans, and as physical places often influenced and inhabited by humans. What is needed is research that is at the intersection of policy and practice, and moving away from the assumption of a rigid human-nature boundary. In reality, however, friction between government authorities and local inhabitants and among locals themselves within PA settings is more the norm.

Four procedural preconditions for *deliberative democracy* could be highlighted: equality, publicity, reasonableness and non-tyranny (Zachrisson 2012). Stating one's reasons for advancing, supporting or criticising proposals to allow for interpersonal reasoning by others, and doing so in public so that all have a chance to judge them, are two of the preconditions. The last one, non-tyranny, assumes that institutional requirements do not constrain the distribution of power in multilayered decision-making social situations. Decisions made under such conditions of authentic deliberation are legitimate, and they actually belong to the core of deliberative theory according to Dryzek (2001). The community-making power of deliberation through opinions being made in public has the potential to produce citizens who are informed, active, responsible and open to others' arguments, and thereby also willing to create a common vision of the desired future, an important prerequisite for collaborative management as an example of deliberative democracy (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2007).

The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argues that the only way to include the full spectrum of rationalities and the values of our everyday lives is through deliberative democratic processes in the public arenas (Habermas 1981, 1989). Following that, the creation of democratic "deliberative agoras"—meaning public arenas for deliberation on issues of common relevance—opening up space for a more sustainable future seems to be one of the most crucial tasks of contemporary society. Such an approach necessitates the role of nature as a tangible common resource of people's everyday lives and therefore calls on common actions that put NRM into the perspective of the often-contradictory concerns and visions of our everyday lives (Læssøe 2008).

In the past decade, various research projects within and outside the Nordic countries have focused on the creation of democratic deliberative agoras in relation to agriculture, rural development and nature and Natural Resource Management (SLIM 2004; Packham & Sriskandarajah 2005; Vasström et al. 2008). Among the Nordic projects, the Halkær Ådal project and the project that emerged from the national park pilot on the Island of Nyord/Møn in Denmark are noteworthy (Clausen and Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). More recently, our work in the context of the Swedish implementation of the European Water Framework Directive has been conducted with the setting up of the basic conditions of a community learning agora in the Lake Tämnaren Water Council in Uppland County (Nielsen, Hansen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). The situations in Nicaragua and

Mozambique pertaining to PA management in human-inhabited national parks taken up in this chapter have also had *community learning agoras* initiated in order to allow for democratic deliberations which do not marginalise the livelihood needs, values and rationalities of citizens affected by nature protection initiatives.

Systemic Action Research

Systemic Action Research has been the chosen approach in the two projects, guided by the need to engage and empower park officials, residents and other actors, in order for them to be involved in bringing about change (action) and improving or building knowledge (research) through rational reflection on personal and/or collective experience (Packham & Sriskandarajah 2005; Nielsen & Nielsen 2005; Burns 2007). It is part of a broader tradition paying stronger attention to bringing a democratic agenda into human-nature research (Midgley 2000; Nielsen & Nielsen 2006; Svensson & Nielsen 2006; Hansen 2008; *Editors' Introduction* in this volume).

Dialogues on human-nature issues should not only be a question of expressing values and future expectations, but also constitute an arena for the sketching and planning of practical experiments where the participants can be involved in change processes, including the often-difficult dialogue and collaboration with the institutional actors in the field. Most usually, social learning has been conceptualised in relation to innovation and change processes, but not in relation to the creation of Commons. Social learning is, in that connection, not only a question of the cooperation of different actors and forms of experience, but also a question of the recognition of nature and landscape as a basic and shared reality which also needs a shared arena for concerted action (Hubert et al. 2012) and for protective and sensitive management and regulation (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006).

Systemic Action Research (SAR) as a strand of Action Research in the two projects reported here is built on the conceptual convergence of systemic thinking and Action Research (Alarcón 2006), the former primarily inspired by the work of Checkland (1981) under the banner of Soft Systems thinking, and the latter implying working through the iterative cycles of action and learning as a means of creating space for deliberation. System is viewed here as a social construct that is useful for framing the inquiry into the complex and dynamic situations in their wholeness. This sense of wholeness about the situation when practicing SAR, including discussions on the system's boundaries and the potential to work with emergent surprises the inquiry would reveal, takes us beyond the usual fragmentation of knowledge and separation of action and research, at a time when the need to see the whole within a systemic world is of greater importance.

Despite their diverse beginnings, the similarities and differences between Systemic Action Research pursued here and the Critical Utopian Action Research discussed in other chapters (see Nielsen, Hansen and Sriskandarajah

in this volume) are worthy of review. The overall logic of using the present state as a launch pad to imagine desirable futures is similar in the two strands of Action Research, though the utopian aspect is put far more up front in Critical Utopian Action Research. Using dialogue as a tool to allow the issues to come to the surface, developing action plans as a way forward to "experiment" with ideas through action and the adoption of workshops as an engaging process remain similar between the two strands. To return to Alarcón (2006), a systemic perspective offers a grounding for Action Research that broadens the "action" and deepens the "research".

THE PROJECTS IN NICARAGUA AND MOZAMBIQUE: TWO NARRATIVES

The first author, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah (NS), is the main researcher working on the Nicaragua project, while engaged in the work of Nícia Givá (NG) in the Mozambique project, as main supervisor of her PhD project. Hans Peter Hansen (HP) is associated with both projects. In the following section, the projects are outlined as two narratives, followed by some comparative reflections, and the section ends with a presentation of some overall perspectives, relating the experiences from the park projects to the future of the Commons.

The Project in Zapatera Archipelago National Park

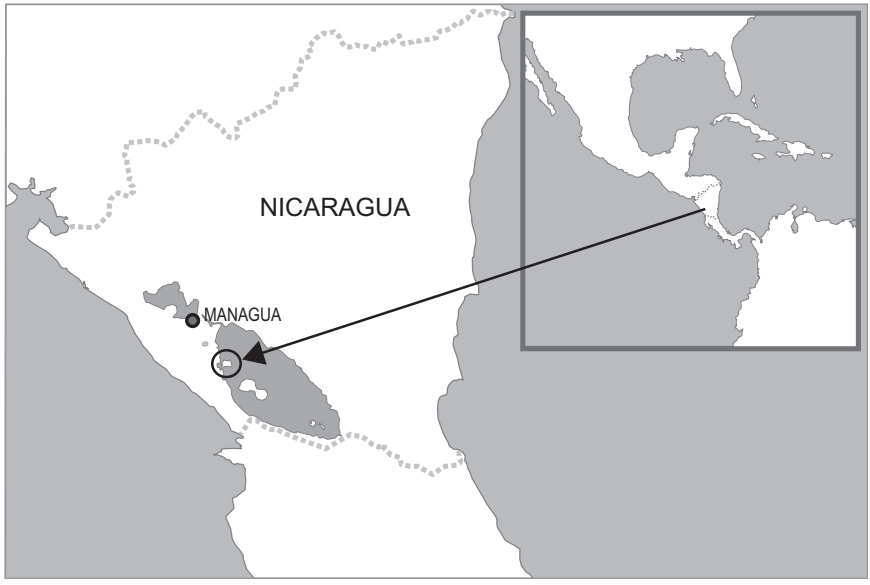
The opportunity to work with the situation in Zapatera Archipelago National Park (ZNP) arose in 2009 when it was offered as the site for a field course taught by the first author (NS) within a master's program at the Universidad Nacional Agraria (UNA). The ZNP case was also taken up as the basis for a master's thesis study by Alex Arévalo Vásquez, supervised by NS, with field work conducted in from January until March 2009, and the thesis published in 2010 (Arévalo Vásquez 2010). This initial work, serving as an unfunded scoping study, formed the basis for a Swedish Research Council grant under the Swedish Research Links program, which enabled the continued research interaction between SLU researchers and UNA researcher Emilio Perez (EP), leading to five further visits and research interventions in Nicaragua over the period of 2012–15. The collaboration of EP, Alex Arévalo Vásquez and Margarita Cuadra (MC) and their input as native Spanish speakers has been significant in the development of this project and is gratefully acknowledged.

Nicaragua, a country with a population of just over 6 million, has 72 protected areas covering about 15% of the land area, 3 of which are national parks. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MARENA) is the institution responsible for directing, regulating and managing protected areas. The Zapatera Archipelago National Park was created in 1983 under

the rule of the Sandinista government and includes Zapatera Island and a small number of islets surrounding it. Zapatera is the second largest island of Lake Nicaragua or Lake Cocibolca, which is also the largest lake of Central America. The volcanic island reaches a height of 629 m above the lake's surface, and the park inhabitants, approximately 1,000 in number, live in one of seven hamlets around the island.

By 2008, MARENA had identified serious threats to the island's environment arising from human activities, which included the transformation of forests into farmlands and pasture, illegal exploitation of timber, fuel wood, fauna and fishing for commercial purposes, destruction and plundering of archaeological remains and population growth from new births and the formation of new settlements inside the island. It is this contest between the intentions of MARENA to manage natural resources in protected areas and the needs of local communities to sustain their livelihoods that became the focus of our study.

The first known inhabitants of Zapatera were the pre-Columbian Chorotega people, who built stone altars for sacrifice, as well as statues, idols and tombs out of volcanic stone. Therefore, it is believed that Zapatera and the islets surrounding it were ceremonial centres and had a sacred value for its early inhabitants. American diplomat Ephraim Squier, who visited the island in 1849, reported the presence of a large number of statues and petroglyphs. He was followed by Swedish naturalist Carl Bovallius, who visited the island in 1883 and discovered and documented all the statues in the settlement of



Map 5.1 The island of Zapatera, Nicaragua. Graphic Anni Hoffrén, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Sonzapote. Looting of the artefacts has been a problem, and most of the stone idols are now at the San Francisco Convent in Granada.

In 1887, Victoriano Lanuza founded the first village on the island and called it Cañas. By 1940, the two landowning families, the Lanuza and Vigil families, had set up cattle ranches on the island, having imported workers from different parts of the country to support the farming activity.

The seven communities on the island today are *Cañas, La Guinea, Terrón Colorado, Santa María, San Miguel Vigil, Sontolar* and *Zonzapote*. In *Terrón Colorado*, the ex-workers of the Caligari Vigil family, whose lands were confiscated by the Sandinista government in 1980, compose most of the households. In *San Miguel*, few households were, and still are, workers of the Caligari Vigil Family. More people from nearby islets have arrived in *San Miguel* in recent years. The workers of the Cordova family are the majority of the people that populate *Santa María*. Some ex-workers of the Cordova Alvarez family, grouped around a cooperative, took possession of the land in the area known as *Sontolar*. In *Zonzapote*, there are 10 families grouped around a cooperative composed of local families and people that immigrated from Waslala, in the north of Nicaragua. People from Waslala fleeing the violence created by demobilized contras arrived on the island as part of a resettlement program. People from *La Guinea* and *Cañas* are known as native people, since they have been living for more than three generations in the area, and they were the subjects of our initial study in 2009.

At the time the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime in 1979, the island was supposed to have reached its peak in cattle production, with more than 3,000 heads of cattle, belonging mainly to the two families, grazing on the island. Grazing land occupied 4,000 manzanas[1], amounting to almost 40% of the land area of the island. In 2009, MARENA was still using the management plan for the park made in 1983, and started working towards creating a new management plan for ZNP.

Despite declaring it a national park, the ownership of land in Zapatera remains unsettled, and for all purposes, Zapatera is a privately owned island, with 90% of the territory in the hands of the two landowning families and the remaining 10% belonging to the Nicaraguan state. Communities have the permission to stay on the island but no entitlement to the land. The relocation of entire communities to sites outside the island has been considered, but the government does not have the economic capacity or the will to enact it in view of the heavy social and political costs of such a move.

What we found when we entered the situation in 2009 was that despite the provision in Nicaraguan environmental law for encouraging the participation of local communities in decision-making processes about protected areas, there were no mechanisms in place for ensuring such participation. The only legally accepted income activities on the island are eco-tourism and the fishing of different species of cichlids and gizzard shad. However, most of the households were basing their income activities on the illegal extraction of forest resources, including firewood, timber, minor fauna species and tarpon

fish. The transportation of these illegally obtained products to the mainland by boat brought the community into constant conflict with MARENA authorities, who were not necessarily present on the island except as part of a patrolling and policing function.

The initial study of the conservation-livelihood dilemma as perceived by the two established communities on the island, *La Guinea* and *Cañas*, guided by a SAR approach is described thoroughly in Arévalo Vásquez (2010). The highlight of this phase of the study was the workshop which brought together representatives of all communities, the two landowning families, MARENA representatives and a development worker from the NGO supporting the island inhabitants. A timeline of events pertaining to ZNP and a shared "rich picture" of the complexity of the present situation enabled the workshop to recognise the emergent issues of concern regarding natural resources management on the island, and to propose desirable and feasible actions for change and improvement. Uncertainty and a lack of clear information regarding land tenure, the need for a buffer zone that would allow new livelihood activities along with conservation and the lack of community organisation in the island were seen as a hindrance for conservation. The need to train community members, promoting dialogue and debate among different stakeholders and greater cooperation among all actors were agreed upon as necessary next steps towards improvement. Our Action Research intervention itself was hailed as a landmark opportunity that created the democratic space for knowledge exchange among all actors, and enabled access to higher levels of decision-making with regards to park management by the least powerful of all, the members of the community, particularly in view of the long history of distrust and conflict prevailing on the island.

From the time we re-entered ZNP for the longer and more comprehensive phase of engagement beginning in March 2012, the Action Research process has included all seven communities and at least one of the landowning representatives present on the island (the leader of the other family passed away without nominating a successor to the project), as one group of prime movers, and the MARENA representatives at national and regional levels as the other. EP was a member of the researcher team as well as a representative of UNA, seen here as the third protagonist. The research has built on the good will established the first time, and through the five interventions during 2012–15, our attempts have focused on expanding and stabilising the social space that had been created in the first instance.

Some highlights of the different workshop events and the unmet expectations are briefly outlined here. When all seven communities were engaged in the research process in 2012, the respective community leaders went through a visioning process focusing on the kind of future they wanted for themselves and the island. They also interacted with MARENA representatives on the mainland as well as with several of the government service agencies, such as education, child welfare and health, as well as the police and navy considered relevant to the island. The concluding round of workshops

held in 2012 became the forum where MARENA authorities informed the park communities, firmly and clearly for the first time, that they should not harbour any hopes of ever receiving land titles for the areas occupied by them within ZNP, while also confirming that no one would ever be evicted from the park.

The intervention in 2013 was in connection with an international PhD course on research methods being offered at ZNP. The class of 16 research students mapped the situation and issues as presented to them by the communities on the island, which they then formulated as the basis for a workshop with not only the usual community and government participants, but also including the university's senior leadership and a large inter-institutional work group on ZNP which had been set up by MARENA. The presence of 45 important personnel primarily from public authorities on the island for the first time gave the community members a sense of progress in relation to their specific life situation, but it also raised the awareness amongst MARENA and other agency staff members about the urgency needed in their follow-up action. The PhD students, for their part, practiced the art of facilitating within an Action Research approach concerning a large and diverse group of participants. Our objective of raising ZNP issues to a higher level of discussion nationally was reached at the end of the four years of our involvement in the project, and was due to a number of unplanned events and ideas converging serendipitously on this occasion.

As a way of addressing the immediate income needs of the park residents, MARENA decided to allow concessions in relation to the restrictions on harvesting firewood from dead trees in the park for cash at this point in time; a park ranger was appointed to act as communication channel for the people and to assure more of a MARENA presence on the island. Additionally, attempts to bring externally funded tourism projects to the island had commenced. The landowner with a tourism business on the island, for his part, initiated small-scale development projects to benefit the communities, such as the provision of small-scale irrigation for agriculture in one or two communities. For their part, community members felt they were being recognised by the state as communities living on the island, and MARENA has begun to reciprocate with visits and the setting up of additional work groups. We noted that park residents had become aware of their existence inside a park and understood that there would always be restrictions. They were becoming aware that the fishing possibilities were declining around the island, meaning that only those who owned powerful boats could make a living from fishing by sailing further out to catch marketable fish. They were becoming aware of illegal logging and that the islands were being used for narcotics trade, and they were willing and able to speak about these as impacting on their "Commons".

We noticed in the past two years (2013–15) that the communities had become more organised than they were before, had an effective system of representation and were able to articulate their needs in different forms

and in space and time. They have sent letters to the nation's president and to the university calling attention to their situation. They have been able to express their visions for the future as well. During the process, we recorded a shift in the way they felt from being victims who are not cared for to people who were conscious of their rights as well as their obligations of living in a park.

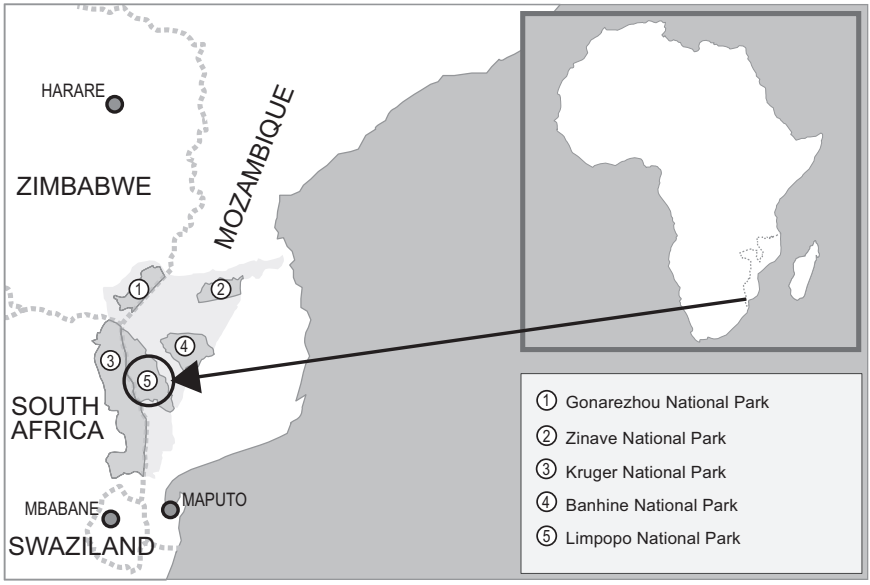
Although the need to revise the management plan (MP) for the ZNP was presented at the 2009 workshop as a way of demarcating a distinct 3,000 hectare buffer zone to accommodate different human activities within the park, the MP has appeared more formally and firmly on the agenda of all subsequent discussions and planning workshops. The emphasis on the MP always came from MARENA, who saw it as a planning and implementation instrument, while also offering it as their way of assuring the community members of MARENA's intention to accommodate community expectations in relation to their livelihood needs.

As the legal document for managing PAs, an MP would describe the status of flora and fauna, which activities are allowed and not allowed within a PA and prescribe what fish can be caught and which ones were not allowed to be caught, much of it built on a biologically driven planning process. Given the situation of the human inhabitants in this PA and their livelihood needs having been the contested issue during the life of our project, MARENA has not been able to produce a revised MP since 2009, even in the more restricted and instrumental sense of creating an MP. This is despite keeping the revision of the MP as a priority item for discussion during the successive workshops since 2012.

On the part of the state, there is evident good will and a readiness to make promises—but with an instrumental attitude to dealing with these. This has been accompanied also by a lack of competence and lack of resources to follow up on promises, despite the fact that we were dealing with MARENA as the highest authority from an institutional point of view in PA management. One of the problems with MARENA has been that there have been three changes of the responsible chief of the division during our engagement with ZNP since 2009. Some officers are more capable than others, but our general impression has been that the officers might be representing certain political interests, and that they might not always necessarily match the capacity and competences needed.

The Project in Limpopo National Park

This work developed when NG arrived at SLU from Mozambique as a PhD candidate in 2012, with NS as her supervisor. She had previously done some work in the Limpopo National Park (LNP), focusing on how people were impacted by the twin forces of conservation restriction policy and climate change. The new work that commenced in early 2012 examined the interactions between LNP management and communities residing in the buffer



Map 5.2 The Limpopo National Park. Graphic Anni Hoffrén, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

zone of the Park, characterised by a conflicting relationship at the divide between park and community.

The LNP in Mozambique was established in 2001 with support from the Peace Park Foundation, making it part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, along with Kruger National Park in South Africa and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe. The usefulness of LNP for a comparative examination in this chapter lies in the similarities and some of the differences between the two parks. The parks under study in Nicaragua and Mozambique were both recently founded, both were founded in post-revolutionary state systems and both have a number of people inhabiting the park while being resistant to the park and its regulations about conservation. A further similarity between the two sites is in the ecotourism discourse and the potential that might exist for creating revenue for the park and its residents from such tourism. There are also some significant differences, especially regarding the dimensions. LNP, as a much larger park with an area of 11,233km^2, is linked to an international conservation program that has a strong park administration and a supporting infrastructure. The community of Macaringue, which we have been working with, is the largest among the ones in the south of the park, numbering approximately 3,000 inhabitants, out of a total of 35,000 people living in the buffer zone that comprises the whole of the LNP. Apart from promises of improving the livelihood of the people living in the park through providing better infrastructure and diversifying their

sources of livelihood through tourism, there has also been an explicit promise that 20% of the park's annual revenue would go to the communities.

The citizens living in LNP have learned that while they received permission to live in a traditional way within the bounds of the park, they also have had a number of their livelihood activities impacted on in negative ways. Despite the official position of acknowledging the people's existence within the park, and the authorities' declared intention to work closely with the communities on all the decision-making processes, the citizens' expectations were not being met.

The complicating factor impacting their livelihoods is connected to the free movement of elephants from Kruger National Park in South Africa. The invading elephants and their raiding of farmers' crops directly impact livelihoods as a new, unexpected consequence of inhabiting a transfrontier park. A further complicating factor for the LNP farmers is that the conservation goals, rules and practices related to the park are not presented as if they lived within a traditional Mozambican Park, but as if the LNP is part of a larger international agenda of conservation.

With sufficient background to the situation obtained through extensive consultations with the park staff and the community, the highlight of the first phase of this Action Research process was the explorative workshop, similar in scope to the one in Nicaragua, with park administrators, field agents, community leaders and some NGO personnel involved in development work with the community. The workshop revealed the degree of distrust that existed between the park and community over a few issues, of which the people's feelings of being betrayed remained high in relation to the promise to improve their livelihood through tourism, specifically through the payment of 20% of the annual park revenue. They claimed they never saw such support. Furthermore, there were other comments of dissatisfaction, such as, "You never come to help us when we have elephants attacking our fields and our land". The park authorities promised that things would get better in the future and that they were establishing ways to increase the local income and improve local people's lives. Over the ten years since the park's establishment, the residents claimed they hadn't perceived any improvement in their livelihoods, instead only a worsening of their situation. The demand for greater participation in the buffer zone management plan was put forward by the community, and there was a strong sense that there might have been a serious communication problem.

At our next workshop, we addressed the communication topic that was highlighted in the first workshop. The park management had previously brought in a consultant and developed a communication strategy document which had not been put into practice. We agreed that we could start by focusing on improving the communication as a way of understanding the issues. The ensuing two-day workshop focused on the theme of communication; the second day saw the field agents of the LNP participating in the workshop in the community, interacting and practising different ways of

perceiving and communicating about the ground situation. On the third day, the whole community was invited for a discussion with the park officers, comprising of rangers who were wildlife guards and the field agents who were tasked to work with the community. The officers did not appear to be familiar with working with the community in interactive ways, and all issues brought up by community appeared to them as new and needing attention. On the part of the community, there was recognition of the fact that even through small-scale actions and close contact between themselves and the officials, the level of misinformation could be reduced and a greater level of trust could be built.

The issue of the 20% revenue payment continued to loom large in the minds of the residents, and given the significance of that issue being such a barrier to progress in any attempts to collaborate, an investigation into the situation with regards to the 20% benefit sharing was pursued as a stream of inquiry within the Action Research process. It was allocated a substantial amount of field time by NG, as the primary researcher. The existing structures, rules and policy, the working processes and what happened and what failed to happen were all mapped carefully, and these findings became the focus of a third workshop dedicated to the 20% payment issues, also involving the district government as an important partner in the process, along with the community and the park. A significant realisation was that despite there being all the correct statutes in place and the appropriate community representation created in the form of a committee to govern the flow of funds, the processes were ad hoc and inefficient and the outcomes not transparent, leading to a high degree of frustration among the beneficiaries. The low levels of competence among the chosen community representatives and poor co-ordination and lack of accountability on the part of the officials were addressed by the workshop, but to date, no specific resources have been allocated to make the situation better for all concerned.

As part of the fourth phase of intervention in the Action Research process, a closed workshop was held in July 2014 just with the senior park officials and senior district government officials to evaluate the present situation and do some envisioning of the future. It has become clearer that despite participation in the collaborative processes initiated by the Action Research process and all the confidence-building and communication-improving measures that followed, the dominant management style of the park authorities was governed by a more formal, linear, command-and-control mindset and related measures of efficiency. There is a history of relocation of some communities located in the core area of the park to other communities outside of the park or in the buffer zone. Although the community we worked with does not fear that as a consequence, we have indications to the effect that other management measures such as fencing them off may come into place which could lower their claims for any co-management possibilities.

For our part, bringing the selected community closer to a working relationship with the park authorities in this instance was primarily an attempt to experiment towards better forms of communication and information

sharing and greater levels of co-management. While participating in this process, since this is a larger park belonging to a much bigger transfrontier conservation initiative and is subject to several international political and economic forces and competing aspects of wildlife conservation agenda, we realised that the LNP is part of a dynamic that was not always transparent or easily understood through our intermittent presence.

The 20% matter is, at present, on hold, but it is also an issue that had the potential to turn things around. We will argue that the people and the park management were given the opportunity to make it work as a successful collaboration, but for different reasons, they did not manage to grab the opportunity. The park has no flexibility in allocating further resources to make it work better, and the people seem rather incapable of taking initiative, even when they know the respective roles and modes of working with the system. The entire process is, therefore, stagnant.

The work will continue, but there are two conclusions to be made at this point. One relates to the importance of incorporating other levels of actors, for instance, the Peace Park Foundation and the highest authorities of the state, to place their agenda more openly on the table. Another is to work with the community more actively and with a long-term perspective, which means there needs to be a facilitator present on the ground, helping further the process of empowering and organising the community in better ways to get access more directly to the benefits. Our attempt to obtain outside funding to support the implementation of the action steps has not been successful.

Comparative Reflections From the Research

Thus, creating *community learning agoras* has been an important aspect of our work related to these two national parks, a work that has also benefited from integrating graduate student research. Comparing the experiences from the two projects, there are some strong similarities, and there are one or two big differences. In both cases, we used Action Research to create and maintain the space for the different actors to come together, learn from each other and plan and act on some matters together with the ambition of creating some kind of transformation. In both cases, the goal was to create high levels of co-management. The experience has given us some general lessons about the process itself. In terms of the engagement of the different actors, in particular the institutional actors, we managed to engage with the highest level of authorities throughout the process in Nicaragua, despite their inherent limitations. In Mozambique, we engaged with the park-level authorities who were far more active but their limitation was that they never really managed to follow up on some of the agreed-upon matters. There might also be competing agendas that have still not been disclosed, and the possibility of some decisions being made at levels higher than at the park management level, this being a contrast to the situation in Nicaragua.

There is a strong desire to make a revised management plan in Nicaragua, and there is an interest in keeping the Park and making it work better, but there is a lack of capacity to implement the plan. In the case of Mozambique, they also have a management plan, and they are making changes along the way and responding to new challenges; however, this is influenced by what is happening in the area around them, including in South Africa, so they are not necessarily responding in a collaborative way. So there are the different management styles and capabilities of the two parks, but the situation of the less-powerful people as the victims is the common denominator here. The Mozambicans are a little bit better off in that they have other sources of income, and in some cases, they get involved in poaching activities. In Zapatera, illegal activities have also been a part of the situation, such as illegal logging, fishing and hunting, but the economic interests are not as big as in Limpopo.

When it comes to the citizens, both processes have raised an awareness among them of being in the park with restrictions and limitations. In both cases, the locals are interested and keen to become more involved in park management. They are aware of their rights, obligations and opportunities, perhaps more so in Nicaragua than in Mozambique. One could say that in Zapatera, there is recognition of the Commons that they share. In both cases, the social spaces had to be created by us as outsiders; these would not have happened by themselves. There is no culture for that either in Limpopo or in Zapatera. The capacity of the community is where the big differences are revealed. In Zapatera, the sovereign communities spread around the island were able to organise themselves. They always took care of opportunities to participate, and they were the first ones to come when we invited them. They were able to express their needs more formally and sharply. They know what they want and they know what they will get. They have been more empowered by our intervention, even though they have not gained much that is concrete so far. In the case of Mozambique, one could say that the illiteracy of people in the communities plays an important role and that the heritage from being colonised still plays a role in the sense that there is no culture of taking action on one's own in the public sphere. On the other hand, the evidence that the communities were able to organise themselves indicated a certain capacity. At another level, they are content with their status and feel that they are still better off because they are farming larger areas compared to Zapatera. The park is there, but life goes on for them assisted to some extent by their strong, traditional tribal structure. Their strong, those in traditional tribal structure may have some influence. In Zapatera, from a historical perspective, what unites them seems to be poverty. In Limpopo, there is also the opportunity for people to cross the border and go to South Africa to find work, which they have done during the 20 years of war. In Limpopo, the influence of the particular conservation approach, which is still an experiment, is special. It is brought in from outside and it is dominant. The objective of the state is to identify economic opportunities,

and there have recently been agricultural leases—within park territory—for sugarcane growing, and possibly hunting leases to come in the future. The hunting dimension is also a historical one, since hunting leases have always been a source of income for Mozambicans, who sold the leases to South Africans. Today, there are large amounts of money in hunting, legally as well as illegally, contributing to the corruption with stories about park rangers being rangers and poachers at the same time. At the community level, the international poaching industry offers the opportunity for people to be rich and achieve a high social status.

Despite these differences in size of the stakes at the two locations, the same core issues brought us to the two areas. In LNP, everything is concentrated around wildlife being the conservation goal and wildlife conflicting with the livelihood of the communities, and it constitutes—legally and illegally—the economic driver. In ZNP, it is more diverse, including the biodiversity of the flora and fauna, statues, artefacts and archaeological evidence waiting to be uncovered with the island simply being an idyllic spot on a lake.

When it comes to the power structures, one could say that power is more symbolic in the Nicaraguan context than it is in the Mozambican case. All actors are within an economic framework, equally powerless, and in fact the officials, including the Ministry, were very accessible to us. The power of capital lies in the hands of the landowners, who can in theory draw an imaginary line on the map and say, "This is mine and that one is my sister's". They know the law and they know the political game, one of them having been in the parliament for a period of time. In the landowner families, there are two lines of cousins, one of whom being the one who "opened the door" for us the first time. The initial workshop was the first time people from the local community, people from MARENA and the landowners had ever been in the same room. While evaluating the workshop, the community members were moved when saying that they had never imagined that they would sit in the same room with the landowners because there were many differences between their statuses. Over time, these differences have clearly decreased. One of the landowners is more present on the island today, constantly trying new, small things. Although he is not living on the island, he is trying to create a tourist resort with people from two of the settlements in a way that serves his interests. Here, power is at play at a very concrete level, but we are working with their good will as well. One can say he is reproducing the classic idea of a patron having inherited the land which for generations has been in his family. The landowner has been in the picture from the beginning, and it is not an ideal or comfortable situation. On the other hand, it should not be seen in an entirely negative light. We recognise that this landowner is investing in the island remaining a park, as he is also bringing in experts to date and preserve the archaeological findings.

The thinking in LNP is, in principle, a more modern approach. The park came into existence much later than Zapatera and it came with a bang,

with the high-profile Nelson Mandela attending the opening and blessing the transfrontier initiative (Spierenburg et al. 2008). In this sense, LNP is associated with prestige and power. The people in the community we have been working with live like they are living in any village regardless of the park status. So the power itself does not create the conflict on the ground. The issue is that the promises that have been made have not been kept. The second level of power is the park management we have been dealing with, with sufficient power to implement anything that was agreed, although it is also answerable to a hierarchical system consisting of the Peace Park Foundation, and international donors, thus extending further than the case in Nicaragua. The disparity of the two situations studied here, in relation to their size and respective power relations, makes the role of the Commons in conservation areas in the two instances an interesting one. The complexity of the situation is aggravated when conservation goals are so closely tied to economic interests.

In the course of our work in Nicaragua, we recognised that the community members were beginning to identify with their Commons. Fishermen, those with smaller boats as well as the larger ones who could venture further into the lake, recognised the lake as their Commons by saying, "We should get the government to help us to keep the fish in the lake in a better way". They spoke about the illegal loggers who come at night, saying that they could hear trees being cut at night and they were now willing to report the violations if what they reported would be followed up on by the law. They do not believe the system is "clean enough" yet they thought that they would risk their lives with such action, and this we saw as a shift in their attitude toward conversation. We have seen a shared understanding between the people on the island and the institutional representatives coming from the outside. Thus, for short moments of time, we have managed to neutralise power differences and hold a dialogue which met mutual objectives.

In an overall perspective, one could say that the Action Research orientation of the research has enabled levels of citizens' participation and their social learning as tangible outcomes, and discussions in these arenas have also brought back the notion of the Commons and strategies to manage the Commons collectively. The deliberations that can happen in these arenas between ordinary citizens and experts are not about recreating the old or traditional Commons, but about exploring how new forms of Commons could be built, and offer a potential to investigate and understand natural, cultural and knowledge Commons, recognising that there is no Commons without "commoning" and that Commons is as much a verb as it is a noun. What is gained in these different limited, local and particular contexts could be related through comparative ways also to the universal situation of concern in learning processes for sustainable Natural Resource Management.

ACTION RESEARCH IN A DEVELOPING CONTEXT

In this last section, we develop the power discussion addressed above a bit more, relating it to the issues of empowering local citizens from below and the transformation of institutions. We close the text by discussing the potentials of Action Research to open up spaces for commoning through the creation of a specific kind of social space.

Institutional and Power Dimensions

In both projects, it has turned out that the empowerment initiatives related to the creation of agoras for social learning in the long run are dependent on and therefore have to be related to the renewal of the institutional and organisational structures decisively for substantial changes. Action Research interventions within this area must be aware of and try to deal with this. For instance, the top-down management approach adopted by the LNP is not consistent with its current reality and expressed desire to integrate people in the management approach. The structure and organisational culture in place allow little and very weak contact with communities and other actors, and the priorities and working strategies of the park at present are driven by the donors' agenda rather than the ideals of co-management; therefore, park staff face the challenge of dealing with unclear working goals and objectives, ad hoc working plans and fuzzy roles and responsibilities. The unclear strategy for seeking a balance between wildlife conservation and the LNP inhabitants' livelihood needs also bears some costs in terms of the instability of the management structure, which might be a threat to the whole process of institutional innovation being attempted here.

In addition to the features inherent in the park as an organisation, the degree of *power asymmetry* among the actors engaged in the community agoras should also be discussed here. The diversity of backgrounds in terms of literacy, language skills and social status among and between park employees and community members has to be taken into account when designing processes for engagement. For instance, in the LNP, most community members are illiterate and only speak the local language; therefore, workshop sessions enabling communication in both the local Shangane and the official Portuguese languages were necessary despite the cost of additional time needed for translation. Though not as pronounced as in other engagement arenas connected with Natural Resource Management, such as the water management cases discussed by Faysse (2006) and by Ludi et al. (2013), in our Action Research reported here, the main power differential between community members and park management had to be counted in when designing workshops and other interactive processes to boost the local communities' negotiation skills, lobbying abilities, capacity to self-mobilise and the ability to bear their own cost of participation.

In his *power cube framework* of participatory governance, Gaventa (2006) refers to three types of "spaces" of power: provided, invited or claimed. The dialogue space that was created in our workshop settings did not fall exactly within these three types of spaces. What has been enabled, influenced and gradually established by us as outsiders in the two contexts could be described as a fourth category of a *mediated space of power* and *an arena of mutual learning*. In our view, referring to such a learning space as a *community learning agora* would better serve to recognise the inevitability of power differences in these situations and indicate the potential for deliberative processes in cultivating the Commons. This is instead of the term "platform", which has gained popularity in many NRM contexts, and the connotations of an implied "level playing field", as put forward by Faysse (2006).

The example from LNP of the management of 20% of the park revenue illustrates very well the opportunities that exist for creative ways of enabling innovation, particularly in terms of its potential to deliver institutional change through collective and consensual decision-making and across institutional limitations, knowledge gaps, communication deficits and power differentials. It is also equally pertinent to recognise here that this was brought about by the choice of an interactive, systemic and cyclical research approach, and therefore through the close presence of an intervening inquirer-facilitator armed with a range of relevant processes and a reflective practice. The likelihood of tangible outcomes in the form of clearer lines of decision-making and fund flows on the matter of the 20% benefit sharing between the park and the buffer zone community, a matter which has lingered on for close to a decade, would be seen as a breakthrough among all actors. But to what extent the collaborative processes initiated through the Action Research undertaken now would move towards eventual institutionalisation without the time, resource and intensive presence of the external facilitator has remained a question to date.

The perspective of interplay between empowering social learning and institutional changes to be established or at least prepared and made possible through Action Research could be said to be the development of *co-management*. When looking at our two projects in this light, it is true—as we have already underlined—that the research outcomes are primarily in terms of mutual learning, trust building and realisations of the limitations and therefore explanations for why this is so. The opportunities for any collaboration or co-management were nonexistent before, but the way is now prepared for that to happen because of this process. At the same time, an awareness or consciousness has been created on both sides, the institutional level as well as on the level of the citizens. It would have been better if the engagement had been more intense, but it is still possible to enable this change to take place. One can say, as a product, it is possible, it is high on the agenda and if we—or other researchers—could be more present physically, we could take it to the next step.

If the economic conditions for the two Action Research projects had been better, we would have been able to act concretely in both places with measurable outcomes on the ground situation as well. So the outcomes have been primarily in relational terms as well as the empowerment of the less powerful. We developed better insight about the people in the two situations and the living conditions inside a park. We have a better understanding of these people and the restrictions they face and we have an understanding of park management from a conservation point of view, and the institutional practices in two different political cultures and the international influences. Both processes have provided an understanding of the different actors within their agencies, and we have opened up space for hope and new possibilities and for the dynamic co-management potential. In the process, we have tried new ways of engagement, and we opened up the cases using our Action Research methodology, applying its iterative processes to engage the actors in ways different from what normally would happen. That is the contribution from the methodological approach, not necessarily related to the research as such. The methodology enabled us to work with those actors we had access to. If we take the meaning of democracy as an ongoing collaborative process and constant communication and negotiation to deal with a common issue, then sustainability is the emergent outcome.

Regarding protected areas and national parks as labels for the conservation of nature, important lessons could be drawn from the two projects. If it is acknowledged that there will be humans, either inside or having access to those protected areas, we now understand that, though it is acknowledged in regulatory terms and practical terms—as was the case in these two parks—the parks do not have the means and do not know how to manage it in good, democratic ways. As they stumble their way through this, both conservation and the human inhabitants suffer. The institutional dimension and its instrumental way of applying regulations remains dominant; even in situations where it has been inefficient and non-operational, the thinking appears to remain intact. Historically, the progression from park areas being there just for their pristine qualities, for the creatures or for the beauty, to protected areas being seen as the fluid intersection of parks and people has been slow. While the IUCN itself made the turn many years ago and in fact designated its 2014 Congress theme as People, Parks and the Planet, we have in these two cases seen how infrequently human beings are a theme in practice.

One could argue that there is much distance to be covered between our focus on bringing people into the equation by changing the mindset of nature conservation, and our ambition to reach a form of co-management of the parks. Co-management has been tried in ecosystem management and conservation contexts in large areas all over the world. Yet, the number of successful experiences reported is not remarkable in comparison to the number of cases attempted. In national parks, where the tangible benefits

for the people are weak or not sufficient, the livelihood aspects do not seem to count. While co-management and adaptive co-management are still being theorised, in this study we have considered co-management as a continuum rather than as a measurable goal. It has been more a matter of working towards greater levels of citizen engagement and participation, seeking what could be labelled as higher forms of co-management. No doubt, the institutions are held back by their history, by mindsets and paradigms, but institutions are where the changes have to be initiated. In both our projects, we see that the people as park inhabitants are always ready and willing, and we have never been short of people participating in the workshops. It is usually the authorities and the people representing the public institutions that we have had to wait for, or at least work much harder to get hold of. But how could these institutions be transformed without getting into them or getting close to them? As described elsewhere in this book, if it is difficult to reach out to such institutions in the Scandinavian contexts, it is clearly more difficult in those parts of the world where democratic traditions are weak or nonexistent.

Action Research, of all possibilities that exist, seems one of the most appropriate means that we can apply. In our way of doing Action Research, we have used a minimally intrusive and non-dogmatic form to search for openings and changes and have sensed the possibilities. So there is not that much of a distinction between how we define the problem and our search for co-management; indeed it is a way of moving forward. In doing so, we can, and should, always be self-critical, and we can ask ourselves if in these two cases we have relied on the good will of just a few individuals, or stayed within the same levels that we had immediate access to. Should we have reached out wider?

We acknowledge that in our interventions we were not on site long or frequently enough. It should be noted that at least in the Nicaraguan case, through the engagement of the National Agricultural University as a partner and the interest taken by its leadership in the project, our involvement in ZNP has been brought up to the responsible Ministerial level and even to the national leadership level. Such recognition has not necessarily led to any speedy changes even though it was a non-controversial location for the state to have acted on. However, our attempts to bridge the local level and government level actors over the long time horizon have begun to deliver outcomes lately, but whether it will lead to the institutional changes towards co-management depends on many things that could not be planned or just taken for granted. In this sense, Action Research will always be open-ended, unfinished.

Systemic Action Research, Social Spaces and Commons

Community learning agoras was introduced here as a concept to emphasise a crucial aspect of our Action Research. The agoras were initiated and held together in such a manner to enable democratic deliberation to flourish

around themes and issues of concern to the different actors, but more specifically those of the citizens affected by the nature protection initiatives. The social learning that eventuates through the articulation of different positions and worldviews by participants, revision of their own preferences and accommodation of differences as a result of the co-construction of the Commons, and the recognition of nature as a shared reality bring out the community-making power of deliberation as demonstrated in our cases. We adopted workshops as the main process and dialogue as an in built tool to give meaning and life to the learning agoras.

While agoras were physical spaces as used in the ancient Greek context, the equivalent notion of a *social space* to imply a mental construction of such a learning arena, and one that emphasizes the relational aspects, has been recovered from earlier work in Action Research. Victor Friedman, as an action researcher, has been recently making connections to Kurt Lewin's original work on what he called *field theory* and retrieved the notion of *social space* from the meaning elaborated by Lewin as well as by Bourdieu (see Friedman & Sykes 2014). We would like to borrow this concept from Friedman, exploratory though at this stage, and integrate it into our own conception. Lewin developed the notion of the *field* as it is known from physics and Gestalt psychology and gave it a social-psychological meaning as a dynamic conceptualisation of people's life worlds. He was criticised for not taking the objective conditions sufficiently into consideration, but this is a critique that does not necessarily affect the notion of social space as such. If community learning agora in the manner we adopted it here implied the physical space for interaction such as during workshops, social space in the sense Friedman and Sykes (2014) articulated it would refer to a different aspect of the same interactive reality, but one that was an architecture of the invisible, relational and deep aspects of that social reality. Social space as a construct in this sense thus has potential to be applied to further understand the learning and co-production of knowledge in the agoras of the kind we created in the field cases discussed here. The obvious resemblances the meanings of the learning agora and social space have to the notion of Free Space as developed in Critical Utopian Action Research (see other chapters in this volume) also deserve exploration.

We conclude by returning to the questions of how the island people from Zapatera got their voice and what new kind of knowledge about their Commons enabled them to articulate their needs and visions in front of a Minister of government or in a symposium held at the university recently? While we would certainly not claim that the strong power differences have been dissipated, it is clear that the people have found the means to overcome these or at least work with the differences. While the processes remain fragile and change rather slow, we can firmly say that in our two cases, the epistemological assumptions of Action Research in terms of learning and knowledge generation, its obligation to the democratic agenda, and our commitment to weave in 'commoning' as an essential part of our research practice, have

contributed to making a difference this far. We remain hopeful that the spaces of change in place would lead to further collaboration between citizens, authorities and experts and a transformation towards co-management.

NOTE

1. In Nicaragua one manzana is equvivalent to an area of 7000 square meters.

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6 Openings and Closures of the Environmental Planning Horizon

Participatory Experiences From Norway

Mikaela Vasstrøm

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the participatory potential in environmental planning and nature protection. Citizen participation in public planning has been discussed for decades in theory and practice. Despite the participatory rhetoric in public planning, there are increasing discrepancies between national and international nature protection policies and local community understandings of why and how nature should be managed. A core challenge in this setting is that participatory approaches are often targeted to fulfil and legitimise pre-defined planning purposes established by central planning authorities. Such purpose orientation leaves little room for the participants to deliberate other understandings and values in the planning arena or contribute with other directions for the planning horizon.

Current nature protection endeavours can be interpreted as one of many institutional responses to the increasing societal sustainability challenges of the globe (Meadowcroft 1999). Environmental planning can thus be understood as the operationalisation of sustainability policies aiming to protect certain natural and material values that deliver ecological benefits and thereby are creating or recreating a better ecological balance within modern society (Cowell & Owens 2011). In the practical process of planning and management, the policy discourses of sustainability and nature protection not only influence certain interests or stakeholders, but also have significant consequences for people's everyday lives and their relation to nature. It is therefore not surprising that (environmental) planning processes raise a disparity of understandings, values, interests and knowledge claims from different institutions, stakeholders and affected citizens (Cowell & Owens 2011). Together, these claims make the planning at the intersection of nature and society a contested arena (Macnagthen & Urry 1998). It is within this overarching frame that one has to understand the challenges of modern environmental planning, Natural Resource Management, nature protection and wildlife management, and not least question the potential for democratic participatory processes.

Participatory Endeavours in Environmental Planning

Nature protection planning and management has traditionally been orchestrated by state agencies through the implementation of national policies in particular areas. During the past three decades, the legitimacy, efficiency and outcome of these expert-oriented, top-down nature policies and government have been increasingly challenged because of their poor democratic foundation (Dietz et al. 2003; Hajer 2003). In addition, they have been criticised for neglecting the relations between the socio-cultural, economic and ecological dimensions of humans, society, nature and landscapes (Berkes & Folke 1998; Folke 2006). This critique has contributed to changes in the legitimacy claims of nature conservation, from a substantive legitimacy based on scientific knowledge, towards a more procedural legitimacy requiring participation from a broader public (Engelen et al. 2008). Public participation in environmental planning is therefore increasingly considered a necessary remedy not only to avoid conflicts and ensure public legitimacy, but also to improve the substantial basis of the planning outcome. Despite the presence of a local participation ethos in nature protection planning, (the lack of) genuine participation continues to be the subject of complex conflicts between local communities and state agencies (Björkell 2008; Grönholm 2009; Clausen 2011; Daugstad 2011; and in this volume: Clausen; Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah; Nielsen and Nielsen). The question is, in other words, what contemporary planning and the current practice of participation exclude, leave out or simply miss. Such questioning requires a critical approach to explore how the underlying rationale and arguments of participation in a given planning process influences the premises of participation, the imaginable planning horizon and the substantial planning outcome (Hansen 2007; Nielsen & Nielsen 2007).

As already problematised by Sherry Arnstein (1969), participation can be formulated along a wide scale of justification; it can be used as a manipulative and legitimising ingredient to reach a ready recipe, or as a democratic process of deliberating values, interests and knowledge to develop new perspectives and mobilise collective actions. There is, in other words, an immense difference between why and how participation is employed within different planning rationalities. Participation in contemporary (rational-instrumental) planning is often employed as a means to legitimise a planning purpose that is already defined by the established qualified and powerful actors in the planning institutions (Elling 2008; Innes & Booher 2010). Conversely, deliberative democratic participation is an attempt to unfold, interchange and develop different and alternative perspectives on what the purpose of a particular planning process (and future management) should be. Within the deliberative democratic rationale, the participatory endeavour is thus understood as a goal in itself, because the very communication of different viewpoints generates new mutual understandings of the situation. In a planning context, it is the deliberations and new understandings that

can lead to a commonly understood planning purpose and ensure a more legitimate planning outcome (Forester 1999), and not least contribute to substantial contextual changes.

The deliberative, participatory rationale might be especially essential in nature protection planning, because such processes do not have any objective solutions and raise different interests, understandings and rationales about a common concern (Vasstrøm 2014). Participation in such contexts can serve to deliberate how and why nature and society relations should be managed, not only from the expert or stakeholder perspectives, but also from the viewpoint of local communities as the affected public. Community or citizen participation can contribute with an everyday life-related perspective of nature protection (and sustainability). These are not technically sectored or scientifically categorised, but related to broad and entangled life relations to the area in question. The public, as citizens and communities, are thus able to contribute with rationalities and perspectives that the planning authorities, experts or interest stakeholders cannot see (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007 and in this volume; in this volume, see also the *Editors' Introduction*; Clausen; Hansen, von Essen, and Sriskandarajah).

This chapter aims to contribute to this discussion about participatory efforts in public planning by exploring how participatory (policy) endeavours were played out during a particular wild reindeer (*Rangifer Tarandus Tarandus*) habitat protection process in southern Norway. As a researcher, I was engaged in trailing the formal planning process during two years, and additionally facilitated what could be called informal deliberative planning arenas with three local communities. The analytical point of this chapter is to analyse how the formal planning process generated what can be labelled as openings and closures in the planning horizon through deliberative democratic participation. The notion of openings and closures is used as a dialectic analytical frame for scrutinising how the communication and practices during the planning process encouraged or hindered public participation and the deliberation of other rationalities on the planning arena. This will be described later in this chapter.

NATURE PROTECTION IN NORWAY AND THE CASE OF HEIPLANEN

Norwegian conservation policies have, since their appearance on the political agenda in the 1970s, been centralised at the state level, and later devolved to regional state agencies (the environmental agency of the county government) (Reitan 2004). In recent decades, the increasing political pressure for, and legal requirements of, participation have resulted in policies with a growing participatory and governance-related steering rationality in Norway (Falleth & Hovik 2009). The planning of nature protection in rural areas in Norway constitutes a clash between local area understandings and practice

and national expert policies. These different perceptions and conceptions can be illustrated as a three-dimensional conflict of nature-society planning: the protection-use dimension, the nature-culture dimension and the local-national steering dimension (Daugstad et al. 2006).

Wild reindeer habitat protection is a particular example of such a clash of understandings. Wild reindeer have special, though distinct, cultural values on the local, national and international levels. Their population ecology and behaviour require large, undisturbed habitats in desolate mountain areas. These mountain area habitats have experienced increased human and societal area use claims during the last 50 years (Andersen & Hustad 2004). The national authorities on the one hand consider increased mountain area use a threat to the wild reindeer habitat and population, but on the other hand, it is regarded as a potential resource for rural value creation. The challenge for societal planning and nature management is thus to establish a long-term balance between the increasing and diverse economical, recreational, infrastructural and cultural claims to mountain area use, and the wild reindeer habitat requirements (Andersen & Hustad 2004).

In 2007, the Ministry of the Environment pursued this challenge by commissioning nine regional planning processes in Norway to secure wild reindeer habitats by setting boundaries to human activities in the mountain areas. To support the process, a national wild reindeer centre was commissioned to compose updated natural scientific-based maps of the potential wild reindeer habitats in each region. The commissioning letter emphasised the protection (but not conservation) of the wild reindeer habitats, as well as the exploration of rural development potentials. The steering of the planning process was placed with municipal and regional political actors, but all decisions were to be based on updated natural scientific knowledge. The regional planning initiative can thus be interpreted as an attempt to avoid conflict with local communities by addressing both protection and use interests, and by including local actors in the decision-making arena (Vasstrøm 2013).

Heiplanen, the case explored in this chapter, was the southernmost regional planning area. It involved 18 municipalities in five counties and a planning area of approximately 12,000 km^2. The planning process started in 2008 when the county governments developed and politically approved a plan development program for the process. The formal planning process started in the autumn of 2009 and ended in the spring of 2011. The plan had a public hearing in 2011 and was finally approved in 2012 by the county governments and the Ministry of the Environment.

The three municipalities of Setesdal were central to Heiplanen because they have some of the most critical wild reindeer habitats in the region (Mossing & Heggenes 2010), and their entire municipal area was included in the planning area. Setesdal is a narrow, 200 km long valley situated in the southern mountain area of Norway. The three most northern and mountainous municipalities, Bykle, Valle and Bygland, are large in area (approx. 4,500 km^2), but sparsely populated (approx. 3,500 inhabitants in 2013). The nearest city is Kristiansand (approx. 85,000 inhabitants) situated on the coast at 1–3 hours

Map 6.1 National wild reindeer areas and recommendations for European wild reindeer regions. Dark areas: national wild reindeer areas, Gray areas: other wild reindeer areas, Gray line: European wild reindeer regions. Area 1 and Area 2 indicate the planning area of Heiplanen (Mossing & Heggenes 2010, printed with permission from the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research).

driving distance. These rural municipalities, like similar peripheral rural areas in Scandinavia and Europe, face socio-economic challenges related to workplace development and a declining number of citizens. Rural development is an important issue in the municipality and understood as a broad, diverse and long-term process (Normann & Vasstrøm 2012). Setesdal has a long and conflictual history of (wild reindeer) nature protection processes, which resulted in a landscape protection area in 2000 (Falleth & Hovik 2006).

Two main dimensions of use influence the wild reindeer habitat in Setesdal: recreational use of the mountains and hydropower development. Similar to other mountainous regions in Norway, Setesdal is increasingly used for

recreational tourism, and the number of second homes has increased tremendously during the last 20 years (Ericsson et al. 2010). Another use dimension is the large-scale construction of hydropower plants by the national state during the last three decades that has claimed sizable areas in the centre of the wild reindeer habitats, due to construction of dams, power lines and roads.

This particular case of regional nature protection planning in three municipalities reflects many of the initially described challenges of nature protection planning in relation to different claims of knowledge, steering, interests and values. The case illustrates that there are substantial or material socio-ecological interest conflicts between economic development perspectives and the ecological habitat requirements of wild reindeer, as well as cultural differences of nature values between (and within) the local community and national policies. The case further reflects the more immaterial or abstract challenges related to the procedural legitimacy of steering (and participation) in the planning process, and the meeting between different knowledge paradigms and rationalities. In the underlying study of this chapter, I explored how these tensions played out during the particular planning process and how they created openings as well as closures for a more deliberative, participatory planning arena (Vasstrøm 2013).

METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The explorative ambition of the study described in this chapter was operationalised through a Critical Utopian Action Research-inspired approach (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006; see also Clausen as well as Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume and their descriptions of this particular Action Research orientation). The research ambition was not only aimed at developing generic knowledge about a planning process from the institutional and community perspectives, but also an attempt to *disturb* the existing planning logic through the introduction of a community everyday life perspective in the formal planning arena. To accomplish this ambition, I, as the researcher, acted as a participatory observer *and* critical reflecting partner with the institutional planning actors in the formal planning arena for two years. I, in this sense, continuously questioned and reflected with the formal planning actors about their understanding of participation, and proposed how different modes of participation could produce other perspectives of nature protection and use that were not represented by authorities or interest groups. The disturbance of the formal planning arena was further enacted through the researcher's proposal and facilitation of an *informal* participation process in the Setesdal municipalities to elucidate the nature-society considerations and aspirations among local communities.

I planned and facilitated three Future Creating Workshops (see also Clausen as well as Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume) in collaboration with the municipal planners in Setesdal and financially supported by the formal planning process of Heiplanen. The workshops created an arena to explore and develop citizens' perspectives about "*The good life for people and wild*

reindeer in Setesdal—now and in the future". This informal arena generated an opportunity to bring everyday life-oriented perspectives of nature-society relations into the formal planning arena.

This two-sided Action Research approach—of working with both formal planning actors and the local communities—attempted to open a legitimate space for deliberations across a diversity of understandings involved in the planning process. From an analytical perspective, this created an opportunity to explore the potentials of a deliberative planning process by analysing the openings and closures for participation, and how this influenced the understanding of the planning horizon.

Case and Research Process

Table 6.1 summarises and describes the development of the planning process in different phases and the involvement of the action researcher.

Table 6.1 The different phases of the Heiplanen case.

Time	Case Process	Description
2004–2007	Pre-planning process	The pre-planning process was the research and policy process that led to the commissioning of nine regional wild reindeer planning areas and the particular planning program of Heiplanen.
2008–2011	Formal regional planning process	The formal planning process underlies the entire Heiplanen process. It represents the operationalisation of Heiplanen by the formal planning authorities at the regional and municipal levels.
2009–2010	Informal planning process	The informal planning process represents a researcher-initiated parallel process with the municipalities and citizens in Setesdal. It is labelled informal because it did not have any formal authority in the Heiplanen process, but was accepted as an additional process by the planning authorities. It explored the everyday life-oriented understanding of nature and society based on Critical Utopian Action Research-inspired participatory processes.
2010–2011	Semi-formal planning process	The semi-formal process emerged as an outcome of the communication between the informal and formal planning arenas. It is labelled semi-formal because it did not constitute a formal planning arena in itself, but each participant represented a different formal planning authority role in the process.
2011–2012	Post-planning process	The post-planning process was the final hearing and approval of the plan outcome.

(THEORETICAL) OPENINGS AND CLOSURES FOR DELIBERATIVE PARTICIPATION

There are several theoretical and practical arguments for public participation in nature protection planning. First, local participation can be interpreted as an institutional answer to the increasing conflict experienced in nature protection processes (Engelen et al. 2008) and the legitimacy crisis of environmental policies (Elling 2008). Such argumentation is based on an instrumental understanding of participation as a remedy to reduce conflicts and increase the legitimacy of national protection policies. A second line of argumentation is that local participation contributes to increasing learning and knowledge development in nature protection and management processes (Folke 2004; Blackmore 2007). Local communities, in this sense, have valuable knowledge about their area that should be taken into account in a planning process. Local participation can therefore contribute to better planning and management outcomes, as well as to generate collective learning across the expert and local citizens' perspectives (Daniels & Walker 2001; Innes & Booher 2010). However, as argued in the *Introduction*, the ongoing conflicts in nature protection planning illustrate that something remains unanswered within these participatory rationales.

A fundamental problem could be the underlying institutional presumption that participation is a tool to fulfil the planning system purpose rationality (Elling 2008). Such instrumental participation is concerned with modifying or simply legitimising a planning purpose and contributing within the premises defined by an institutional planning authority. Participants are therefore, in practice, often limited to concerned experts and stakeholders who are considered relevant from the institutional perspective, i.e., those that can serve to fulfil the purpose of the plan. This reduces the actual deliberation of values and knowledge about the subject matter to the concerns of a narrow, predefined public (Elling 2008). Participation on such terms will not be able nor allowed to transcend, enable—or even encourage—discussion of the subject matter in a more unrestrained arena (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007 and in this volume). Such instrumental participation logic leaves the democratic core of broad public involvement neglected and eroded, often resulting in some degree of participation fatigue (Clausen 2011). It is perhaps not surprising that people become uninterested in participating in pre-ordained planning processes, and it is easy to dismiss such fatigue as a simple lack of concern from the public. However, on a more distinct level, the weariness of not being heard can also erode the sense of responsibility for the public planning efforts of the area in question (Clausen 2011; Vasstrøm 2013). A central concern in public planning should therefore be to avoid participation fatigue and, more fundamentally, prevent the corrosion of the democratic essence in planning (Hansen 2007).

The argument put forth here is that if public planning is to be a democratic approach to create more sustainable societies, then it must also involve

citizens as constituents of defining the actual purpose of a given plan. Participation, in this sense, carries a democratic, deliberative rationale. The deliberative approach emphasises that a planning process should generate the opportunity for citizens to collectively discuss and reflect on the subject matter. The planning arena should, in this sense, open and encourage discussions between different rationalities as a way of understanding current challenges and potential change dimensions in the given context. Such processes can not only further new understandings through social learning, but also mobilise social change actions. The deliberative argument thereby furthers an approach to participation in planning that also involves citizens' everyday life relation to the area as a different contribution to the otherwise expert-dominated planning horizon. Such contributions can further changes in the nature-society management that a planning document would not be able to grasp.

The "solution" to nature protection or sustainability cannot be found in any single rationality or understanding of the nature-society complexity. Rather, the point here is to illustrate that there is no panacea to these complex challenges, not scientific, technocratic, or local (Ostrom 2008). The development of more sustainable futures (i.e., environmental planning) therefore requires a more (deliberative) democratic platform that can serve to open local and scientific rationalities and knowledge regimes towards new and perhaps more diverse understandings. Such collaboration requires that layman or citizen everyday life perspectives are allowed to participate with their rationality, and not only through the mere premises of technical planning categories or expert agendas. In other words, public participation must be involved in defining the agenda, deliberating the ambitions and seizing responsibilities.

This line of argumentation leads to the question of how participatory practices can be facilitated to avoid the discrepancy and tyranny increasingly criticised in theories of participatory nature planning and management (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Hansen 2007; Björkell 2008; Grönholm 2009; Clausen et al. 2010; Clausen 2011; Daugstad 2011). Critical Utopian Action Research is one such approach that aims to develop deliberative arenas in practice through Future Creating Workshops. This approach was used during this study to develop alternative participatory arenas during a formal nature protection process. The experiences with this approach will be discussed in the final sections of this chapter; however, I will first elaborate on the analytical dimensions used to interpret the outcomes of this approach.

Discursive and Experiential Openings and Closures

There will always be different rationales and arguments of participation at play in processes of policy making and planning. The interesting point of the analysis is to scrutinise how these are played out between planning institutions, experts, local citizens and stakeholders, and in a dialectic sense, point

to where (or how) there is potential for a more democratic orientation on the planning horizon. Openings and closures are, in this sense, used as analytical concepts. The purpose of such analysis is not to define right or wrong practices, but to point to dialectic dynamics in a planning process that hinder or enable participatory processes and the development of communication across different rationalities.

The conceptual understanding of openings and closures builds on two theoretical inspirations: Critical Theory and Critical Utopian Action Research. In a critical theoretical sense, the concepts of openings and closures are concerned with the communication and understanding about our reality and how potential alternative realities are considered (or excluded) in these processes (Deetz 1992). In Critical Utopian Action Research, openings and closures are also concerned with how practices and experiences enable or disable social learning and change (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006, 2007a). The analysis of openings and closures explores how certain communicative or experiential events create *turning points* in the planning process.

The discursive aspects of the analysis centre on the possibilities and barriers of the communicative praxis and social dimensions, namely how the institutional and organisational premises in time and space influenced and (potentially) developed the participatory praxis between different actors during the process. The second dimension of the analysis focuses on the experiential and material elements in the process that contributed to create openings and closures for deliberative participation, and the development of new understandings. The following sections describe these two analytical dimensions.

Discursive Openings and Closures

The concept of discursive closures builds on a Habermasian-founded communicative theory and problematises how seemingly broad democratic participation can be restricted (closed) by distortion or false premises (Deetz 1992). Communicative distortion is, according to Deetz, in play when decisions are presented as consensus-based, although some participants have been deprived of meaning creation in the process. Such participatory processes are strategic actions purposed to legitimise the decision-making process (Deetz 1992).

Discursive closures are the suppression of potential conflicts in order to protect a certain institution (norm, culture, organisation). Deetz (1992) categorised eight strategies that create discursive closures in a communication process: *Disqualification, Naturalisation of discourse, Neutralisation, Topical avoidance, Subjectification, Meaning Denial, Legitimisation* and *Pacification*. The four most relevant strategies for the analysis are summarised here:

1) *Disqualification* refers to how a decision-making process marginalises some discourses or participants while others are privileged. The *right*

knowledge or expertise is predefined, while other knowledge perspectives are consequently disqualified. This strategy reproduces its own capacity to determine who is qualified, and who is able to question the very definition of qualification.

2) *Naturalisation of discourse* describes how a communication process can operate with reification of *truth*. The subject of the matter is, in other words, predefined in the process as something natural or unquestionable. Such strategies create discursive closures by communicating subjective claims as objective truths or as frozen realities.
3) *Neutralisation* is a process of hiding value foundations and treating the process as *value free*. It neglects the underlying values that co-construct social perceptions, and treats the dominating values as the only possible values. The act of neutralisation suppresses the potential of conflict and the emergence of different understandings, and thereby undermines the possibility of deliberative democracy.
4) *Legitimisation* is the act of rationalising decisions through the invocation of higher order explanations. It creates some *master values* by legitimising some values over others; e.g., the value of biodiversity or efficiency is considered "good" on its own account.

The core of democratic participation and deliberation is the willingness and capacity to explore different, contrasting and even oppositional viewpoints in a process. To be able to depict how such will and capacity emerges, it is relevant to formulate some reversed points of discursive closures as *discursive openings*. Discursive openings are understood as the possibility of conflicting or alternative values, understandings or representations to enter the communication and decision-making arena. The legitimate participation of competing or contradicting discourses requires that the constituting rules of the communicative arena accept the *equal right* of different values, perceptions and knowledge claims to be presented and heard (Healey 2006, 2009; Elling 2008). This also means recognising that the very knowledge and value *premises* of a decision-making process are a matter for broad discussions; it is in the definition of the subject matter (or in this case nature protection) that the discussions should begin (Deetz 1992). The notion of qualified claims, master values or objective knowledge must therefore be reverted to recognise a plurality of different values and knowledge claims with distinct validity grounds. The openings for deliberative participation occur when the communication process can deliberate the presumptions and worldviews underlying such claims. In a deliberative, participatory process, the subject matter is thus constituted in relation to the different participants through *transparent* and *equal* communication processes (Deetz 1992).

Openings of dialogue and deliberative participation is a process of both individual and social *formation* (Deetz 1992). In a sustainability perspective, this human ability of formation and change lays the ground for responsibility for the societal relations to nature. Discursive openings are

therefore also a matter of social learning that motivate and develop citizens' authoritativeness and responsibility towards local and universal aspects of nature stewardship (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006). The argument is not that the expert and natural scientific knowledge is not relevant, but that a deliberative, participatory arena must allow for meaning refraction and learning that involves other claims and perspectives than just the expert perspective.

Nielsen and Nielsen (2006, 2007a) argue that a deliberative, democratic nature planning process should take its point of departure at the citizen's everyday life relation to nature. This relation might be latent, ambivalent and contain (individual and collective) contradictions. However, they argue that the openings for deliberative, democratic participation lie in creating a free space for social deliberation and learning about these individual and collective community relations to the surrounding nature. It also means that contradictions, ambiguities and conflicts can be unfolded, and thereby also involves closures to the creation of new meaning orientations. However, it creates the potential for the deliberation of both critical and utopian understandings and change perspectives that are rooted in a—for the citizens—meaningful perspective, even though these might be different from the institutional planning perspective. Such social learning processes can facilitate or (re)develop nature responsibilities and concerns in a local arena. The discursive openings for deliberative, democratic participation in planning, or what Nielsen and Nielsen (2007a) call *reverse* participation, is thus the ability to include the everyday life perspectives of the citizens as a legitimate point of departure for the planning process (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, 2007a).

Experiential Openings and Closures

The openings for citizens' participations and social learning can, however, not only rely on the sharing of existing meaning structures and perceptions, or the negotiation of established interests. Our perception of nature and society relations is more than just language and maps. New understandings and practices must also include an experiential, and particularly a collective experiential, dimension (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, 2007a). The experiential learning dimension is related to the Action Research perspective, but is also found in the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey (1938) as a foundation for the knowledge development of a democratic society. This pragmatic philosophical perspective emphasises that democratic societal development is constituted on the generation of knowledge based on our lived experiences and reflections. New understandings and reorientations of meaning and practice are based on our (social) experiences with the physical-material nature dimensions. Collective experiences of nature, connected to an everyday life practice, can therefore form the basis for individual and social learning and new common horizons of understanding. Openings for democratic participation in the planning horizon are therefore also a matter of creating

and facilitating experiential learning in relation to a common materiality across expert and citizens' rationalities.

The analytical framework of openings and closures seeks to identify certain aspects of an environmental planning process that can hinder and further a deliberative democratic process between expert and local community rationalities. However, the objective is not simply to categorise the complexity of a planning process into a single conceptual "opening and closure" model. Rather, the concepts are used as a dialectic analytical frame of reflection for creating generic knowledge from the complex (researcher) experiences. The empirical analysis that follows next can thus be seen as two-fold: a descriptive analysis of the prevailing participatory rationales during the process, and a dialectic analysis of factors and events that (potentially) fostered openings or closures in the planning process.

DEPICTING PARTICIPATORY RATIONALES IN HEIPLANEN

The Initiation of a Regional Process

The process of Heiplanen was played out in a regional-scale participation arena that was to handle a planning purpose which would have had significant consequences for the affected municipalities and local communities. The planning purpose of wild reindeer habitat securement has an intrinsic regional character, as it, in an ecological sense, traverses municipal planning boundaries. The main participatory objective in the formal regional planning process was the involvement of 18 mayors and 5 county government mayors on a regional steering board purposed to negotiate area boundaries based on updated wild reindeer knowledge. The negotiation process, however, revealed that setting boundaries in the area involved complex and irreducible challenges in each municipality (and especially in Setesdal, where the planned boundaries affected almost the entire area). During this process, it became evident that the natural scientific knowledge ground and regional-scale understanding was different from the local-scale understanding of the area. The areas in question were, from the local scale, not only perceived as wild reindeer habitats, but constituting and interwoven in socio-cultural—and economic—nature relations with historic and future dimensions.

The municipal mayors criticised the initial participatory approach in the regional arena as a legitimising strategy by the national authorities to reduce the inherent conflict potential in what they perceived as a predefined planning outcome. They argued that the premise of natural scientific knowledge in the decision-making in practice restricted their potential to contribute with their opinions or to bring in other arguments. The knowledge premise could thus serve as a constitutional directive of the planning outcome and undermine the decisions of the steering board. This critique was invigorated by the introduction of an area map in the process that outlined boundaries

of potential habitat areas of the wild reindeer (Mossing & Heggenes 2010). From the municipal perspective, this map was seen as a way of materialising natural scientific knowledge as an objective truth, and thus as an attempt to restrict the broader negotiations of habitat boundaries.

The project leader of Heiplanen recognised that (the complexity of) the process and the articulated critique required additional in-depth discussions with the involved municipalities. He arranged meetings with the political and administrative leadership of each municipality, and attended open public meetings to discuss the purpose and challenges of Heiplanen. The participatory approach was in this sense broadened with several local discussion arenas. However, the participatory approach was rather directed at providing information about the planning process and potential consequences and to hear the public critique, than to actually deliberating other potential directions for the process.

The Generation of an Informal Planning Arena

During this phase of the formal planning process, the action researcher furthered a proposal of facilitating local community Future Creating Workshops in the three Setesdal municipalities to create a space for citizens' deliberations about their nature and local community concerns. This suggestion was discussed and finally supported by the Setesdal municipal authorities and the regional plan project leader as a relevant contribution to depict local community perspectives. In collaboration with the municipal authorities, the action researcher planned and enabled three workshops with approximately 60 participants. The workshops facilitated a social community space for deliberating everyday life considerations of the nature-society relations that were not reducible to predefined planning categorisations. The substantial content that developed during the workshops exhibited the intrinsic relations between the lived life and the use of nature, as well as the frustrations of being "governed" by national authorities and nature protection categorisations (Vasstrøm 2013). The workshops developed visions for improved local management systems, local nature knowledge centres, nature-related youth education and new agricultural practices. These visions were perceived as potential actions that could serve to revitalise local nature identity and responsibility and facilitate the creation of local workplaces. Such workplaces were considered pivotal for potential re-attracting of migrated local youth and thus strengthening the long-term community existence.

The local community engagement was not furthered in the formal planning process. The regional planning authorities argued that the participation of citizens was too complicated in a regional arena and they were afraid that it could mobilise individual economic interests and land quarrels. Further, it was argued that such local community perspectives were not suitable to enter a regional planning process that aimed to establish (objective)

boundaries for the wild reindeer habitat and a written planning document. Lastly, it was argued that the given planning delivery deadline did not allow for further in-depth citizen participation or the development of community visions. The (knowledge) outcome of the workshops—or the citizen nature perspectives and visions—were, however, recognised as an interesting perspective in the formal plan process, and the researcher was invited to present these to the regional political steering board and to the administrative regional planning actors.

The Emergence of a Semi-Formal Planning Arena

Shortly after this research presentation, the action researcher was invited by the regional planning authorities to participate in a study trip to England. The purpose of the trip was to learn from English nature planning and management practices in national parks and in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The municipal political and administrative leadership, the regional planners and the representatives from the county government's environmental department were all invited to participate. The English experiences with nature protection management and participation, and the related discussions between the Heiplanen actors (and the action researcher), created momentum for considering new ways of communicating between the municipalities and the state (county government) authorities during the remainder of the planning process.

Shortly after the study trip, and encouraged by the action researcher, the environmental managers of the county government, county government planners and the municipal leadership agreed to meet around a table to discuss the purpose, boundaries and challenges of Heiplanen. These (semi-formal) planning arenas gradually facilitated a mutual understanding of the necessity of regional and local communication. It developed an increased understanding of the area boundary complexity where both wild reindeer requirements and local community consequences were considered and discussed. This again served to improve the mutual willingness and recognition for the necessity of dialogue across authoritative levels to gain a better mutual understanding of the nature protection measures in the area. These arenas thus empowered the local authorities to participate as legitimate contributors in the process, based on their local perspectives and knowledge (also as citizens). The dialogue process gradually developed the recognition that there were different legitimate understandings of the area. In other words, the local concerns on a regional scale and the regional concerns on a local scale became outspoken and generated a process of mutual learning. The final outcome of these six semi-formal meetings was a collaboratively crafted planning document and the establishment of negotiated area boundaries for the Setesdal municipalities. In 2012, the Heiplanen document was approved by the county governments and national steering authorities.

Openings and Closures for Deliberative Participation

Based on this empirical description, this section unfolds and analyses the factors and events that created discursive and experiential openings and closures in the planning horizon for deliberative participation.

Disqualification and Naturalisation

The commissioning letter from the Ministry of the Environment introduced natural scientific knowledge as a fundamental premise for decision-making in the planning process. This knowledge premise can be interpreted as a discursive closure for the participation of broader meaning perspectives in the planning process. It served as a lever to qualify and disqualify certain discourses and rationalities in the planning process. Natural scientific knowledge (such as reports, studies, maps, etc.) and the proprietors of such knowledge (researchers, environmental institutions) were in this sense regarded as the "right" kind of expertise to evaluate or validate decision-making. Such a strategy of *disqualification*, as Deetz (1992) argues, reproduces its own capacity to determine who is qualified to be a decision-maker. In this sense, it serves to appoint actors who have a legitimate position to classify the definition and foundation for participant qualification.

In addition, the combination of a knowledge premise and the materialisation of an area map that was seemingly based on natural scientific knowledge served to reproduce the power of certain actors to define the planning purpose and outcome as a matter of establishing habitat boundaries. In this sense, it *naturalised* the purpose of positioning boundaries as a necessary "truth" to protect wild reindeer habitats. This naturalisation closed the discussion about the subject matter exactly where it should have begun: how is the subject matter (nature protection) as such defined? (Deetz 1992) The knowledge premise in the Heiplanen thus served to develop a discursive closure for broad participation and the development of new mutual understandings by disqualifying non-proprietors of natural scientific knowledge and by naturalising the nature protection discourse of habitat boundaries as an objective truth. The power to define the "reality" and the "right" expertise and values was thus able to reproduce itself continuously by avoiding the participation of contrasting rationalities or reality perceptions.

The participatory component in the planning process can thus be understood as partly closed in the initial part of the planning process. The municipal authorities were not qualified as relevant participants and contributors in the process of constituting the planning purpose and process. The contribution of participation was, in this sense, reduced to a rational-instrumental remedy to ensure local political legitimacy and to avoid significant conflicts between local and state authorities in the planning process.

Neutralisation and Legitimisation

The understanding of complexity in the planning process, paradoxically, also closed the possibility of discussing the planning purpose at a broader level. In this sense, the regional planning authorities acknowledged that the planning area involved complex socio-cultural and ecological elements. However, since the commissioned objective by the Ministry of the Environment was to establish wild reindeer habitats boundaries within a given time frame, the deliberation of use perspectives within this area complexity would be too complex to "plan" within the deadline. In this sense, the planning horizon was closed for rationalities and perspectives other than those that were related to the settling and categorisation of boundaries. This type of argumentation *neutralised* the establishment of boundaries as a value-free and objective measure of nature protection planning. The purpose of boundaries thus became a steering "truth" which controlled the potential content of the dialogue in the process, and made it unfeasible to open deliberations about the subject matter (nature protection) on other terms. This discursive closure of the subject matter also directly influenced who were considered relevant participants in the planning arena. The formation of wild reindeer habitats was thereby *legitimised* as a higher-ranked purpose than the local community perspectives of nature relations and potential development. The habitat boundaries became a *master value* in the process that legitimised the planning purpose without further discussion. The participatory rationale was, in this sense, directed at negotiating boundaries on a map, and not about deliberating public (or local community) perspectives of nature-society relations.

Discursive and Experiential Openings

The first opening for a broader public participation arose with the project leader's visit to the 18 municipalities. These meetings generated an arena where the understandings and perceived challenges related to the planning purpose and process could be discussed from the local municipal viewpoint. In this sense, it created a discursive opening for deliberating frustrations and critiques, and to discuss alternative perspectives for the planning process and substance. This enabled a learning process between the regional and local scales of understanding that improved the project leader's understanding of the current situation, the historical conflicts and the future perspectives. This improved understanding of the planning complexity and further generated an opening for local community involvement. That is, they led to the acknowledgement (and financing) of the organisation of three local Future Creating Workshops.

The facilitation of the Future Creating Workshops in Setesdal generated an arena for broader deliberations about the subject matter, based on an

everyday life understanding of nature and society, or, "*The good life for people and wild reindeer in Setesdal*". This opened a space where discussions of nature and society could unfold beyond the purpose orientation of the formal planning process. The workshops created a potential for local community engagement, and facilitated new orientations about how to go about nature-society issues in the local communities. In this sense, it was a "free space" for collectively discussing these issues as something different from the planning system categorisations, and something broader than individual interest orientations.

This informal process was, to some extent, recognised as contributing with profound information about local community concerns and illustrated that local actors could be involved in planning without a focus on individual (economic) interests. However, as previously described, grounded in arguments of the necessity of boundary setting, and given the time constraints, local community participation was not furthered in the formal planning process.

The experiences and outcome from the workshops can, however, be seen as one factor that served to open the understanding of the planning purpose among the regional planning authorities. Another important factor that contributed to open local participation in the planning arena was the study trip to England. This trip created a space for learning from nature management (and participation) experiences from areas with similar challenges. Municipal and state authorities, in this sense, participated in a collective learning experience that could be discussed and reflected on in the process of Heiplanen. The combination of the Setesdal workshops and the experiences from the study trip broadened the understanding of the complexity of the nature protection and local development issues at stake, and increased the recognition of the municipal authorities as legitimate and knowledgeable contributors in the planning process.

These openings fostered the semi-formal dialogue arenas between the municipal and regional state (county government) authorities. The establishment of these arenas, open to participation of municipal authorities, was not just understood as a legitimising factor for predefined outcomes, but as a committed and qualified contribution to the planning outcome. The previous naturalisations of the planning purpose as primarily wild reindeer habitats were thus challenged by local understandings of the area as part of the lived life and history. The process of disclosing values and knowledge (scientific, local and experiential) about the area (topography, ecology and human use) opened up a generation of new meaning orientations. The planning document illustrates how local knowledge and opinions became directly influential on the firm setting of habitat boundaries and the formulation of the planning document. Although the collaborative effort resulted in an agreed-upon planning document and developed understandings across institutional levels of planning, it did not succeed in opening the planning horizon to public participation on broader terms.

Sustainable Planning Horizons?

The participatory rationales in Heiplanen developed during the process through different movements of both openings and closures of new understandings among the formal planning actors. The initial participatory motivation was to ensure some sort of local legitimacy and reduce the level of conflict. During the process, the participatory rationale turned into a remedy to understand the area's complexity and collaboratively (negotiate and) improve the knowledge ground for setting the habitat boundaries. *Within* the planning purpose rationality, the understanding of participation was thus opened towards collaboration between the municipal and the regional-state authority level. However, the regional planning arena was not opened *beyond* this predefined purpose to discuss broader issues of nature protection through the involvement of local communities. Nature protection was thus perceived as a matter of establishing habitat boundaries, and not about encouraging local responsibility or developing future perspectives for sustainable nature-society relations.

This analysis claims that the participation of the local communities could have created a "better" planning outcome, in the sense that it could have broadened the institutional perspective of nature protection with *different* rationalities. The closure of the local community participation was an unplannable or irrelevant "good", and thus marginalised perspectives about nature protection that could not be expressed within the institutional purpose rationality. From a sustainability perspective, this marginalisation and disqualification of the broader public concerns disregards the potential for redirecting the nature-society trajectory based on community lifeworld perspectives. Such redirections are, however, intrinsically important in nature protection planning because they can develop perspectives for change in the very nature-society practices from which we are trying to protect nature.

In a more general sense, the openings and closures of participation in planning raises discussions about how the planning arena defines and handles the notion of the "public". A relevant question to ask, then, is whether the public should be invited as representatives of individual interest (stakeholders), as interest groups with particular agendas or as citizens with a broader lifeworld rationality (cf. Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). This question elucidates the tension between the collaborative and deliberative understanding of public participation in planning. The collaborative perspective is concerned with "relevant" actors and affected stakeholders who can contribute to understanding the complexity of the situation (Innes & Booher 2010). Participation, in such terms, is concerned with balancing and negotiating established interests or values towards an agreed-upon planning outcome. Although this type of collaborative participation might be relevant in some situations where there is a fairly agreed-upon understanding of the situation (if that is ever the case!), it cannot transcend established institutional logic or predefined purposes.

The deliberative perspective, on the contrary, is concerned with bringing the public into play as something different from interest holders. It is thus an attempt to enrich the democratic planning arena, and the substantial outcome with different rationalities from the institutional or interest-based rationalities (Hansen 2007). If the planning arena is reduced to consider only the planning system-defined categories or stakeholder-defined interests, it can seem meaningless (and impossible) for the public, as citizens, to contribute with their everyday life perspectives of the subject matter (Clausen 2011). If the purpose of environmental planning is also a matter of redirecting societal development trajectories, then the planning arena must be able to remain open for deliberation beyond such institutional or interest-based logic. This would imply that a planning process could open for "reverse participation", where citizens and communities are considered legitimate contributors of different rationalities and visions to the subject matter (nature protection) than what is (pre)defined by the planning system (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007a). Such involvement of the public requires that citizens be recognised as citizens rooted within an everyday life orientation to the subject matter. The argumentation for citizens' participation as a democratic goal in itself should, however, not just be a matter of procedural legitimacy in planning. It should also be directed at encouraging citizens' emancipation, responsibility and substantial contribution to sustainable societal development horizons (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006).

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

The experiences from Heiplanen illustrate that current nature protection planning, despite its participatory rhetoric, is moulded by discursive closures to public participation. The disqualification of participants and naturalisation of the predefined planning purpose restricts the potential for discussing the subject of nature protection on broader terms. However, the case described also reveals that there are potential openings in the planning horizon. The formation of communicative and experiential arenas that allow "free space" for deliberating nature and society relations based on community, everyday life perspectives can encourage other types of knowledge generation, social learning and future visions. Such arenas can thus further a different outlook on the societal planning horizon.

From a sustainability perspective, nature protection is a matter of developing new understandings and practices in our nature and society relations. The characteristic dichotomies of protection and use, culture and nature, and local or central steering that are echoed in the nature planning and management literature and praxis are relevant for understanding different conflictual aspects of nature-society relations. However, the question of nature and society relations more fundamentally raises challenges of discussing what we understand as our common concern. Environmental planning, as

an institutional sustainability endeavour, should therefore essentially be a matter of encouraging and deliberating the relation to nature as a common societal concern in a broad public arena. It is through our cognitive and experiential "relationing" to the common that it becomes meaningful for the public as citizens to participate in and contribute to societal planning. Nature protection, as part of social reality, can thus be understood as a broadly termed common concern amid different rationalities and relations.

The discussion of the public contribution in planning is especially relevant in environmental planning or, more broadly, in the search for sustainable trajectories. Such endeavours cannot be reduced to a matter of strengthening the expert bureaucracy or producing decisions based on the "right" knowledge. Environmental planning should acknowledge the participation of the broader public, exactly because the public can contribute with perspectives that are not "visible" within established scientific, bureaucratic, or interest-based discourses. The involvement of the public as citizens opens a perspective that is not limited by sectored interests or scientific categorisations, and that can further other types of social knowledge development. Participation on such terms can thus deliberate the subject matter (nature and society relations) as a broader social Commons. Nature protection should thus not be reduced to a matter of establishing boundaries for current unsustainability; it should also be a search for alternative futures. The opening of broader public participation in planning is thus, in a procedural sense, a potential to develop citizens' emancipation and responsibility for the social Commons, and in a substantial sense, the potential to generate different perspectives on a sustainable societal trajectory.

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7 Recovering Multiple Rationalities for Public Deliberation Within the EU Water Framework Directive

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INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four described how internationally, participation has become an institutionalised rhetorical phenomenon within Natural Resource Management (NRM) that politicians and governmental agencies are obliged to integrate in the development and subsequent implementation of public policy. It was also argued that despite the strong rhetoric on participation and legislative internalisation following the "Rio Declaration on Environment and Development" from 1992, only a few fundamental changes at best have emerged from the rhetoric and legislation in terms of participative and deliberative practices. One of the international conventions mentioned was the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). The WFD contains a legislative claim of integrating public participation in water planning. Using Denmark and Sweden as examples, we will in this chapter investigate how the participatory requirement has been implemented. Denmark and Sweden are both members of the European Union and therefore must comply with the WFD, but the countries have chosen two different ways of fulfilling the legal requirements of public participation. Despite the very different approaches, we will in this chapter argue that both countries have failed to democratise their water planning.

Using the two examples of the implementation of the WFD, in this chapter, we will discuss two questions. The first question is, "What prevents the integration of the knowledge and experiences of professionals, authorities and citizens when balancing particular interests with the more general interest, as required by the WDF?" The other question we wish to address is, "What openings and closures can be identified for introducing participatory planning arenas for the inclusion of the knowledge, experiences and values of the citizens, as well as the various types of knowledge and experiences of professionals and experts?" *Openings* and *closures* are here understood not only as discursive openings and closures, but also as immanent possibilities for change, either not identified by the actors or the possibilities that are identified but for various reasons not utilised (Deetz 1992; Vasstrøm 2013 and in this volume).

The two main questions addressed in this chapter are a reaction to our findings that there is a discrepancy between the programmatic intention of public participation and also the way water planning has in fact been practised within the framework of WFD. From our point of view, water planning being a part of NRM has to be based on dialogue between the different forms of rationalities, understood as knowledge, experiences and values, in order to overcome the expert-oriented planning. This is necessary if NRM is going to respond successfully to the severe social, political and ecological crises our civilisation is facing today. Despite the fact that we are talking about multiple crises, they are also interrelated and can all be labelled as one: *the sustainability crisis* (see also *Editors' Introduction* in this volume).

The sustainability crisis requires substantial changes on a societal level, not as one-sided technocratic initiatives, but as an outcome of democratic processes where people as members of society, as citizens, can take responsibility for the material as well as immaterial Commons, here defined as *natural resources* and *the future*. As it is argued in several chapters in this volume, this requires a democratic transformation that has to be based on dialogue and therefore rooted in *deliberation*. This is where Action Research comes into the picture, with its roots in a strong democratic normativity emerging from the experiences from the Second World War and with a strong focus on the totalitarian tendencies of modernity.

This chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first section, we will briefly introduce the WFD as the basis for water management within the European Union, and we will in particular elaborate on the democratic requirements of the Directive. In the second part of the chapter, we will show how the WFD and its requirements of public participation have been implemented very differently in Denmark and Sweden. We will, based on the two examples, discuss the potential *openings* and *closures* provided by the WFD for a more fundamental democratic transformation of NRM. In the third and final part of the chapter, we will present an alternative approach to a more democratic water planning based on a seven-year-long Action Research project in Sweden around a particular lake.

THE EU WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

In the EU, water management is regulated under "Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for the Community action in the field of water policy", for short, the EU Water Framework Directive, and in this chapter, the WFD or simply, the Directive. The WFD entered into force in 2000 by a decision of the member states of the EU as a general EU-wide ambition to improve and secure the water quality by defining a framework for protecting and improving streams, lakes, transitional waters, coastal waters and ground water (WFD, article 1). The Directive essentially rests on two pillars, one aimed at the quality of the

water, using "good ecological" and "good chemical status" as the indicators, and one aimed at the political process, using "public participation" as the normative category (Valinia et al. 2012). It is for the member states to decide how to implement the two pillars of the Directive, but essentially, the definition of "good chemical status" is based on threshold values, while the definition of "good ecological status" and "public participation" are open to interpretation. The preamble of the Directive calls for a close co-ordination between the different levels of planning, combined with enlightenment, consultations and participation of the public as a precondition for achieving the effects requested. Thus, citizens' participation could be said to have a prominent position in protecting our water milieu. To ensure active involvement and consultation, the member states are obliged, as a minimum requirement, to organise six-month-long hearings on the different stages of the water planning process, three, two and one year before each water management cycle (EU 2000, article 14). What "active involvement" should be is not further defined, but left to the interpretation of the member states.

The Directive calls for the "active involvement of all interested parties" and states that the success of the Directive "relies on close cooperation and coherent action at Community, Member State and local level as well as on information, consultation and involvement of the public, including users" (EU Directive 2000/60). Apart from the six- month-long hearings, however, the Directive does not in itself provide any legally binding obligations on how to include the public and the local levels. As such, the call for "active involvement" is an empty signifier and from a legal point of view, it is entirely up to the member states to decide whatever minimum participative requirement they wish to apply.

Deliberative Citizens' Participation Ideal in EU Guidance for Public Participation

Despite the weak definition, the rhetorical emphasis on public participation in the WFD creates the expectation that it is more than procedure as usual, and in order to obtain a better understanding of the thoughts on participation lying behind the Directive, one can read the official "Guidance Document No 8, Public Participation in relation to the water framework directive" (EU 2003), in which participation is defined. Thus, there seems to be a discrepancy between the formal demands for public participation of the Directive and the intentions as described in this document (Gertz et al. 2012; Nielsen 2012a; Valinia et al. 2012), where the main purpose of public participation is described as follows:

> To improve decision-making, by ensuring that decisions are soundly based on shared knowledges, experiences and scientific evidence, that decisions are influenced by the views and experiences of those affected by them.
>
> (EU 2003, p. 14)

Citizens' participation is here divided into four levels. "Written hearings" is the lowest level, followed by "oral participation" and "participation in the development and implementation of the plan" and, at the highest level, "shared decision-making and self-determination", which invites the engagement of and a more direct commitment from the citizens. The first level, written hearings, is characterised as minimum implementation, while the third and the fourth levels are referred to as "best practice". It is underlined in the Guidance Document that participation, both in the development and the implementation of the WFD, is considered a central necessity if the demands of the Directive on the protection and improvement of the water quality are to be fulfilled.

Furthermore, the Guidance Document describes how public involvement can initiate public consciousness of environmental questions, and how the water planning itself could gain from integrating knowledge, experiences and initiatives from a broad spectrum of stakeholders. All in all, it is argued, this could lead to more sustainable solutions. In the Guidance Document, the notion of "best practice" is clarified by referring to elements such as giving responsibility to citizens, self-governance, ownership and the sharing of knowledge between experts and the public. Altogether, this represents a strong deliberative understanding of democracy and constitutes a pronounced opening towards an actual democratising of European water management. Its message is that should the member states succeed with the water plan process, they must also, supplementary to representative measures, apply deliberative forms of participation. With this, the WFD potentially becomes one of the most radical institutional and legislative platforms for a democratic transformation of NRM in Europe.

Based on this background, we will now look at two national examples of the implementation of the WFD, with a particular focus on one main pillar, *public participation*.

WATER PLANNING IN DENMARK AND SWEDEN

Denmark and Sweden represent two very different political and administrative ways of implementing the WFD. Where Denmark represents a traditional top-down process, characterised by a one-sided, centralistic approach,[1] Sweden represents an attempt including a more local participative approach with the use of so-called water boards.[2] We will in this section briefly describe the two different approaches, primarily maintaining a focus on how each of the two countries has dealt with the requirement of participation. We will then contrast the two approaches to the definition of participation as stated in the aforementioned "Guidance Document No 8" on public participation in relation to the WFD and discuss the potential openings for a democratic transformation of European water management.

Top-Down Water Planning in Denmark

In Denmark, the state took on the responsibility of implementing the WFD, including the development of water plans, while the municipalities were responsible for the implementation of the water plans at the local level. The initial implementation of the WFD was strongly influenced by ongoing organisational and administrative changes. Thus, Danish NRM faced a double challenge with the WFD. The three required legislative six-month phases of consultancy were fulfilled by introducing written hearings, while the demand for active involvement and public participation was complied with by the formation of Water and Nature Councils, which were comprised of representatives from municipalities and from different well-established NGOs, such as the Danish Society for Nature Conservation, the Danish Outdoor Council and various agricultural associations. The premises for these Water and Nature councils were described as follows:

> Good collaboration and good dialogue with the many actors having an interest in the elaboration of the plans. To ensure this dialogue, local Water and Nature Councils are established.
>
> (Miljøministeriet 2007, p. 1)

The councils were meant to be fora for dialogues between state, municipalities and organisations in the water planning process, but without any decision-making competence.

Shortly after the Water and Nature Councils were launched, the neoliberal government established a cross-sectoral governmental committee called Grøn Vækst (Green Growth) (Regeringen 2010). The committee was constituted of seven ministers and chaired by the Finance Minister. The purpose of the committee was to create a vision for green growth, combining the protection of the environment with modern and competitive agricultural production (Regeringen 2008). The committee worked for approximately two years and during that period, the implementation of the WFD was at a standstill, since the government had decided to subordinate water planning to Green Growth. For that reason, all public consultations were postponed, and state officials have described how they were unable to inform either the municipalities or the public on the WFD process because decisions took place behind closed doors (Nielsen 2012b). There was the impression that the government had decided to subordinate water planning to the Green Growth committee because of its impact on Danish agriculture. The agricultural interests were also reflected in the final decision from the committee, which permitted higher nitrogen emissions from agriculture than those recommend by experts. No environmental impact assessment was made on the consequences of the decisions made by the committee, as formally required by EU legislation (EU Directive 2001/42/EC).

With the centralistic approach and lack of transparency, the governmental system lost all possibilities of generating any public involvement. The

centralistic approach furthermore rendered the originally planned Water and Nature Councils superfluous, since the decisions at the central level overruled everything else. Thus, this first phase, the Danish implementation of the WFD, turned out to be an absolute minimum solution without any "active involvement" and participation as defined by the Guidance Document.

The plans were, however, subject to a short, supplementary, 10-day public hearing for authorities and landowners whose property was directly affected by changes in the water plans. A few weeks after this hearing in December 2011, the water plans were adopted (Nielsen 2012b). Afterwards, the agricultural organisations complained because of the very short hearing, and thus the Nature and Environment Board decided in 2012 to invalidate the plans. The statutory six-month consultation (WFD, article 14) of the draft for the water plans was repeated. Altogether, the implementation of the WFD was delayed by five years. Rigsrevisionen (The Public Accounts Committee), a governmental institution monitoring the government on behalf of the Danish Parliament, concluded that the process had not been transparent and had not followed the time schedule, and that there were considerable risks that the environmental objectives in Danish water catchments would not be achieved in 2015, as defined in the WFD (Rigsrevisionen 2014).

Water Planning in Sweden

Contrary to Denmark, Sweden chose a different approach to the implementation of the WFD. The WFD was internalised into Swedish legislation in 2004 and a new governmental body directly responsible to the Swedish government, called the Water Authorities, was created. The Water Authorities was divided into five regional water districts—the Gulf of Bothnia, Bothnian Sea, North Baltic Sea, South Baltic Sea and Western Sea—each responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the WFD regionally and nationally. The actual implementation was left to the County Administrative Boards (CABs) and the municipalities, including the public participation (Julin & Maltseva 2011). However, public participation as well as "local participation" was, and still is, emphasised as a very important aspect of the Swedish WFD implementation by the Water Authorities (Vattenmyndigheterna 2015a). One important instrument made available for the CABs is a local, cooperative body known as a "water board":

> The water boards are the regional and local forums where the entities affected can meet and discuss water issues they share in common. They are also a forum where everyone within a drainage area can actively take part to influence the focus of water management and how it is to work. The water board will be an organ for cooperation within the drainage area and will work as a link between the agencies responsible, the stakeholders affected, and the public.
>
> (Vattenmyndigheterna 2015b)

The water boards are open to "everyone affected by the water", but especially stakeholders such as "representatives from the municipalities, agriculture and forestry, industry, recreational interests, energy interests, non-profit organisations and others" were mentioned.

In spite of the strong rhetorical emphasis on participation and local involvement, the encouragement has differed significantly between the five Water Districts, depending on how important the particular general manager of each District considered public participation to be. For example, the first general manager of the North Baltic Water District was quite open about the fact that he did not consider public participation very important (Hansen 2009a). Contrary to this point of view, the general manager from the South Baltic Water District strongly promoted and actively supported the establishment of as many water boards as possible. As a consequence, significantly more water boards were established in the South Baltic Water District compared to the North Baltic Water District.

According to the Water Authorities, a total number of 125 water boards were established all over Sweden in 2013 (Vattenmyndigheterna 2015b). A general critique of the water boards brought forward by interest groups and governmental officers was the lack of clarity in terms of their legal status and practical role and function in the Swedish water management process (Hansen 2009b). The boards are not given any legal function, protection or power, and it is not clear whether they are supposed to be seen as an extension of the local or regional governmental bodies or as independent civil organisations. There are no common procedures to be followed and it is entirely up to the CAB how they will use and support the water boards. Financially, certain CABs offer only some of the boards support, making it very difficult for the boards to actually take initiative on their own.

Democratic Openings and Closures

Denmark and Sweden used two very different approaches in their implementation of the WFD in general and fulfilling the requirement of public participation in particular. Where Denmark used a traditional top-down approach, Sweden decentralised and introduced water boards as a way to create opportunities for local participation, as prescribed by the WFD. As such, the Swedish approach was more democratic than the Danish, and one can argue that it represented an institutional attempt to transform and democratise water management. Despite the good intentions, both countries ended up in a traditional stakeholder model, reproducing the institutional steering logic focusing on the classic power holders (see Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). The difference between the two examples was that the stakeholder model was carried out at two different levels, a central level and a local level. The Swedish case immediately leaves the impression that public participation is taken seriously because there exists an institutionalised opportunity for more local participation. One lesson to

be taken from the Swedish approach is that public participation is not simply a matter of institutional frameworks, but also about how to add a societal direction to the role and function of public participation. In both cases, underlying, repressive mechanisms prevent deliberative forms of local participation from taking place and feeding into the planning process because the water boards become replicates of the already existing stakeholder governance at higher levels of government. As a consequence, the possibility of balancing the specific and the general is lost in favour of particularly strong interests. Water, as a natural resource to be managed as a common interest, is questioned in both cases.

In Denmark, the boundaries for participation were, from the beginning, set at a high political level without democratic intentions, leaving absolutely no openings for any democratic transformation. In Sweden, the decentralisation of water management actually created an opening, giving the general manager of the Water Districts the possibility of inviting local participation, although it was still up to the general manager to decide. The strong institutional focus on stakeholderism, combined with the lack of defined purpose and legal authority, left the water boards open to politicisation and without any real function to fulfil.

One way to get a better insight into the existing *closures* toward a democratic transformation is to deepen our understanding of the rationality of the civil servants working within the governmental agencies. A general frustration identified in our interviews and conversations with governmental officers in the Danish example (Nielsen 2012b) is the limited space for professional competences. One argument being put forward by officers working at the central governmental level in Denmark is the difficulties navigating within turbulent political contexts with permanently changing political winds affecting the contents of the water plans and the collaboration with the municipality managers as well. At one moment, the dialogue with municipalities and interest organisations is highlighted as being most important, while the next moment, the NRM officers are reprimanded because they are too open. The officers feel they have to make compromises with their professional knowledge. Together with ongoing reforms and shifting political guidelines, their professionalism is de-coupled, creating a situation that could be described as depriving them of responsibility and integrity (Willig 2009).

NRM officers at both the central and local levels felt that their professionalism was squeezed from above as well as from below due to the constantly shifting politicised context and the requirements and expectations of public participation. One can interpret these frustrations as a desire for a different planning process that allow for the incorporation of the competences and professionalism of the NRM officers. The reluctance shown towards a more profound democratic transformation identified in the Swedish example, especially in terms of local participation, might be rooted in the same frustrations. It is not simply a matter of not knowing what the participative

process is supposed to contribute with, it is also a matter, as an NRM officer, of being able to activate one's professional identity and the skills and competences built up over years of study and work experiences. The paradox is that it is not the primary skills and competences that are being required in the everyday working life of the NRM employees, but skills and competences for which they are often not trained, such as facilitation, mediation, communication, conflict resolution and so on.

Two important points can be extracted from the two examples above. One is that *closures* towards public participation do not just emerge in the aspiration for legitimation and conflict-free governance, but also from the need of the NRM officers to maintain their professional identity. Since many stakeholders adapt to the language of the professionals in order to be "legitimate" actors, it is much easier for the NRM officers to relate to them, while it is much more difficult to relate to laypeople who do not comply with the professional rationality. This might also be the reason why participatory processes initiated by public agencies are often subordinated, not just to the issues concerning the professional and institutional perspectives, but also to some kind of professional categorisation, making it difficult for laypeople to associate with (Hansen 2008).

The other point one can extract from the examples from Denmark and Sweden is the importance of the normativity of subjects. Since there is no clear legal interpretation of the participative process, it is the normativity of the individuals—politicians and/or NRM employees—at different administrative levels that holds the privilege to interpret and decide whether participation makes sense and how it should be practised and integrated institutionally. The participative process relies on how democracy and participation are understood "here and now" by those particular subject(s) in charge, with all the limitations and subjectivity included (for more examples, see Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). The results so far from the Danish and Swedish examples are that public participation is ignored and undermined at the local political level, including the level of the public and citizens, and is de facto de-coupled from the water planning process. Locally rooted knowledge, experiences and values are ignored, and different forms of knowledge remain separated. Getting even a little closer to what in the consultancy document is referred to as "best practice" is hard to identify, and the two basic pillars of the Directive, good environmental status (ecological and chemical) and public involvement, including local participation, are not brought together—to the detriment of both. Aside from the democratic deficit in the planning process, it must be considered very problematic as to the consequences for the quality of the water plan itself. However, despite the despair and difficulties, the two main points here identified might actually pose the potential for a democratic transformation of future planning processes. Participation in its deliberative sense is not about rejecting professional knowledge and experience, but about creating a space wherein citizens' knowledge and experts' and managers'

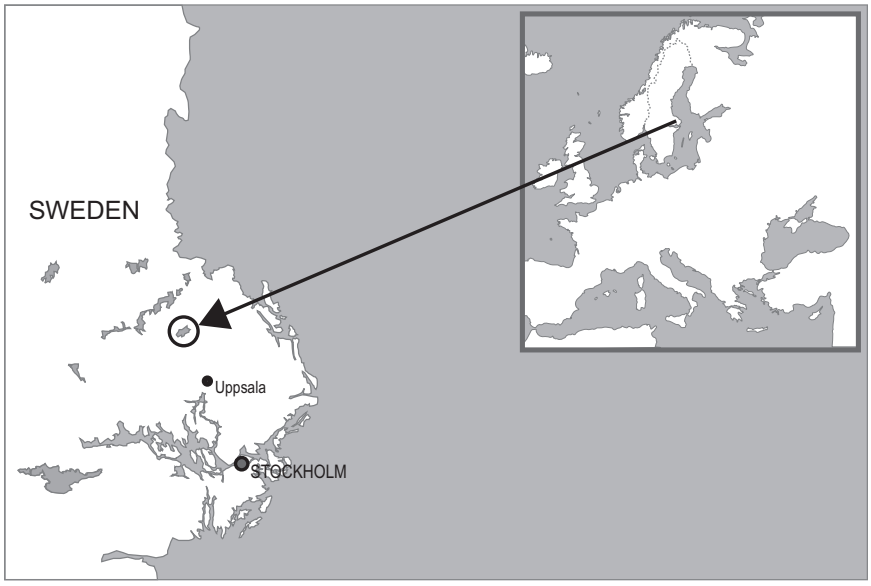
professional knowledge can complement each other. The described dependency of the normativity of those individuals holding the power to decide on the participative process constitutes a challenge in several ways. From a legal point of view, the citizens are not offered equal democratic opportunities to participate in the planning process, and in terms of continuity, the participative process becomes vulnerable to the ongoing changes and exchanges of staff that frequently take place within governmental organisations. On the other hand, those officials in charge are themselves citizens, who also restrain other types of rationalities beyond those articulated by their professional competences. Knowing the institutional structures and logics from within, they should potentially be best suited to bridging the gap between the knowledge, experiences and values existing outside the institutional system with the knowledge, experiences and values existing within.

Although it is difficult to identify any "best practices" linked with the implementation of the WFD at a formal level, the authors[3] of this chapter have been collaborating for more than 7 years with a local water board around a particular lake trying to develop a more radical arena for local participation and responsibility (Nielsen 2012b). In the following section, we will describe our approach.

LAKE TÄMNAREN: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY AGORAS FOR ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Lake Tämnaren is the largest freshwater lake in the province of Uppland, with a surface area of 38 square kilometres. The lake is located approximately 100 kilometres north of the capital, Stockholm, and approximately 50 kilometres north of the old town of Uppsala. It is a shallow lake, with a depth ranging between 1 and 1.7 metres. Parts of the lake, in particular in the southern part, are overgrown with reeds (Wallsten 1980). In the 1950s and 1960s, part of the lake was used as a shooting range for the Swedish Air Force. Today, the shore area of the lake consists of farmland, forest areas and nature reserves, but there are also summer houses and recreational cabins, and the lake is used for recreational purposes such as boating, bird-watching and fishing by both residents and tourists. The lake is not well known among the broader public, but because the lake is so shallow, its surface is one of the first to freeze during the winter, and therefore the lake is well known among dedicated ice skaters (Tofters 2007).

Administratively, the lake falls under the jurisdiction of the CAB of Uppsala and three different municipalities. The lake serves as a backup water supply for the city of Uppsala and it is connected to the Fyris River, which for thousands of years has been important for all the settlements in the area. Although Lake Tämnaren is still the largest lake in Uppland, it used to be twice as big. Due to the fact that the land has risen—and is still rising—after the pressure from the latest glacial period 10,000 years ago,



Map 7.1 Lake Tämnaren. Graphics Anni Hoffrén, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences)

combined with several land drainage projects starting in 1872 in order to create more farmland, the lake has diminished by 70 square kilometres in the last 200 years (Erikson 2012; Tofters 2013). Today, the lake is mechanically regulated by dams, dikes and locks, but estimates suggest that the lake will turn into a swamp within a few generations (Hansson et al. 2010).

Due to the shallowness of the lake, the surrounding land and houses are often flooded by heavy rainfall and melting snow. In periods of low rainfall, the depth of the lake decreases, causing huge swarms of mosquitoes and making living conditions very difficult for livestock and human beings. Both situations create frustration and tension among the people living around the lake. The low depth of the lake is reinforced by a court decision from 1973 stating that the level of the lake should not exceed 35.24 metres above sea level and should not fall below 34.32 metres above sea level. Parts of the lake are protected by the European nature reserve category Natura 2000, established under Article 6 in the EU Habitat Directive in order to protect habitats and birds (EU 1992).

In 2007, a group of local citizens living near the lake decided to create a water board. Some of them had seen the lake deteriorate over the years and wanted to take action to preserve the lake (Tofters 2013). They contacted the CAB of Uppsala to formalise their work, and in the middle of 2008, the head and the initiator of the newly established Lake Tämnaren Water Board (TWB), Kiell Tofters, contacted Professor Nadarajah Sriskandarajah from

the Division of Environmental Communication in the Department of Urban and Rural Development at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and asked if SLU would support the facilitation of the work of the TWB. Together with his colleague, Hans Peter Hansen, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah accepted the invitation and developed an Action Research project that has run from 2008 until this date. Based on previously unpublished primary data, such as reports (so-called "protocols") (Tämnaren Vattenråd 2009a-b; 2010, 2012a-b; 2013), minutes (Hansen 2010a & 2010b), audio recordings and personal notes from the Action Research project in the period from August 2008 until spring 2015, we will, in the following, summarise the process and results.

From Stakeholders to Community Advocates

The TWB represented locals with a personal veneration for the lake. As an example, the head and initiator of the TWB, Kiell Tofters, was born and raised in a community close to the lake. Having retired from his professional life, he had dedicated himself to community development. He had strong memories of the lake and recalled how the swimming lessons in primary school took place in the lake, which was then nice and clean but today is muddy and eutrophicated. Kiell Tofters and others in the TWB saw it as their main objective to raise the level of the lake by changing the court decision from 1973 on the maximum level of the lake.

At Kiell Tofter's request, Nadarajah Sriskandarajah and Hans Peter Hansen saw the possibility of a full-scale democratic Action Research project where new forms of citizens' participation in water management could be developed and tested as a contrast to the existing practices of participation, which were only creating frustration among NGOs and governmental institutions on how to fulfil the democratic requirements of the WFD (Hansen & Sriskandarajah 2012). Inspired by Hans Peter Hansen's experiences from Critical Utopian Action Research projects within Natural Resource Management and nature conservation, and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah's experiences from Systemic Action Research, they designed a participative process that would bring community development and nature conservation together based on new forms of cooperation between citizens, authorities and experts. The objective was to develop a new kind of cross-cutting planning and knowledge integrating multiple rationalities, meaning the knowledge, experiences and values of the citizens, experts and various traditionally separated sectors (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007, see also Clausen; Nielsen and Nielsen; Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah; Sriskandarajah, Givá and Hansen; and Vasstrøm in this volume).

The members of the TWB represented formal as well as informal interests, such as pump guilds, landowners, cabin tenants, conservation associations and local authorities. Until the involvement of the researchers from SLU, the TWB had had their meetings in the CAB venue in the town of

Uppsala. The meetings were characterised by formality and instrumentality, where CAB officers provided the scientific and legal data related to the lake and where the various stakeholders could express their interests. The researchers saw a potential risk that the TWB would gradually become an extended instrument for authorities and thereby lose their moral legitimacy locally. In order to avoid this institutionalisation, the researchers suggested a two-fold strategy:

1) The TWB should maintain its integrity as an independent organisation and as a group of stakeholders with similar as well as divergent opinions and interests.
2) The TWB should, as its primary function, be the "space" and advocacy for the local community, regardless of the existing opinions within the TWB itself.

In order to fulfil the second function, the researchers suggested that the TWB should invite the three main communities around Lake Tämnaren to share their perspectives on the lake and the interrelationship between the lake and the communities. It was suggested that this could be accomplished by initiating what can be labelled a Critical Utopian Citizens' Dialogue (CUCD) process.

The CUCD is inspired by Critical Utopian Action Research (see Nielsen and Nielsen, *Part One* in this volume), and emphasises the citizens' perspective with a focus on common issues and a utopian approach to the future as key features. With strong inspiration from Critical Theory, the purpose of the CUCD process is to explore the immanent but "not yet" discovered alternative futures through dialectic phases of critique, visioning and realisation and through a shifting one-sidedness (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006; Clausen; Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). Opposite to communication practices related to consensus building and conflict resolution, often focusing on the interpersonal relationship between the actors, the CUCD process emphasises the cultivations of the Commons not just in terms of the content, but also how the participants are situated in the room and how every workshop and every meeting is documented and shared.

The TWB accepted the suggested two-fold strategy, including the outline for the CUCD process, and together with the researchers, they started planning full-day Future Creation Workshops in each of the three communities, followed by a research workshop and the implementation of the developed ideas.

Initial Phase: Visions for the Future and the Fear of Conflicts

The first task for the TWB, having no funding and no research grants available for the work, was to obtain financial support for the work ahead. The TWB was depending on financial assistance from the CAB and the Water District, as well as other external donors. With support from the CAB official

in charge of water planning, in 2009, the TWB managed to secure a small grant of 100,000 Swedish Kronor (at the time equivalent to approximately USD 15,000) from the Water District. In order not to lose momentum, it was decided to start the process using the money only for expenses such as the venue and food, and not for salaries. The researchers would facilitate the process with support from the Division of Environmental Communication.

With the TWB as the host, the first two community workshops at the northern end of the lake were announced in the local newspapers in October 2009 and realised in November 2009. Approximately 45 citizens participated in the two workshops. During the process, a common horizon gradually emerged, and at the two workshops, the participating citizens identified the critical issues and transcended those into visions for the future of people and nature, departing from their own knowledge, experiences and values. Among the themes that developed in the two workshops were:

1) Better access to the lake,
2) A clean lake,
3) Stable water levels,
4) A cultural, social and economic integration of Lake Tämnaren with the local community,
5) Combine the restoration of Lake Tämnaren with bioenergy production,
6) Remove vegetation from the lake.

Photo 7.1 Work in progress—Work group in action at Future Creation Workshop, Lake Tämnaren, Sweden, 2009. Photo Hans Peter Hansen.

In January 2010, a joint workshop was organised to summarise the outcome from the two Future Creation Workshops and decide on the next steps. It was the impression of the TWB that the differences of opinion between the northern and southern areas were so significant that bringing people together would create tension and potentially, conflicts. Since for the time being, there was no more money available to organise the third workshop at the southern end of the lake, the researchers decided to invite representatives from the third community in the southern part of the lake to the joint workshop. This was done in order to prevent false rumours from emerging, but also to give the southern community a chance to see and comment on the results from the first two community workshops and to contribute with their concerns and ideas. Despite their concerns, all participants engaged constructively in the dialogue.

At the joint workshop, the thematic ideas from the first two workshops were presented by the participants themselves, and similar ideas were merged and further cultivated under revised themes and elaborated descriptions. The ideas of the TWB were separately presented, as were the ideas of the representatives from the southern end of the lake (Tämnaren Vattenråd 2010). The headlines of the identified themes were:

1) "Tämnaren 2040",
2) Stable water levels,
3) Recreation on and around the lake,
4) Economic resources,
5) Decrease vegetation in the lake.

Each main theme was supported by a number of sub-themes. Take "Tämnaren 2040" as an example: this represented a vision of the situation in the year 2040, where the local community and the lake would be interrelated in a sustainable way and where organic material from the lake would be filtered for heavy metals and used to generate bioenergy and work opportunities.

Those participants who agreed to continue working with the themes signed up for work groups.

Phase Two: Stalled Progress

A number of fact-finding meetings between members of the work group and coordination meetings between representatives of the work groups, the TWB and the researchers followed during 2010 and 2011. Simultaneously, the TWB continued the search for funding to continue the work and continuously strove to maintain the interest of the three municipalities, who only showed limited interest in the TWB and Lake Tämnaren. As an outcome of the collaboration between the TWB and the researchers, the lake and the

area around it became the subject of excursions, assignments and theses of students from SLU as well as from Uppsala University.

In 2012, the TWB received additional funding from the Water District as well as from a local bank. That opened up the opportunity to calculate the cost for some of the proposed ideas for the restoration of the lake and created the opportunity to run the originally planned Future Creation Workshop at the southern end of the lake. The workshop was run in March 2012, and similar themes to those from the first two workshops emerged, in addition two new ones came up "water as a Commons" and "hiking opportunities around the lake". With the third workshop, a new group of citizens with valuable new experiences and competences joined the work.

During the spring of 2012, one of the ideas developed in the very first workshop—the reestablishment of an old birdwatching tower—was implemented with external funding, and the tower was opened in a ceremony in June 2013.

In November 2012, a workshop for representatives from the various work groups summarised the results of all the work and activities held, and the next phase of the process was planned (Tämnaren Vattenråd 2012a). The content and status of all the main themes brought up since the first workshop in November 2009 were meticulously discussed and the expertise

Photo 7.2 Opening ceremony for the new birdwatching tower at Lake Tämnaren. Photo Hans Peter Hansen.

needed for the Research Workshop was identified (see Nielsen and Nielsen in this volume). A total of seven areas were identified:

1) Legal expertise,
2) Hydrological expertise,
3) Expertise on dredging,
4) Expertise on Natura 2000,
5) Expertise on rural development programs, including the European "LEADER programme",
6) Historical expertise on Lake Tämnaren,
7) Expertise on conflict management.

Phase Three: The Liberation of the Water Board

In March 2013, 26 representatives from the work groups and the TWB met with seven external persons, including the facilitating researchers and experts. The term "experts" referred in this situation to university professors as well as local people with particular knowledgeable of certain areas. For example, it turned out that one of participants from the Future Creation Workshop at the southern end of Lake Tämnaren, a person that had moved from the Netherlands to Sweden, was able to share his dredging expertise from the Netherlands.

After a short introduction, the Research Workshop began with a lecture on the historical background of Lake Tämnaren by a historian from Uppsala Museum who had recently finished a doctoral dissertation on the subject. After this presentation, the historical linkage with the present situation and the various power issues at stake were discussed (Tämnaren Vattenråd 2013). Afterwards, each of the themes was thoroughly discussed with input from invited experts. Three new work groups were established at the Research Workshop:

1) A work group continuing the work with the legal aspect of the court decision on the level of Lake Tämnaren.
2) A work group continuing the work to improve access to the lake.
3) A work group continuing the work on dredging and increasing vegetation in the lake.

A new issue not explicitly addressed before was brought up by some of the participants: the organisational structure of the TWB. Over the years, members of the TWB and citizens involved in the various work groups had experienced difficulties initiating activities due to the lack of funding, and especially between early 2010 and late 2012, it was hard to maintain motivation because the TWB had no funding to start implementing some of the plans and ideas developed. This situation was partly coupled with the fact that the TWB had no proper legal status, making it even more difficult to get

funding. Already at the workshop in November 2012, participants had suggested establishing a new organisation (Tämnaren Vattenråd 2012). It was at the Research Workshop, together with the other action plans, that it was decided to explore the various legal possibilities to transform the TWB into a new organisation with increased independence and legal legitimisation. One of the participants—a retired businessman—took on this task using his own network of legal expertise.

In early 2014, a number of alternative organisational legal models had been explored and discussed by the TWB. One of the presented models was then chosen to be the most adequate replacement for the TWB and in March 2014, the TWB called for a public founding convention for a new locally rooted non-governmental organisation: *Tämnaren Water* (Tämnaren Vatten 2014a). The new organisation took over the responsibilities of the TWB and some of the board members who had served the TWB for several years and felt it was time to be replaced by new people were released from their responsibilities and replaced by people recruited from the CUCD process, who were democratically elected accordingly to the statutes of Tämnaren Water (Tämnaren Vatten 2014b). At the first annual meeting of Tämnaren Water, approximately 100 local households had registered as members, each paying a small fee. Tämnaren Water was also open for governmental institutions to become members, and one of the three municipalities had duly registered as a member.

Because of the difficult economic situation, the TWB and the researchers invited interested university students to use Lake Tämnaren as their empirical case study area, leading to a number of reports which gradually deepened the understanding of the socio-ecological situation and identified the measures required to improve it. One example was the question on the contamination of the lake sediment. As part of the action plan on the dredging and bioenergy production plans, it was crucial to test the lake sediment for heavy metals from the period when the lake had been used as a shooting range by the Swedish Air Force. At the time of the Research Workshop, the TWB had a small sum of money available, but paying a private company to test the sediment would drain the TWB of all its capital. The researchers from SLU suggested inviting students from one of the two universities in Uppsala—SLU and Uppsala University—working with water and/or soil to make this a part of their studies, and the project was announced among the students at both universities. In the middle of spring 2014, a master's student signed up to test the sediment in relation to her thesis work at the Department of Earth Sciences at Uppsala University. One of the local citizens had a boat, and so she was able to collect the necessary samples during the summer of 2014 and analysed the samples in a laboratory in Stockholm. At the first annual meeting of Tämnaren Water in March 2015, she presented the results of her work (Lundgren 2015). At the same meeting, the progress on other projects and sub-projects in the human-nature intersection were presented.

As mentioned, the student from the Department of Earth Sciences was just one of many students studying Lake Tämnaren. Over the years, the

SLU researchers and the TWB, and later Tämnaren Vatter, organised several scholarly excursions in relation to master's and PhD courses, as well as in relation to research conferences and visiting scholars for the following reasons: 1) To keep the linkage between the university and the local level alive, 2) to bring the reality of "real life" back into academia, 3) to generate as much interest as possible in the work of the local communities.

The work initiated by the CUCD process in 2008 is far from complete, but the ideas of "alternative futures" developed over the seven years are still the core of the ongoing work. The endeavours to implement the ideas meet, like other experiments with citizens' participation or change projects from below, a number of social, economic and not least, institutional difficulties. They make up an important part of the challenges Tämnaren Water has to deal with. The process continues with local activities, but these activities also have a general perspective, a potential of influencing future water planning and NRM in general, or even more fundamentally, the interaction between people and nature in everyday life.

GENERAL LESSONS FROM LAKE TÄMNAREN

Taking the two pillars of the WFD—good ecological and chemical status and the involvement of the public, including at the local level—the lessons from Lake Tämnaren widen our democratic perspective not only on water management, but on NRM in general and our understanding of the *openings* and *closures* towards a more sustainable society.

The CUCD process described in the Lake Tämnaren project turned the traditional relationship between planners and citizens upside down, a *reverse participation*, placing the everyday life experiences of the citizens in the foreground (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, 2007; Clausen in this volume). The work outlined an alternative to the technocratic stakeholderism organised around "experts" who hold the privilege not just to formulate the questions, but also the answers within NRM. Sometimes, as was the case in the Danish example, this was limited by formal as well as informal political interests, while sometimes it was guided, as was the case in the Swedish water planning, by a more normative rhetoric that was wide open to interpretation. The Action Research project from Lake Tämnaren proves that citizens are fully capable and ready to participate and set the agenda for future planning when offered the responsibility.

The everyday life perspective in itself was opened for the involvement of a broad group of citizens, not just those with special interests in nature conservation or landowners with economic interests. The case exemplifies the everyday life perspective as decisive for any democratisation process and for the creation of local publics over time, expanding the local perspectives to include also a broader societal perspective. The inclusion of different forms of knowledge and their mutual enrichment added a new quality to NRM,

and it was obvious that the involved participants were all attached to the local environment, but also that it was difficult for them to relate to the lake as simply an object.

The workshops opened the way for a more equal relationship between the citizens and the experts. Sometimes, the knowledge and experience of the locals proved to be better and more detailed than the knowledge and

Illustration 7.1 Lake Tämanraren 2014, watercolour made by Nils Öman.

experience of the experts coming from outside. The CUCD process was in no way an exclusion of expert knowledge. On the contrary, it was an inclusion of knowledge, with the linkage between the everyday lives of the participants and the identification of the Commons—the nature and the future—as the added and essential value. The participating "experts", whether they were local experts, invited scientists or practitioners, were able to participate both as professionals and as subjects without the knowledge and experiences of the locals being patronised or excluded from the dialogue. One way to explain this dynamic is that the entire context—holding the dialogue in the local community, the sequence of the different steps of the CUCD process and the way the facilitators maintain a citizen-oriented perspective on the Commons—transcends the usual objectivism of the professionals and allows them to identify themselves with the locals as subjects. So just as the Agoras open the way for the knowledge and experience of the "experts", they also open the way for the "experts" to associate with the everyday of the lives of the locals and unite all participants as citizens.

Despite the established Agoras where the locals and the external experts could meet and enrich each other, there were also difficulties. One was the structural barrier in terms of availability. All meetings and workshops were adapted to accommodate the availability of the citizens in order to make their participation possible. For that reason, meetings would either be held on weekday evenings or, for longer sessions, Saturdays or Sundays. With a few exceptions, most external "experts" and practitioners were reluctant to turn up on evenings or weekends. One of the exceptions was the mentioned NRM officer from the CAB, who turned up on a voluntary basis almost every time she was invited regardless of the day of the week, sometimes more passively listening, and sometimes more actively participating in the dialogue, sharing her knowledge, experiences and perceptions of the issues debated. In personal conversations, she reflected on the CUCD process opening the way for a different kind of dialogue, bringing the TWB to the forefront of public participation within water management in Sweden. Although it seemed difficult for her to more fully integrate the experiment at Lake Tämnaren with the regional governmental level, she twice managed to persuade the Water District to offer the TWB financial support.

In line with Critical Utopian Action Research, the creation of *free spaces* was the basis for the work throughout entire project. By creating free spaces, a change-oriented potential was cultivated, allowing citizens to transcend the reproduction of *reality power*, understood as structural power allowing existing societal structures and steering logics that appear unchangeable and thus exclude any alternatives. While reality power dominates our everyday lives and blocks social imagination, the CUCD was widening the horizon through its creation of free space, allowing the participants to depart from their everyday lives using their knowledge, experiences and values, not as static categories, but as a platform for formation. Despite the

critical impulse to be decisive in order to develop alternatives, the *free space* became a space "*towards*" not a space "*away*" from something (Bladt 2012; Bladt & Nielsen 2013).

The Lake Tämnaren project was, during the entire seven-year period described here, driven forward by the citizens' engagement in and dedication to the future of their local area. However, the engagement did not emerge out of thin air. The initiating factor was a local person who decided to act and: 1) To invite other locals to participate, 2) utilise the possibility to create a Water Board, 3) from the beginning, invite researchers from the division of Environmental Communication at Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences to help in the design and to facilitate the process. Without the existence of some form of local engagement, it would probably not have been possible to launch a citizen-driven dialogue that continued for more than eight years regardless of financial and administrative difficulties. On the other hand, with fewer structural and institutional barriers, and a more substantial and accountable funding situation, it is likely that more fundamental environmental and social changes would already have happened, leading to even more local participation and responsibility.

The Future of the EU Water Framework Directive

The citizens' participation project around Tämnaren is unique, as it has created a deliberative space where the citizens can gather in Agoras and discuss and develop proposals and actions for the future development of their local area. In a democratic perspective, the experiment addresses a need to supplement representative democracy with more deliberative and participatory methods when involving the public and citizens in planning processes.

The WFD is a continuing process running in six-year cycles, with each cycle requiring public participation. As such, best practices can still be developed and the participatory processes improved and strengthened. The Action Research project at Tämnaren does not offer "the solution" to be simply copied, but it offers some lessons and is as such an exemplary model from which one can learn. In the local context, the CUCD process was detached from this institutionalisation, as there was no previously defined framework for the participation or the outcome. To begin with, the governmental NRM institutions were put on hold while the citizens were given the opportunity to develop future planning proposals for their area. The critical utopian thinking characterising the entire Lake Tämnaren experiment favours a perspective that includes the particular as well as the general. This is rather unusual, but one can argue it is an imperative in order for any sustainability agenda to succeed. Thus, the experiment can be seen as an unfinished democratic, cultural, social and political practice responding to the call for a more fundamental democratic transformation of society, enabling us to define alternative and more sustainable futures.

NOTES

1. As part of her PhD project, Helle Nedergaard Nielsen has researched the first period of the Danish implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The work includes interviews with involved administrative planners at the state and municipality levels, focusing on identifying and opening up reified structures and emancipatory potentials (Nielsen 2012b).
2. Hans Peter Hansen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah have, since 2008 and until spring 2015, through their involvement in an Action Research project together with the water board of Lake Tämnaren, followed the Swedish implementation of the WFD.
3. While Hans Peter Hansen and Nadarajah Sriskandarajah have been responsible for the actual research design and the collaboration with the water board of Lake Tämnaren, Helle Nedergaard Nielsen has been documenting some of the activities and used the documentation to contrast the participative aspect of the WFD implementation in Denmark with the experiences from the Action Research project at Lake Tämnaren.

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8 Citizens' Initiatives for Democratic Nature Management and Community Development

Reflecting on Danish Experiences

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Referring to Karl Polanyi, we have described the current crisis as essentially related to the fact that capitalism implies a dis-embedding of the economy from the rest of society and that means also a dis-embedding from its own grounds (cf. *Chapter Three* in this volume; Polanyi 2001 [1944]; also the *Editors' Introduction* in this volume). A hierarchy is established between "productive" and "reproductive" activities. The "reproductive" activities may to a certain extent still be seen as necessary, but they are considered external to "the economy" unless they can be transformed into industrial or moneymaking activities, inscribed in capitalist logic. Thus, what counts as economy is today a very small part of the multitude and richness of activities constituting societal life, while at the same time, this small part tends to dominate society and seize more and more of our time, directly or indirectly transforming more and more life activities into monetary logics or their shadow pictures.[2]

Seen on this background, the societal transition to sustainability could be understood as a re-embedding process. Instead of being seen as an effect of the dis-embedded economy ("When it goes well for the economy, it will go well for society"), the *reproduction* of society and its living conditions must be understood as a basic precondition for a prosperous society and our everyday lives. Reproduction and renewal should not be separated. Therefore, re-embedding must be based in a new understanding *and* practice of economy. In *Chapter Three*, we introduced the concept of *Plural Economy*, mainly referring to Rudolf Lippe (for some references from other traditions, see Hart et al. 2010). We find it helpful and will in this chapter explore its potential, especially in relation to Action Research. To us, Plural Economy is intimately related to the concept of *Life Economy* as developed by Lippe back in 1978. We consider *Life Economy* the general concept of another kind of economy, while the diversity of plural economies could be understood as its constitutive practical specifications. Life Economy is the regeneration and renewal of our societal culture, including its natural dimensions and preconditions: economy as culture. It is a *polar* economy (Lippe 2012, p. 30), with the assignment of weighing and balancing what we practically *do* with the world, intervening in and transforming it, and what we perceptively receive

from it. Each activity being part of the reproduction of society will in this perspective appear as an economic practice. This is the essential perspective of Plural Economy.

The activities here referred to as a plurality of economies are of a very different nature and adhere to different logics. Measured with the standards that characterise the capitalist economy, they could hardly be recognised as economic, but are rather considered pre-modern relicts associated with scarcity, even poverty, representing life forms to be definitively abandoned. However, instead of using measures related to a dis-embedded economy in relation to the plurality of economies discussed here, they should be understood from their own logics and measured with regard to their societal function. Plural Economy is not only a concept, but a living practice. However, it is under severe pressure—not least in countries such as those of Scandinavia. Plural Economy is not something to be invented, but it certainly needs to be supported, nurtured and cultured.

To us, it is obvious that concepts of Plural Economy and Life Economy could be seen as related to the concept of Commons (cf. Clausen in this volume). They could be seen as complementary. Life Economy and Plural Economy concentrate on the nature and quality of the different activities in question in their interplay and regarding their function for the reproduction and renewal of the richness of life conditions and common affairs. Commons, for its part, rather concentrates on the nature and quality of the social practices and communities in question regarding social forms, including regulation, managing and governing, in other words: concretisations of what *self-determination* might look like when it comes to *commoning* and *commonance* (cf. the *Editors' Introduction*). We are talking of two sides of the same matter that could not practically be separated.

Practically, many Action Research projects are in fact related to these discussions, although they are not always explicitly conceptualised and recognised in this way. When we try to engage Action Research for a transformation towards sustainability, we could consider such *recognition* an obvious task or assignment, not in the sense of using specific concepts, but in the sense of consciously dealing with the questions which we relate here to the Plural Economy and Commons. This is not a call for a "politicisation" of Action Research by the researchers bringing these dimensions *into* local projects from the outside. They are already there, constituting the reality of the societal phenomena we as researchers work with—as a potential to be furthered. This is what we will discuss in this chapter, reflecting on our experiences from two of our major Action Research projects from Danish rural community contexts, both of them initiated at the beginning of the 2000s and both still continuing on their own many years after the formal Action Research projects had come to an end. Throughout this whole period, we have had the opportunity and luck to be able to follow and to a certain extent also co-operate with both projects, accompanying them in their different metamorphoses. To us, these projects, together with

our initial Action Research project *Industry and Happiness* (cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2015), represent condensed experiences from our Action Research, and from a personal perspective, they make up some of the most satisfying hours and periods of our professional lives as university researchers.

TWO ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS ON NATURE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The two projects described here dealt with the question of *democratic nature management related to local community development*. The first project was located in *Halkær Ådal*, a stream valley ("ådal" literally meaning "stream valley") in the northern part of Jutland, the main Danish peninsula. The valley includes three villages. The second project was located on the small island of Møn and the tiny neighbouring island of *Nyord*, in the southeastern part of Denmark. The starting points were very different. In Halkær Ådal, due to a minor research grant dedicated to the question of citizens' interest in nature conservation, we invited people to take part in the project. Beforehand, we had established contact with a group of local, engaged citizens that had formed *The People's Association of Halkær Ådal*, based on the objective to make the area a so-called "experimental ecological zone". However, as it turned out, this "green group" was rather isolated, and their ambitious ideas had very little resonance among the "everyman",[3] the other citizens living in the valley. Together with our contact persons from this group, we therefore contacted representatives from the *citizens' associations* of the three villages. They were interested in the question of nature management and environmental questions, but they also made it clear that if we wanted "ordinary citizens" to take part in the project, we would have to widen the theme. Thus, we started the project by inviting the citizens of the area to take part in a Future Creating Workshop (cf. *Chapter Three* in this volume) with the simple heading: *Nature and our local community in the future*.

At Møn and Nyord, the situation was different. Here, we were invited by the local municipality to take part in an official pilot project on the possibilities of establishing a national park that would cover parts of the landscape of the two islands considered to be unique and therefore worthy of conservation. For that reason, the islands were included as one of ten so-called pilot projects all over the country, exploring the possibilities of creating national parks in Denmark (cf. Clausen in this volume). This process was initiated by the national government, which had also decided that no national park would be designated without the local citizens' participation.[4] The reason *we* were invited was that the participation process designed by the local Steering Group with the mayor as its chairman, including local and regional authorities and important local stakeholders, had run into serious problems maintaining its legitimacy. Due to our experiences from Halkær Ådal, we were on this basis invited to redesign the participation process required, or,

as it turned out during the following conflict-ridden process, at least a *part* of it, opening it up to what *we* considered democratic participation, not just a non-committal "involvement". During the whole project period, two lines of citizens' participation took place, partly related to each other and both related to the Steering Group. We were given free rein as to our line (solely referred to below), which was then realised due to our model of Critical Utopian Action Research (cf. *Chapter Three* in this volume). Thus, we started out making two Future Creating Workshops at different locations within the potential area of the national park and with the same heading as in Halkær Ådal, followed up by workshops at Nyord and with school children. A precondition for our engagement in the project was that we succeeded in raising a small amount of money to finance our participation as *independent researchers*.[5] In both projects, the official Action Research period lasted for only two years. In Halkær Ådal and at Nyord, however, the activities were continued and are, in transformed forms, still going on.

In spite of these rather different project conditions contrasting with the principally free agenda in Halkær and the official national park agenda and its Steering Group at Møn/Nyord, the two projects ended up producing a variety of ideas, drafts and also initiatives that showed a high degree of comparability as to their social and sustainable qualities and to democratic perspectives as well. Focusing on these common dimensions, we will discuss here the experiences from the two projects in one, while pushing the divergences into the background. The high degree of comparability was not just related to the fact that both projects were carried out due to our model of Critical Utopian Action Research. More important, we think, was that the initial and certainly central question of *nature conservation* (giving reasons for and financing the projects) in both projects was embedded in the *double thematic* mentioned above, linking the questions related to nature and nature management to the question of the future of the local community (or communities) in a broader and more basic sense. This gave both projects a direction where very different individual interests and perspectives could be pursued, with each not necessarily including both sides of the thematic. At the same time, all ideas and drafts would eventually be discussed within the common horizon lined up by the heading, and the specific drafts' perspectives would thereby be questioned and widened. Each and every draft was discussed in light of a simple question: what might its impact be for our community, for the everyday of the *everyman*—that is, for *our* lives, yours and mine? That is the meaning of addressing people as *citizens*, and not as stakeholders of some kind, characterised by *particular* interests (cf. Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume).

Regarding the ideas of Life Economy, Plural Economy and of Commons that we wish to address in this chapter, the double thematic was enlightening. We could follow how an awareness of the *interconnectedness of social and economic questions* with *the societal nature relation*[6] began to emerge, albeit diverging from person to person, but colouring the social space as a whole.

And likewise, we could see how establishing a practical horizon for recognising what could legitimately be considered *common affairs* was furthered. No doubt, the *thematic presence of nature* as a very concrete dimension and base of a community's or a constellation of communities' livelihood inspired ideas and experiments on *what a Commons might practically be like*, although in the projects, these were not explicitly related to the notion of Commons. In the two projects, we can identify tracks or anticipations pointing in the direction of Life Economy, Plural Economy and Commons, and that is what we will elaborate on when briefly summing up the outcome of the projects.

"Nature and our local community in the future": The Answers of the Local Citizens

The two projects resulted in a great variety of concrete ideas and drafts for small and big initiatives and experiments. Many of them, in fact, have been realised, albeit in a modified and adjusted form. In most cases, the realisation process reached beyond the formal end of the Action Research projects—and at Møn/Nyord, beyond the end of the national park pilot project. In both projects, the initiatives and projects were the outcome of a series of workshops—Future Creating Workshops, follow-up workshops, Research Workshops—accompanied by ongoing work in the many local project groups established in the process, each of them concentrating on their particular drafts, working them through and preparing them for the next common presentation where they were all the object of mutual discussions. Working through the ideas and drafts several times kept moving them closer to a sustainability perspective, while at the same time gaining a stronger interrelatedness, eventually appearing as parts of a common draft for the communities as a whole. They could be seen as citizens' preliminary answers to the question of the possible futures for their communities, answers that are normally never asked for. The "our" of the thematic heading began to have contours. Both projects were formally concluded by public meetings where the participants presented their work. Different initiatives were taken to stabilise and co-ordinate the many endeavours so that they would last beyond the project period. (For comprehensive descriptions of the two projects, cf. our two Danish monographs on them (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006, 2007a). In English, the project of Halkær Ådal is discussed in Nielsen (2012). Regarding Møn/Nyord, also cf. Clausen in this volume.)

Halkær Ådal

Among the ideas and drafts from the first series of workshops in Halkær Ådal, we will present the following:

1) Transforming extensive wetlands around the stream back into a lake for nature conservation to improve the water quality.

2) Creating path systems and sailing routes on the stream—without developing into a tourist industry (but open to controlled tourism).
3) Local water supply and cleaning wastewater, organised as a co-op. A new kindergarten and a continuation school based on green values related to the region.
4) School classes involved in monitoring environmental standards in the area.
5) Women's network in the community.
6) Building new houses (available for ordinary people) in harmony with the nature of the area.
7) New sports facilities with a view to making the area more attractive to young people.
8) Finding (economic) ways of continuing a "job generator", which had been tried out as a temporary experiment.
9) Ideas that would develop the old Halkær Inn, owned by the "green group", into a cultural centre for the whole stream valley.
10) A local democratic "board" continuously consulting all ideas of economic innovations in the area, called the Development Board.
11) A local public forum responsible for maintaining democratic dialogue in the community.

All the above-mentioned ideas and plans were put together and connected in a comprehensive "Nature and Development Plan for Halkær Ådal", which was presented and discussed with local politicians at a public arrangement, organised as a family "market day." The market day was a forum for citizens not previously involved in the work to engage in discussions on the future perspectives of the local area in the projects. A significant outcome of the project thus far was that citizens from the different villages began to talk much more with each other, and the widespread negative attitude to "green changes" and scepticism towards the usefulness of local democratic involvement began to change. In the years to come, many of the ideas and projects (both minor and major) were given life through self-organised citizens' initiatives, while others received support from local authorities. In addition, new ideas were launched and added to the already existing projects. The wetlands of the valley were transformed back into the lake they had been many decades back—a complex and conflictuated process involving the development of compensation schemes to win the consent of private plot owners. Here, the involvement of the county administrative board and municipalities played an important role. Another example to mention was the establishment of a sports centre in one of the villages after years of persistent grassroots activity. Recently, Halkær Inn has been rebuilt, gradually developing into a cultural centre, attracting people from across the whole region and beyond. Plans to establish a village common[7] have met with broad interest and also support from local authorities, and those plans are now being put into action. Halkær Ådal is an agrarian area and endeavours

have continuously been made to develop and integrate ecologically based food production in the activities, while plans for a co-op based on locally produced goods have been discussed. Some farmers have been part of the process, although these are in the minority, but different minor food productions have been established. The green group's *People's Association of Halkær Ådal* underwent a metamorphosis, turning into an umbrella organisation for all the many local associations. For years they gave out a newsletter, organised many public arrangements, established a homepage and functioned as a continuation of the meeting culture developed during the Action Research project, including being a forum for new initiatives. Today, however, as a comprehensive organisation covering the whole stream valley, it could be said to be in hibernation.

Møn/Nyord

At Møn and Nyord, a broad spectrum of ideas, very much like those from Halkær Ådal, was created in the locally based Future Creating Workshops and follow-up workshops. Ideas and participants from the workshops were brought together in Research Workshops, where the ideas were worked through. A specific challenge had turned out to be that the citizens from the different geographical localities tended to see themselves as delimited local communities, and were sceptical about becoming involved (too much) with the others. In the workshops, however, ideas with another perspective had also appeared. Therefore, when bringing them all together for the first Research Workshop, we suggested the heading *Creating coherence in the local community*, using a keyword from one of the workshops. When associated with other keywords, it did not negate the different perspectives, but opened them up to including the whole area as their common livelihood. In line with this, for the second Research Workshop, the heading became *Taking responsibility for the local community*, with "local" now explicitly also related to the whole area. The most important ideas and projects here were:

1) A draft for path systems covering parts of the area, managed by local citizens' guilds.
2) Creation or re-establishment of free nature areas at different locations.
3) Plan for a network of primarily small cultural production enterprises that are conscientious about nature and the environment.
4) Draft for a locally based, self-organised national park management called *The Parochial Church Council Model*.
5) A comprehensive nature, culture and production development plan for Nyord, co-ordinated and self-organised by the new-established *Citizens' Association of Nyord*.

Some of these ideas were realised, partially in revised forms, while others were prepared and tried out through singular arrangements (the path

system). However, most of them did not last for long. Although locally initiated and based, they did not succeed in creating a base robust enough to continue on their own after the end of the national park pilot project and with that, the Action Research project. They remained too narrowly tied to the park project—and to the municipality's willingness to support them. This municipality had been hesitant all the way and as soon as the different projects were no longer needed as an impressive demonstration of the participative foundation of the pilot project, they evaporated. To the citizens and to us, this was no surprise, and in fact, considerable endeavours were made to establish an independent base to take the ideas further and to protect and keep the obtained (but certainly vulnerable) co-operation between the different projects and groups. A *Coordinating Group* was formed (where we participated as secretaries), and attempts were made to integrate it into the local *Agenda 21 Group* that was officially supported by the municipality. This was directly opposed by the authorities, who did not want to favour these types of self-organised activity. Thus, after some time, visible tracks and continuing effectual energies from the citizens' participation could scarcely be identified at Møn.

At Nyord, however, a distinctive practical exception to this developed and continued to flourish in the years to come—and still does. The citizens of Nyord started out opposing the very idea of a national park and had no desire to take part in the participation project with the citizens from Møn. However, they invited us to come to Nyord and establish a Future Creating Workshop with them. Here, most of the inhabitants of the island took part, and *The Citizens' Association of Nyord* was formed—now known simply as *The Association of Nyord*. Like the Association in Halkær Ådal, it functioned (functions) as an umbrella organisation for the many specific associations of the island, slightly differing as to their number; today, there are seven of them. Besides this, it is a platform for discussing and co-ordinating the specific groups and their initiatives and also for generating new ideas and plans. As such, it also functions as a board, making official applications for mostly economic support—rather successfully, one might add. Within the framework of the national park project, it elaborated and presented an impressive comprehensive "Development plan for Nyord", integrating the dimensions of nature, culture, energy, production—all related to the questions of the everyday life, wealth and renewal of the community of Nyord. The work inspired by this plan, then, has been continued, new projects and active persons have joined, and today, the community of Nyord appears as an extraordinary centre of inventiveness and hospitality. After manifesting a hostile attitude not only to the national park project but to common initiatives with other communities and groups at Møn as well, they completely changed this, involving themselves in our Action Research project as part of the overall citizens' participation of the Pilot Project. This transformation was due to their participation in the Research Workshops, in which members of the coordination group and the Steering Group also

participated. They created the idea of a locally based citizens' council managing the national park called the *Parochial Church Council Model*, which we will return to later.

A remarkable outcome should be mentioned: a central component of the initial negative attitude of the citizens of Nyord to the national park project was a conflict between the citizens' historical bird hunting practice (locally broadly supported) and the interests of the private organisation called The Birds' Protection Foundation, which had bought significant areas of the island's meadows, areas functioning as a stop-off place for migratory birds and breeding grounds for different wildlife species. The citizens feared that a national park, supported by the National Forest and Nature Agency, would once and for all decide the conflict in favour of the birds' friends. However, inspired by the dialogues in the Research Workshops between the local citizens, The Birds' Protection Foundation and representatives of the National Forest and Nature Agency, an agreement on experiments with delimited local hunting at Nyord was established. Thus, the mutual respect created in the workshops opened up the way for more creative hunting regulations.

Exemplary Dimensions of the Two Projects

To us, it seems obvious that the citizens' ideas and drafts could be seen as potential contributions to their common livelihood or community, no matter how this community was defined and delimited—an impression confirmed by the still-ongoing activities in parts of Halkær Ådal and at Nyord now more than a decade later. However, in order to avoid idealising the two projects, it is also necessary to realise that as a whole, they might still be said to have the quality of being a loose collection of good ideas that are interrelated through their common social and ecological (or nature conservation) orientations. Looking at them in a re-embedding perspective, they certainly possess qualities in this direction, the basic dualism between "productive" and "reproductive" activities practically being questioned, the renewal and regeneration of their community being handled as equal and interrelated assignments. Separately, however, (almost) every idea and project might very well end up being integrated in a kind of ecological modernisation, a growth-oriented green capitalism (cf. the *Editors' Introduction* in this volume), and this goes for the comprehensive development plans as well. *Any* practical change step towards a new paradigm will have such ambiguities. No single idea or project or cluster of projects could thoroughly be divided into affirmative and transcending components. This ambiguity corresponds to the personal ambivalence of the citizens, and that is why endeavours to establish a certain *tolerance to ambivalence* should be an integrated dimension of Action Research.

Thus, we could not just claim that here we already have the *beginnings* of a Life Economy and a Plural Economy or of Commons, but this said, we think it would be just as misleading to reduce the projects to the impression

of a loose collection of more-or-less related ideas and initiatives that will most probably be integrated in another step of modernisation of the growth economy. This would make one blind to the potentiality transcending this immediate appearance. Such potentiality, we think, was in fact created in both projects, and is intrinsically related to the experiences with the common work on all drafts carried out throughout the projects, regarding their contents as well as their forms. As potentiality, it appears as *lived anticipations*. Such anticipations are never "pure" alternative or stable steps towards a new paradigm. They are *steps in freedom*. Freedom, however, could never be *realised* as particular, but is only real as it is *moving in a certain direction,* as a tendency. Constitutive of freedom is an element of *negativity*: *moving away* from something, negating it, while therefore *also* dwelling on what we want to bring with us, imagining in which direction to move, transforming what we bring with us. Liberty can only be achieved through steps of liberation, emancipation, determinate negations—to put it philosophically. As *learning and experience processes*, these steps do not just disappear; they may be forced into hibernation or even injured, but they could also be aroused in changed constellations and new situations. Here, we are at the point where these two projects, both as to their subjective and objective sides, reach what we consider an *exemplary character*, opening up to a dialogue with the concepts of Commons and of the Plural Economy and Life Economy.

NATURE AND COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT AS PART OF THE LIFE ECONOMY

When turning our attention to this potential, we will start by emphasising a very important dimension: the endeavours to establish a *common horizon*. A common horizon signifies more than "common interests"; it is a *utopian* horizon, opening up the future as something we as individuals *and* in common can actively participate in forming and be attached to with our wishes *and* fears, but with some hope. It is within this common horizon that the question of a *common responsibility* (cf. Egmose in this volume) was brought to the agenda. Here lies the key to our discussion. This common horizon was prepared and also anticipated in the Future Creating Workshops, but it reached a new quality through the common work in the Research Workshops. Here, the plurality of singular ideas and project drafts were brought together and discussed in mutual exchanges of critical reflections and ideas, suggestions of improvements and practical ways of continuing. These discussions were certainly not without conflicting positions, but generally within a friendly atmosphere.[8] The participants began learning from each other, and also different kinds of co-operation began taking form. To a great degree, the singular projects were kept and also brought to life *as* singular (although collective) projects, but all of them had also been discussed and

weighed as to their (potential) impact on the community and the common living conditions—and in most cases, revised due to this weighing.

We will dwell on the question of *weighing*. Weighing is not just a question of gathering as many pros and cons as possible, measuring them in relation to each other and finally revising the idea or initiative according to an overall measurement. The type of questions asked is decisive, and that includes the horizon and therefore also the *direction of the questioning*. Of course, the basis of this process was the simple fact that the participating citizens met, all of them committed to presenting their ideas, accounting for them and at the same time wanting to stand for them, explain and defend them, but also being open to learn from their fellow citizens and *their* ideas. However, on this basis, a kind of questioning was practised that to our experience, at least, was—and is—rather unusual. All ideas were—also—questioned as to their *general or universal dimensions*,[9] or, put in another way, as to their possible impact on the lives and living conditions of the participants, but potentially also transcending the sum of their different perspectives, opening up to the social and sustainable quality of the whole—no matter the difficulties in concretising and delimitating this "whole".

We will especially point to two dimensions of the work in the Research Workshops that could be said in a particular way to evoke and further this direction of questioning. The first is the fact that the Research Workshops were designed as a *meeting place between different kinds of knowledge*, everyday knowledge on the one hand and professional or scholarly knowledge on the other. These kinds of knowledge adhere to different logics. The everyday knowledge is organised around the question of "how to live", while the professional or scholarly knowledge is organised around specific thematic or conceptual questions. Although they differ with respect to their organisational logic, and this difference should not be eliminated, they also are—or should be—related to each other. If they are strictly separated, they will both be impoverished or even perverted. This is the problem of technocratic (and academic) blindness and self-sufficiency on the one side and the stubbornness of common sense with its "I always know how it really is" on the other. When entering into an open, mutual dialogue, the meeting of these different kinds of knowledge sets free an immense creativity and a critical self-reflection.

This meeting and exchange between different kinds of knowledge had the form of a *social meeting* between the workshop participants and a differentiated group of invited experts. The experts were invited to comment on the citizens' ideas and drafts, but with a specific awareness and obligation. Before bringing their expertise into play, they were asked to try to "listen themselves into" the drafts they were presented with, thus mimetically trying to follow the drafts on *their* premises—and *then* trying to find the appropriate answers that their expertise could give. This is completely the opposite of the normal practice characterising hearings, for instance, where citizens are presented with experts' drafts which they might then question (cf. Clausen

in this volume). We developed techniques organising this meeting, but cannot go into detail here. We think this model opens up the beginning of a really mutual *exchange* between these different kinds of knowledge, thereby also beginning to *change* them. This points to a democratisation of expert knowledge without reducing it to its specific logics (also cf. Egmose in this volume).

The other dimension of the work furthering this general perspective has the form of what we call *advocacies*. All drafts are questioned as to their possible impacts on specific thematics, all of them pointing to a general dimension. They could be of a very different character, and the participants have to decide which questions they find most important to work with. At Møn, we ended up with five advocacies questioning each project draft as to its impact on *democracy and community (solidarity)*, *economy and sustainability*, *considerations for the weak*, *coherence of everyday life* and *nature diversity*. It turned out that when put to all the different ideas and drafts, such specific and yet general questions tend to awaken an awareness of these dimensions being in fact far more closely connected than it might seem: questions of wealth, social justice, sustainability and everyday life are interdependent.

In this way, the common horizon gained substance—and notably through the dwelling in turn on each and every singular idea or draft, each thus taking colour from the comprehensive future draft for the community as a whole, of which they became co-constitutive. This is the point where the participants might begin seeing the variety of future drafts as parts of a *Life Economy*, while at the same time experiencing themselves as part of what we could call a *we-community*,[10] constituted as such through their mutual questions and answers to (the projects of) each other and related to the comprehensive order that at the same time makes up their base and horizon.

We could generalise this creative work in the following way, implicitly relating to the concept of *artistic sense* in Action Research (Nielsen & Nielsen 2015): fully concentrated on, maybe even absorbed with the specific questions of the singular projects, the participants at the same time *through* the concentration on this specific singular part gradually achieve an awareness of the part in its relations to the whole, an awareness of the singular project and its impact on and potential interchange with the other projects, their mutual dependency and enrichment, and thereby also of a whole "nature and development plan"—as in the examples of Halkær Ådal and Nyord. Thus, what might have been in the beginning of the Research Workshop no more than a *potential* common horizon is gradually transformed into a substantial common horizon. This is a result of the productivity of the Research Workshops, when they succeed.

In previous texts on the character of the work carried out in our Action Research, we have conceptualised it as an emerging *co-operation*. This notion is primarily related to the *subject pole* of the work. Now, when analysing the work in its relation to the emerging common horizon, potentially

opening up to the perspective of Life Economy, the *object pole* enters into the foreground. In the movements of the work sketched above, what Adorno calls a *preponderance of the object* is gradually established (cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2015). This is a precondition for the specific quality of the sketched emerging interdependencies and exchanges beginning to form the contents of the ideas and drafts—a life economic quality—as opposed to the formal quality of interdependencies and exchanges characteristic to (the products and activities of) a competitive market economy. Inspired by Lippe, we will call this quality *resonance* (Lippe 2012). Resonance implies another kind of mutual awareness of the existence and practices of each other—the many known and at the moment unknown, but potential communities, lives and life activities you are or could be interconnected to—being part of a common world, our singular, finite world. Resonance is at one and the same time the imprint of the world on our ideas and drafts and our answers to the world.

With this concept in mind, we could now take a step further in trying to characterise the *social quality of an emerging Life Economy*. A transformation to sustainability is, in the public debate, often associated with scarcity, if not poverty, a diminishing of societal wealth, eventually taking us back to a pre-modern way of life. That interpretation, however, is inappropriate. Besides the fact that a sustainable economy would be more likely to create material wealth for more than only the privileged parts of the populations of the world and is also the only way of preventing collapses with serious consequences for material wealth, it would also make a specific difference with regard to social quality. We could here adapt a concept suggested by Raimon Panikkar, who talks of a *pluralistic conviviality* (Panikkar 2008, p. 404). The late Latin linguistic root of conviviality means living and dining together, including associations of friendliness and festivity, but we also know conviviality in the sense in which Ivan Illich used it, criticising the built-in dimension of domination in modern technology and talking of *convivial tools*, i.e., tools that would be developed and maintained by a community of users, guaranteeing them the possibility and right to independently work and renew their livelihoods (Illich 1973). Taken together, these two senses of the concept make it appropriate to the concept of Life Economy. Moreover, it opens up to the inclusion of the specific *atmosphere* that, without exception, we dare to say, characterises the workshop climate and which we have often related to the combination of playing and concentrated work, being together here and now and working at a common future, having fun while looking for answers to the question, "How should we live?" This atmosphere is not just an attendant phenomenon, but in fact constitutive to the process. To Panikkar, a precondition of such plurality of conviviality is the recognition of "Faith" as a third instance. That might, in fact, meet a broad resonance among many people and in many parts of the world, but in our tradition, a secular, critical humanistic third instance would suffice. To us, the joyful trust, as we might call it, is a category of experience. It is related to resistance to the tendencies that threaten us *and* a common search

for another future for today's world, and therefore it also implies the *feeling of holding out* (Adorno 1970, p. 31)—what Robert Jungk called *courage*. As such, it also has an affinity to *public happiness*, a notion that originally comes from the classical Enlightenment tradition. Thus, at one and the same time, it is something we create and find, something we share. In itself, however, this should not be a point of conflict.

When working individually or in smaller groups *and* collectively together on their ideas and drafts for a future nature and community development in their different areas, the participants of the two projects, as we see it, for a moment—of different, very varying duration and intensity for each of them—anticipated what we have here brought into the discussion as Life Economy, practically to a higher or lower degree forming their ideas, drafts and initiatives in a way that allows us to interpret them as the forerunners of different economies in the widened sense of Plural Economy introduced here. The concepts we have suggested here are not the concepts of the participants at Halkær Ådal or at Nyord, but we think that they do their work justice in a way that an account focusing solely on what "came out of them" would not do. An interpretation has to let some of that which has *not* or *not yet* been realised, at least not to its full potential, light up (again) for a moment, thereby creating an awareness of it and perhaps opening up the way to its reintegration in a future practice. Seeing different projects and initiatives as potential *economic practices* within a plurality of economics could open up citizens' self-understanding as societal individuals and allow their ideas and capacities to appear in a new light, thus strengthening their self-confidence, encouraging them to be part of a common practice. A few years ago, one of the citizens from Nyord said, "It seems to me that it's a whole philosophy we are up against".

In a sustainability context, this could be an antidote to the one-sidedness of a "green reconversion", abstracting from the necessary societal embedding of sustainability in the sense of seeking its fundament in the citizens' responsibility for their common affairs as a whole. And at the level of singular projects or initiatives, it could also protect them against the risk of green sectarianism or affirmative integration. When engaging in Action Research for sustainability, action researchers should integrate this perspective in their work.

DEMOCRATIC NATURE AND COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT: COMMONANCE?

Above, we discussed the impacts of seeing the diversity of ideas, drafts and activities that, in our examples, makes up an emerging "citizens' nature management and community development", suggesting it as a de facto anticipation of a Life Economy, a plurality of economies. We concentrated the discussion on the question of how a common horizon was gradually

established as an immanent dimension of the ongoing weighing and building up of ideas and drafts. This is crucial because it is decisive as to the kind of generality and universality in question here, as created and controlled from beneath and thereby as an alternative to what characterises at least our Western historical tradition. Here, *the general*—typically in the form of the state—assumes the shape of an *authoritarian third* above the concrete individuals, their societal practices and everyday lives. This is a thematic that is central to all discussions of democracy and democratisation, and in relation to the sustainability agenda, including climate change, it may be of even greater urgency to recall the obvious risk of what André Gorz (1980 [1975]) once called a kind of "eco-fascism".

When concentrating on this immanent cultural dimension, however, we left out the question of the search for complementary *societal institutionalisations*. Without such institutionalisations, the processual cultural work may easily evaporate after some time, be it because some goals have been achieved or because exhaustion replaces enthusiasm. This is a well-known phenomenon for many Action Research projects. Normally, it is naturalised, taken as something inevitable, and when it comes to Action Research, it is often seen as a consequence of the researchers leaving the field after some time (at the end of the official, financed project period). No doubt, this bears some truth, but it is also a superficial interpretation and it might say more about the character of the projects and of their conditions than of the real difficulties *and* possibilities of creating institutionalisations of ongoing democratic change projects.

As is also obvious from the above discussion, such projects face questions concerning how to consolidate their initiatives, maintaining the amount of autonomy and self-determination necessary to secure the "alternative" originality of what they are doing, while at the same time co-operating with the relevant official authorities which, in by far the majority of cases, is *also* necessary for the survival of their initiatives. Of course, the questions they have to deal with differ, dependent on the character of the projects. For instance, establishing a production co-operative is something very different from our examples of making local community development a common, public assignment or of initiating democratic nature management. Besides all the practical questions, such initiatives raise difficult questions concerning responsibility and democratic legitimacy, and here, the concept of Commons becomes relevant.

The international discussion concerning a transition to sustainability, for good reasons, has—as far as we can judge—primarily been occupied with describing and claiming the restoration and renewals of the qualities that are threatened or have already been more or less destroyed. The development of and trials of suggestions and experiments sketching institutional renewals at societal levels, however, has been left as a desideratum. The notion of Commons or of commonance, as a new kind of governance, does essentially point to a new type of societal institution: neither state nor market. What is

discussed here is certainly inspiring, but we think it is not unfair to say that many of the difficult questions are still left open or at least mostly answered *in principle*. Therefore, we will now turn our attention to the ideas and practices in our two projects, examining whether they could inspire this discussion. We will concentrate on two issues, in each case focusing the discussion on ideas from one project, although also with a view to the other. First, we will discuss the ideas of institutionalising the experiences from working out the "Nature and Development Plan" as a *Development Board* (Halkær Ådal), which was also associated with the (broader) idea of a forum for democratic dialogue. Secondly, we will discuss the draft of a local national park management known as *The Parochial Church Council Model* (Møn/Nyord).

We have described how in Halkær Ådal, the Research Workshops during the Action Research project worked as a forum for the specific development of the projects, gradually concretising the common horizon. In this way, these workshops could be said to have the character of a *temporary or provisional institutionalisation* of the common work, unofficial of course, without any formal legality and authority, but to (by far the majority of) the participants *subjectively binding*, evoking a commitment and responsibility transcending one's own ideas and initiatives. In fact, certain ideas were given up or radically changed. It was clear that this would not last after the end of the official Action Research project unless a specific initiative were to be taken. What was needed appeared to be a combination of at least three things: 1) The specific way of working through (weighing) ideas and drafts should be cultivated, including the organisation of the work and the co-operation with experts and the public commitment. 2) The initiative should be recognised by official authorities, at least in the sense that all future plans and drafts for new initiatives in the area discussed within this new "institution" should be subject to a guarantee that they would be taken seriously by the municipalities, i.e., within the structures of the existing formal democracy as the authoritative legal instance of decision-making (cf. also Hansen, von Essen and Sriskandarajah in this volume). 3) It should be organised by an autonomous group (elected or in other ways nominated by interested citizens), and this group should have a minor amount of money at its disposal that is granted by the municipality, as well as a secure, continuous co-ordination. What else would be needed in terms of resources should be obtained from different sources or donors, still to be concretised. The idea of a *Development Board* was based on such ideas and discussions, but never comprehensively concretised or realised as such.

In the years that followed, the time and energy of those carrying on the activities were absorbed by the many singular projects that were in fact brought to life while at the same time renewing *The People's Association of Halkær Ådal*, which became an umbrella organisation for all the initiatives to be realised and the new ones being added. For several years, this Association became an informal "institution" in the area, for the first time

co-ordinating and combining much of what was going on in the different villages in the stream valley. A regular newsletter was distributed, and public meetings were held. Within this organisation, the specific way of working and weighing the ideas from the Research Workshops was to a certain degree continued and cultivated, partly by an ongoing co-operation with experts and researchers (including us), which was primarily related to workshops dedicated to singular projects being located in the different villages, but also to the re-established lake. These workshops gathered a broad participation of citizens, but endeavours to establish a stronger institutionalisation of the intentions represented by the idea of the Development Board bore no fruit.

In fact, in today's society, a lot of development and planning groups *do* exist as different kinds of influential *interest groups* or *organisations* representing particular, private interests. They could be informal or formal, as advisory groups for the authorities of the municipalities or even as corporate groups, but generally outside the public limelight, at least with regard to their ongoing work where all the decisions are prepared. However, the very idea of experimenting with *institutionalising a common third* in the sense developed here was met with practically no resonance by the authorities. In the situation and the years that followed, the participants of the Action Research project, including us researchers, found no ways of proceeding with this question. Therefore, we were not able to point to a model of institutionalising this way of working, but that does not negate the importance of the potential at play here.

Before reflecting some more on this, however, we will first turn to the idea of a *local democratic national park management* that was developed in the Action Research project at Møn/Nyord. During the project, several ideas of establishing local citizens' *guilds* that could bear the practical responsibility of taking care of delimited nature areas, including different social duties (such as, for instance, keeping the roads free of snow during winter) were born and also elaborated on in detail. Likewise, in Halkær Ådal, and in fact partly inspired by these ideas, a guild to take care of the re-established lake was suggested. This was thought of as taking back some parts of the social practice from the municipality (principally part of the state structure) and putting it into the hands of the smaller local communities, not in the form of privatisation, but as self-organised public activity—with another kind of responsibility than, for instance, the well-known purely volunteer groups possess. In fact, it could be seen as an alternative both to the bureaucratisation and monetarisation of taking care of specific common affairs. These ideas were seriously discussed also within the Steering Group, but failed to get past the drawing board. However, they also nurtured the idea of locally based, democratic national park management. The question of how a national park at Møn/Nyord should be managed (if it was decided by the national government) was in fact something that the Steering Group had to deal with as part of its terms of reference. The suggestion elaborated in the Research Workshops and put forward by the Coordination Group led to intense debates.

The idea of having locally based citizens' nature management (in case of the national park) had to find answers to the justified questions that were raised, such as: who could be the legitimate, responsible subject of such management? Why (just) the locals? A national park is not only part of *their* common affairs. Nature is not limited to the geographical areas in question, and it implies many considerations that could not be handled by an arbitrary combination of citizens, be they democratically nominated or not. It could be said that such objections could just as well—and certainly should—be made to most private decisions having deep societal influence, and also to many decisions formally made by democratic municipalities and authorities, but based on opaque procedures influenced by strong particular interests. In any case, when claiming that Commons could become a new kind of democratic societal institution, adequate answers must be found to questions such as those lined up here. The suggestion made by the participants of the Action Research project was a reflection on this, although the notion of Commons was not used. It was a principal draft meant to be concretised later on should it be accepted as a model for an experimental form of national park management.

The very idea, which stemmed from a participant who was also the head of the Parochial Church Council of Nyord, was based on an analogy: the official Danish state church is based on a decentralisation of the administration or management of the common spiritual affairs (both as to their practical and spiritual sides) to the Parochial Church Councils. They are elected by the local members of the church, and they run the churches and designate the priests. They have an amount of money at their disposal (which they have to account for), and for spiritual matters, they refer to and are supervised by the bishop. Why not transfer this model into the field of nature management? Of course, this would raise a lot of questions. The most important one would probably be: what could the equivalent for the bishop be? This question was what worried biologists, rangers and administrators. They thought it was too risky to leave the responsibility of nature conservation and management to lay citizens.

The answer to these concerns was simple: it would certainly be risky if it were in fact left solely to the citizens' personal judgement. Generally, administrative decentralisation—not least within nature management—very often implies favouring strong particular interests and disregarding general or common considerations. Therefore, a qualified responsibility should be built into the model. Based on the experiences from the Action Research project, first and foremost, the Research Workshops introduced a new kind of co-operation between experts and citizens, transcending the purely particular and local perspectives and interests and also including a public obligation, a detailed plan for a national park management that could be elaborated and tested within the framework of a specified *experiment*, monitored by local as well as national authorities and experts. As demonstrated in the Action Research project, this would have had the potential of creating a new broad

engagement and sense of responsibility by the citizens in taking care of nature and, more broadly, the environment, while at the same time new balanced (or weighed) relations between conservation and use could have developed.[11] The Research Workshop in itself was not such a model, as it is neither a forum of decision-making nor of alternative planning, but its specific qualities could have guided a full-scale experiment. In fact, the proposal was adopted by the Steering Committee and became a nationally discussed model for all future national parks. The national Steering Committee of all ten pilot projects required that the Danish Nature Conservation authorities evaluate the legal aspect of such a model. However, this evaluation experienced so much delay that it was not possible for the National Steering Group to discuss it before their recommendations were to be finalised. Some members of the National Steering Group found that the authorities deliberately delayed the process (all of this is thoroughly documented in Hansen 2007). Obviously, neither the conventional farmers' organisations nor the professional nature authorities (in many cases, opponents) wanted to try this out.

The proposal was just a general draft, and it would have taken a lot more work and engagement to concretise and prepare it—even just for a delimited experiment. Yet, combined with the potentials of the Development Board, it contains interesting perspectives with principal implications for how to work with a more long-term institutionalisation of Action Research projects (institutionalisation here not exclusively in the emphatic sense of establishing a new kind of societal institution), but also for the ongoing discussions of what *commonance* might be. As we see it, these discussions need to be extended in different aspects. We will point to two here. *First*, there often seems to be a gap between the alternative ways of producing and communicating that characterises most alternatives, especially also when claiming a Commons perspective, and the far more traditional way of discussing how to administrate and govern them *as* Commons. It seems obvious that you could not just rely on "trust" in each other, nor could you just point to a principle of solidarity and co-operation—as is often done. A Commons is essentially a processual cultural space, but it will also require regulations. It is problematic, then, to turn back to traditional organisational and in many cases also legal forms of regulation, developed in the bourgeois era and well known to the myriad of associations and committees also in civil society (cf. for instance Ostrom 2010). The ways of structuring meetings, discussions and decision building in these organisations, in short, their basic procedures, is strongly bureaucratically biased when compared to the qualities and procedures elaborated above. They give legitimacy and stability, but kill social imagination. What is needed is something else. The norms and forms of decision-making and regulation, including the handling of conflicts,[12] should be invented—*experimentally tried out*—and inspired by the alternative ways of co-operating and weighing proposals and ideas, as, for instance, was practised in the Research Workshops. "Methods" as conceptualised and practised within (our) Action Research are always also models of social ways of living and regulation. The

Life Economy corresponds to a sustainability norm as a *practical integrative principle of living*, to paraphrase Busch-Lüty, who was referring to Shiva (Busch-Lüty 2000, p. 62), and this cannot be reserved for certain—traditionally called cultural—levels, but should also become constitutive for new organisational and institutional forms. Now these things separate, the creative processes to one side, the forms of institutionalisation to the other, the last imperceptibly neutralising or eating up the former. This said, we will also suggest that such new institutional forms of regulation should never replace what historically are certainly bourgeois forms, but nevertheless today represent the best protection of universal individual rights—until their inalienable dimensions are guaranteed within the new forms. (However, for instance, principles of contextual-based conflict mediation are already today practised within the framework of general law.)

Secondly, when it comes to commonance, the predominant model of what a Commons is seems relatively narrow. The example of nature management shows that taking, for instance, co-operatives (or other minor collective bodies) as a model for common regulation or self-determination is insufficient. The question of who would be the legitimate subject or subjects must be answered at another level. *Common* responsibility and regulation is not identical to *collective*. The Parochial Church Council Model at least makes these challenges thematic. These considerations point to something very important. We have stressed that we still find the *localisation* of Action Research and, more generally, of reform experiments absolutely necessary—but not in the sense of a simple contextualisation. We all live in different social contexts of varying intensity and scale. Therefore, we will all be part of different contexts with differing commitments. Likewise, Commons are of a very different character and forms of commonance must be elaborated as specific answers to these differences. *Local autonomy* could never be absolute, and small autonomous bodies or practical units cannot be generalised to bigger societal levels or issues to be handled as common affairs. When Commons should be a real alternative to state and market, it has to be elaborated in these dimensions and scales, not remaining at or generalised from a local level. Otherwise, it would never find answers to the challenges of today's crises. This is also a necessary perspective in order to avoid the risk of *emancipation* being subordinated to a re-embedding, localising logic, as elaborated by Nancy Fraser in her critical discussion of the potentials of Polanyi's concept today (Fraser 2013).

Bringing these overarching perspectives into awareness might seem overwhelming when turning our attention to Action Research and its possibilities. However, it need not be so. It should not imply turning away from the specific life context, giving up the localisation of projects and initiatives. Localisation, a specific space and *place*, is a precondition for feeling at home, belonging and creating an awareness of the general and universal in the particular, and local is born out of *dwelling*, feeling at home at a specific place, because—as Lippe puts it—"the roots of *dwelling* [. . .] grow out

of our ability in concrete situations truly to give answers to our co-world" (Lippe 2008, p. 447). This must be kept in mind as opposed to an abstract, ideological idea of cosmopolitanism free of any specific places or of an absolute third instance above human everyday life and practice. At the same time, the "feeling at home" should be loosened from the absolute privileging and therefore mystification of *one* specific place, thereby also from any privileged associations to one's native homeland or the like as promoted by nationalism and ultimately by fascism ("blood and soil").

Action Research is primarily carried out in localised situations, but why should experimenting with the here-discussed thematics transcending the local context and scale not be possible? Of course, this could not be suggested and decided arbitrarily. It must be prepared within the local projects. Bringing groups of citizens from different projects together and discussing each other's experiences, however, would be an excellent opening in this direction (as we learned when bringing representatives from Halkær Ådal and Nyord together). Public grants should be available for such purposes—although we have also learned that this is difficult. Another opening might emerge from the experiences that are common to most Action Research projects when communicating with public authorities, typically officers at the municipality level (planners, consultants, experts). This concerns experiences dealing with the general difficulties of Action Research projects, how to proceed from creating ideas and giving birth to practical initiatives and experiments to more long-termed stabilisation thereof (what we have here called their institutionalisation), while at the same time keeping their unusual, potentially transcending dimensions and thus avoiding being reintegrated into the existing institutional and bureaucratic structures and procedures. In the projects discussed here, we find many inspirations and practical openings concerning these questions, not least in relation to the necessary collaboration with officials and experts at different levels. Thus, for instance, we were invited to Møn/Nyord by interested, well-informed local officials who were very helpful during the project. It would be a big mistake to consider municipalities (including their officials) monoliths that per definition are opponents to sustainability (cf. Hansen 2007; Nielsen, Hansen, and Sriskandarajah in this volume).

They should rather be seen as potential—but necessarily ambivalent—supportive allies. Often, they are sceptical of a more comprehensive role of citizens, but this scepticism could be cushioned if they are not put under pressure and if one is open to their reasons for being sceptical. Also, they should be listened to. They are *citizens*, too, who have wishes for *their* lives and (potential) common responsibilities, often with valuable, but *partial* knowledge that just has to be freed from the one-sided specialisation related to the existing bureaucratic logics of planning and management, which frustrate *them* as well. This knowledge must be translated to a common consciousness and integrated in a comprehensive, common interplay with other forms of knowledge within the horizon of the Life Economy—as we could

witness gradually emerging in the Research Workshops of the two projects. Therefore, they might be allies also when it comes to more far-reaching experiments, even with perspectives that might transcend their own positions and functions.

Instead of focusing on the fact that the visionary *and* simple models created by the citizens in the projects discussed here were not accepted and realised as practical experiments, we suggest considering them parts of a reservoir or bank of *not-yet-used ideas*. Explanations of why they could not be brought further could easily be made up, but such explanations (although necessary to consider) are always parts of specific contextual and historical constellations that should not be generalised. Making Action Research also always includes working on creating new constellations.

THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF ACTION RESEARCH

The two projects discussed here were, at significant phases, both strongly related to Action Research projects, although in both cases to a certain degree, there already existed groups of citizens engaged in developmental plans for their communities who were eager to take responsibility and work autonomously. These groups, although now recomposed and broadened, also made up cores of the continuing activities after the end of the formal Action Research projects. They made up fertile soil for the Action Research that did not have to start from scratch, although they also represented some difficulties to be dealt with. This underlines the basic fact that Action Research should never be seen as the *subject* of change processes, as that would be a misplaced idealisation. Generally put: change processes will always have cultural and social preconditions related to the forces in a given field, ultimately in *the everyday life experiences* of the participating citizens and qua this therefore also with a much broader potential base than what might appear at first. Change processes are rooted and initiated in many ways. Action Research projects would, at best, make up a very small part of the multitude of initiatives, experiments and practices constituting a societal reorientation towards sustainability.

What, then, is the contribution of Action Research? Could Action Research make a difference—in the sense of Gregory Bateson's "difference that makes a difference"—and if yes, what kind of difference? In *Chapter Three*, we discussed how the creation of an *encouraging* atmosphere permeates all dimensions. In Nielsen & Nielsen (2015), we have thoroughly discussed the specific *creativity* emerging in Action Research, which also permeates all dimensions. Encouragement and creativity would probably characterise all change projects, without necessarily leading to the *social imagination* in the comprehensive sense that we have interpreted here as anticipations of the Plural Economy and Commons. These anticipations emerge where singular ideas and initiatives are transcended *as simply singular* within a

loose common horizon, and they could be seen as growing out of the playful interplay between the critical, utopian and general or universal questioning of the practices and life perspectives sketched, discussed and weighed in the workshops. Through this interplay, they become part of a comprehensive meaning, while keeping their unique singularity. It is exactly here where we see the role and potential of Action Research and its difference from consultancy work—and probably also from certain forms of purely activist initiatives.

Through the forms in which it proceeds, its methods, if you like, Action Research in a unique way can have a kind of midwife function in establishing a common horizon in the sense discussed above. We, as action researchers, and within the Action Research projects initiated by us, can represent the emergent *overarching order* that we have also called the general or universal, not as something to be brought into the situation from outside, but as something *potentially inherent in and transcending the practical situation as a plurality of singular interests, perspectives, economies, etc.* To be able to do this, action researchers have to be good at making the workshops, be personally present, inspire a listening and playful atmosphere where anxiety is minimised, and they have to engage in the thematic of the workshops—but they should not strive to be perfect. Such narcissistic ambition will be counterproductive, with a more humble attitude being better placed. However, action researchers are not specifically experienced or qualified persons ("experts in method" as it is sometimes suggested), nor qua researchers, especially privileged to represent the general dimension. In the workshop, they have to be able to personalise the *research position* as a position in itself committed to a general and universal perspective and help this commitment to penetrate the work. This can be done in a simple way, turning the questions of the general into *common working questions*, as we have done in developing the critical utopian workshop method (discussed above in relation to the Research Workshop), asking ourselves: how could we work with this in the workshops? This simple question will guide the action researchers' midwife function.

We ascribe neither research nor researchers a privilege of interpretation on behalf of the general. Research is brought back into people's life situations, but without dissolving it with respect to its historical search for truth. On the contrary: we must let this search interact with the participants' quest for a good life. This is also the basis for the social meeting and dialogue between experts and citizens, between different types of knowledge taking place in the Research Workshops. It corresponds to the position of the Action Researchers, being part of this emerging change practice, but at its periphery—an *immanent border position* that requires a specific way of moving, of balancing, a kind of free-floating awareness, as once described by Freud. This is an in-between position that could hardly be fixated as a role. Qua citizens, the researchers identify with the emerging common future perspectives, although *this* specific life context is not *their* field of "direct practice", and qua

researchers, they identify with the specific assignment and potential related to the idea of research as part of enabling steps towards more freedom. Both of these perspectives are hope- and joyful—which makes up the grounds for the researchers' way of acting, *their* "direct practice", in the situation. Many years ago, we called this the practice of *solidarity*.

We see this as a classical heritage from the European Enlightenment, a utopian idea of science, research and scholarship, reinterpreted and practically reinvented in a critical consciousness of the dialectics of Enlightenment, that is, with an awareness of the necessarily negative dimension of the search for truth, avoiding any temptation of falling back into new forms of something absolute—unhistorical fantasms of what is true and right. The general and universal dimensions that begin to take shape in the workshops are, in a constitutive sense, provisional, unfinished; they result from the common practice, with all its contradictions and limitations. They are, however, not exclusively related to the collective of the participants, but are mediated through their wrestling with *the world* as their livelihood, thus transcending their particular interests and perspectives.[13] This "wrestling with the world" is practical, but inherent to it is a dimension of *interpretation*. The impulse and need for interpretation grows out of the feeling, conviction and hope that the present state of the matters of the world, that which meets us and may seem inevitable, can't be all there is (cf. Adorno 2001, pp. 188–189). Therefore, you have to look at the present constellations not as facts, but rather as riddles (Adorno) that may contain clues to other futures not yet known. Interpretation, asking for what might also be possible, looking for openings in other directions, is this critical impulse made practical. It is based on an awareness of human life, of our individual lives, as natural and historical in one, and is therefore finite, and in this sense relative, making the humanisation of our everyday lives a concern of ours, individually and in common, asking, "How should we live?" This is what should be cultivated in Action Research and is what constitutes a significant difference from the understandings represented by the Mode II or III concepts (cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2006; eds Gunnarsson et al. 2015).

In a specific way, Action Research is open to this research perspective. Through the combination of critical and utopian perspectives, it represents a kind of questioning of existent societal constellations that may uncover humanising potentials breaking up and transcending what otherwise count as facts. In its search for other truths, it proceeds through negations of that which is, avoiding installing new absolutes. It is historical in an emphatic sense and *world*-oriented, thus transcending a purely intersubjective circle. This is, incidentally, the impact of the *action* dimension that therefore should not be given up in favour of an "interactive research".

In this perspective, Action Research could have an *exemplary function*. The practical and intellectual reorientations characterising a transition to sustainability must be related and committed to a general and universal horizon, a common third (cf. Clausen as well as Egmose in this volume).

Although this horizon has to be intrinsic to the plurality of practices, economies and ways of life, it will also have, somehow, to be *represented, practically symbolised*. It could not be simply a transient quality of the multitude of projects and processes, but has to be objectified as some kind of public instance of dwelling and critical self-reflection. An inspiration could be the world-renowned Scandinavian *Ombudsmand* (English: ombudsman) institution. The ombudsmand is related to the parliament and functions as an independent authority watching over the work of the government, primarily with regard to its legal aspects, according to the principles of the democratic constitution. The ombudsmand has no other authority than the moral one related to the institution, which of course includes its practice. However, it is unheard of that these recommendations are neglected. Such institutionalisation must be a decisive dimension of future sustainable forms of social practice, a precondition for the *general* dimension being present in all the different practices, projects or economies. Otherwise, the general might easily be transformed into an authoritative third representing a new kind of undisputable "true sustainability values", perhaps even based in science. Related to our above discussion of different kinds of institutionalisation of transitional, sustainable practices, what we are talking of here could be seen as a *separate institutional dimension* within a constellation of new institutions—just as the ombudsmand institution would be nothing in itself, but something only in its relation to the parliament and to the public sphere. Action Research could be seen as a series of practical anticipations of this. What we, in relation to the creative process in the workshops, described as the function of the *research position* as an immanent border position representing the general, is an anticipation of an "ombudsmand institution" of a new kind. As a border position, it is part of the direct, particular practice, while referring to (or personalising) a utopian research interest, but at the same time, it represents a comprehensive, general perspective that is not *purely* immanent, although it is (potentially) present in the particular practice. This is the exemplary function we ascribe to Action Research.

Transitional and sustainable practices need institutionalisations of a new kind. That is what we have especially dealt with here. The base of such practice is the interchange of persons, here and now. This is also the basic medium of Action Research. There is no transcendent dimension outside human practice. A general or universal common horizon is in itself historical, of which human interpretations are an integrated part (as argued above). It is open—in different directions and thus in a certain sense always "in plural", not adhering to a central perspective, and that goes for its *moral* dimension as well. The transition to sustainability necessary implies morality, but morality could not be taken as something self-evident; you could not choose a moral position as some kind of ontological point of reference and reclaim it as yours.[14] Referring to Adorno, we could say that moral consciousness only starts where it is no longer self-evident to itself. There is no such thing as "moral certainty and self-confidence". All morality could fail.

It requires an impulse to do right *and* self-critical reflexivity as well. (Adorno 2001, p. 365) Therefore, a social dimension is inherent in morality; it is not a purely individual, nor a purely intersubjective matter. It must relate to general dimensions within a common world and is constituted as a practical *critical attitude* against what is wrong and unjust and makes up limitations of our potential freedom. Thus, morality implies persistent interpretation. That is why we point to the hermeneutical dimension as something constitutive in Action Research, emphasising the importance of creating a listening atmosphere, listening, answering, listening: we all have to learn to be able to enter into dialogues. And what hermeneutics as theory is about, Gadamer said, is "that you have to learn to listen" (Gadamer 2000, p. 191). Thus, the dimensions of hermeneutics and social learning are inseparably interrelated. Action Research is essentially cultural work.

EPILOGUE: A HUMAN NATURE

In the two projects we have been discussing, nature has played an important role, obviously more or less "as such" representing a common point of reference, being the basis for people's livelihoods, transversely to all different and conflicting interests therein. This also holds true for most of the other contributions to this volume. As we have seen, it would not seem a long and alien step to adapt the concept of Commons to the question of "nature protection", "nature management" or "natural resource management", and therefore we might see "nature" as a privileged field for bringing the question of a reorientation towards a sustainable transition into the societal agenda.

However, we have to hesitate for a moment, questioning whether this seemingly self-evident way of conceptualising nature as something to be handled in common—as a Commons—is sufficient in a sustainability perspective or perhaps bears the risk of reproducing key contradictions in the *societal nature relation* that are predominant in the Western world and, through globalisation, would eventually penetrate *all* in the world. Nature is conceptualised *and* treated as something *outer* in relation to society, as something to be dominated and exploited in order to create human richness and culture: nature appears as an inexhaustible resource without limits. This understanding is paradoxical. It is taken for granted that nature could go on regenerating, while at the same time, it is devalued as to any kind of productivity or creativity—something that is solely reserved for man. Nature is theoretically and practically taken as something different from man. Reluctantly, the natural or animal dimension of man is recognised, but at the same time separated from that which constitutes the human. Rudolf Lippe calls this *subtractive anthropology* (Lippe 1987, p. 17). What we could understand as specific *human modi*—reason, spirit and freedom—are celebrated as *exclusively human properties*, and therefore not understood dialectically as being fundamentally based in our natural, somatic

side, while at the same time, in fact, also expressions of something uniquely human. Nature is treated as if it were there *in order to be* used, enjoyed, controlled and optimised by us. Today, this is concentrated in the concepts and practices of a neoliberal transformation of life into a pure vehicle for the dis-embedded capitalist economy, reducing nature *and* human beings to *resources*. Rationalisation and modernisation strategies, including the development paradigm, are essentially resource management.

Since the Second World War, this has been hegemonic within politics and science—this is true also for the Communist world, now more or less collapsed or transformed into specific forms of capitalism (as seems also to be the case in China). Almost by itself, Critical Theory, in the tradition from Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, has in this period made up a counterposition to this hegemony. In Critical Theory, *nature domination* is considered *the* key to understanding the destructive and in fact devastating dimensions of modern culture as practically developed by capitalism—philosophically spoken: the *dialectics of enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno 1969 [1944]). Critical Theory has shown how the unrestrained exhaustion of "outer" nature has intrinsically been linked to societal class and gender domination corresponding to a domination of our own "inner" nature, conceptualised *and* treated as an "inner abroad" to be brought under control. The dialectics of enlightenment—the rise of *modern autonomy*—has increasingly set free destructive and self-destructive dynamics now evident in the sustainability crisis in its intertwined dimensions. However, the dominating crisis strategies of today's capitalism, even where they are aimed at taking the problematics of sustainability into account, as in ecological modernisation and green capitalism, still try to optimise nature domination, counting on new, smart technologies.

A reorientation towards sustainability must include a *new societal nature relation* that overcomes the fatal implications of the subtractive anthropology practised. Of course, many ideas and initiatives that we could interpret as endeavours to change the paradigm of nature domination can be observed all over the world. Also within natural and societal sciences, many new departures can be found, provoked by the ecological crisis, but mainstream science (including sociology) still adheres to the traditional, hegemonic scheme. As to the nature dimension, this holds for critical currents such as, for instance, post-structuralism, post-modernism and constructivism, as well, transforming and reducing it to discursive constructions, whereas on the other side, the temptation of holistic visions negating the specific *differences* eliminating the insoluble tensional relation between nature and culture and society seem strong.

We human beings, and therefore also culture and society, are certainly part of nature, but human life is not only natural. Following Critical Theory, we could understand nature as something *non-identical* in human life, while at the same time, we as human beings *are* part of nature. The relation between man and nature is exactly this: *a relation*, mediated through our lives as societal individuals. That is the precondition of our delimited freedom. Today,

we could not have an immediate, non-mediated nature relation. Neither our intellect nor our senses could be fully understood within purely naturalistic concepts nor through purely cultural and societal concepts, and nor could nature "as such". Of course, it is of immense importance, for instance, to fight the elimination of the diversity of species and so far, it makes good sense to talk of nature protection.

However, essentially, nature should not be considered and treated as something totally different from society—as has, for instance, been the case in some arguments for the establishment of natural (or national) parks. Often then, in an unholy alliance, such arguments fuse pragmatically with arguments of the (potential) use of a rich diversity of species, for instance for medical use. Pure protection, sometimes imagined as natural areas closed to human beings, in itself does not represent a break with nature domination as pivotal to the predominant modern societal nature relation. Such a break would imply a renewed way of thinking and practicing on *all sides* of our nature relations, not least including planning and use. *Nature as a Commons*, then, would not so much be the precondition of such renewals, but their *result*: a *common third* based on new practices and a new awareness. Perhaps we could think of the relation between nature and mankind (culture and society) within a *world* concept in line with Merleau-Ponty's considerations of the visible and invisible as a differentiated unity to which we belong, but where everything is certainly not related to us (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964])—a non-anthropocentric worldview.[15]

This is what we had in mind as we suggested that it might be a good idea to see the different activities as they emerge within Action Research projects related to democratic renewal, the self-regulation of the participants' common affairs, as parts of a *Life Economy*—and that is always a *constellation of plural economies*—where the specific human productivity and creativity are based in what Shiva calls "nature's power of self-regeneration", "her prodigious creativity" (Shiva 2010 [1992], p. 228). That may further a self-critical reflection not only regarding societal conditions and mediations, but also regarding the kinds of awareness brought into play or hindered. Referring to our previous discussion, we would especially point to the idea of "weighing". Weighing in the sense meant here is something different from calculation. It is not planning how we can dispose of nature and society that makes up the *conditio humana*, but the contradiction between disposition and gratitude. This is what should be weighed—according to Lippe (2012, p. 126). Gratitude we understand as joyful and humble happiness, being part of this natural and social world as our living condition and therefore also as an obligation for us to care for and improve it. We experience gratitude through receptivity and active answers in one, living together and learning from each other. This corresponds to what we have discussed above: *resonance*. Resonance means to take in, mimetically to perceive and receive while at the same time responding in your own way to that which you take in as appropriately as possible. This would not be possible if

nature—or other human beings—were totally alien to us, as different kinds of social theory will have it, denying our kinship with nature and considering human communication in itself unlikely, as Luhmann once put it. In the awareness here practised, we discover affinities, perhaps distant, perhaps close, between what and whom we meet and ourselves—but still respect the moments of non-identity (cf. Lippe 2012, pp. 192–193).

Benjamin and Adorno called this *reconciliation with nature*, a critical, utopian alternative to nature domination. To them, this would not simply go hand in hand with peace, social justice and the democratisation of society; it could only be obtained *through* such practice, political, social and cultural in one. According to Benjamin, this would be a *break with the continuum of history* corresponding to a *genuine historical experience*, necessary as he saw it at the advent of fascism if a catastrophe were to be avoided (cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2015). The catastrophe occurred. The current crisis also contains catastrophic potentials. It is difficult to imagine a reorientation towards sustainability if not as a paradigmatic shift, involving a break with nature domination as the core of the general societal nature relation. We have desired to contribute to an awareness of beginnings in this direction already existing or emerging in manifold initiatives, projects and situations. This already ongoing paradigmatic shift will necessarily have global dimensions, but it has its centre (or its multitude of centres) in the relations between those participating in localised practices and—*through* these relations—in the relation of society to nature; this relation therefore is always a mediated one (Lippe 2012, p. 164).

We talk about *a human nature* as a utopian, but also very practical horizon for what we today label nature management or Natural Resource Management. A human nature is not a nature formed completely in the picture of human beings, but it is a nature where human beings belong with all their activities, including production—but weighed in the sense discussed above. A human nature is what nature is and could be as part of human lives, and although this is an absolute precondition, it is certainly not a harmony concept. We should give up the fantasm of totally controlling nature, but we should indeed as far as possible try to control the societal nature relations. As a utopian idea, a human nature goes back to the young Marx, who imagined a humanisation of nature and a naturalisation of human beings. Bringing this concept together with Plural Economy could neutralise its reminiscent romantic dreams of identity, while still keeping alive its social imagination of reconciliation with nature as the core of sustainability.

NOTES

1. Throughout the 2000s, the concept of Plural Economy gradually became more and more important to Kurt's and my understanding of Action Research. On a bigger scale, we first tried it out in our book on one of our two large Action

Research projects of this decade, situated in the small Danish rural community of Halkær Ådal (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006), which is also discussed in this chapter. Later on, we transferred it to the discussion of a necessary reorientation of the classic trade union movement towards engaging in the development of a *solidarity economy* (Nielsen & Nielsen 2007b). When we began planning our own contributions to a book presenting Scandinavian Action Research to an English-reading public, we made a first abstract of a chapter on Plural Economy. Shortly after, Kurt died—in April 2012. Now I alone have fulfilled what we planned, introducing the idea of Plural Economy as part of our overall concept of Action Research in *Chapter Three* in this volume and completed by the considerations of this present chapter. I have been using our common abstract and our many previous discussions on the concept as a starting point and guidelines for my reflections, although of course also bringing in new thoughts and experiences. However, these chapters still relate so strongly to our common work that I find it justified that Kurt and I appear as co-authors. (BSN)

2. In our part of the world, the welfare state to a certain degree protected important societal activities against being subsumed under capitalist logic. Rapidly, this is changing. For instance, through New Public Management (now being modernised into New Public Governance), the calculated economisation of activities within the public sector has become dominant, combined with hierarchical management structures. Neverending rationalisation and intensification is the result, and many private activities are more or less transformed into activities necessary for consuming capitalist-produced commodities; what Ivan Illich called "shadow-work".
3. The notion of "everyman" refers to Robert Jungk, the inventor of the Future Creating Workshop, and his "everyman project", cf. *Chapter Three*.
4. This demand for citizens' participation was ambiguous. It was formulated by the neoliberal national government, where commercial agricultural interests were strongly represented. The participation should ensure local consensus, which de facto gave the agricultural interests a veto in the process. At the same time, the national park project should demonstrate the government's green interest and was also meant to give some influence to green organisations—and was in fact also supported from this side. Within this political complexity and these internal contradictions we had to manoeuvre, using the possibilities that opened when taking the demands of citizens' participation at their word.
5. Several people helped and co-operated with us. First and foremost, we will mention Hans Peter Hansen, whom we met through the Halkær project and who was also an important partner at Møn/Nyord. Here, Laura Tolnov Clausen also became our partner. Dorte Ilsøe and Jens Christian Elle helped us in making the Future Creating Workshops at Møn. The workshops with school children were initiated by Laura Tolnov Clausen and made by her and Hans Peter Hansen. We are dealing with rather small locations and a small number of people. In Halkær Ådal, 30 citizens took part in the initial Future Creating Workshops, but during the rest of the project and in the following years, hundreds of citizens took part in different ways. At Møn/Nyord, around 75 took part in the initial workshops (exclusively the school workshops), with more joining here also. This is the general pattern. In the beginning, it is a minority taking part (in our case with Nyord as an exception—here two-thirds of the (at that time) 60 citizens took part), but with an in-built tendency of widening the number of citizens participating when it opens up to a variety of forms and grades of participation. The question of non-participation is important, but we cannot discuss it here. However, as an anthropologist, Clausen in fact

investigated this, having conversations with citizens at Møn who did not wish to participate. It was an illuminating investigation, showing that they did not want to participate not because they had no interest in the "common matters", but because they wanted to protect their individual "tactics", living with nature against public exposure (cf. Clausen 2011, and in this volume).

6. The concept of *societal nature relations* is developed from Adorno's Critical Theory (cf. Görg 2003). We will return to it.
7. Here, we use *common* in the singular (Danish: *fælled*) because the project is to establish a common green area that is cropped by local sheep and cattle, but also open for the use of local and foreign citizens. Thus, it is not necessarily a Commons in the strong modern sense, although the initiators were in fact inspired by this idea.
8. Some of the real hard conflicts concerning a transition to sustainability, although dealt with, were not really solved. This concerns especially the problem of the strong interests of the big farmers and the agricultural organisations, farming in Denmark today more or being less transformed into industrial production, for instance of pigs. In Halkær Ådal, only a few small farmers participated, and at Møn, organisational representatives took part, systematically trying to block all initiatives they considered to be against their interests.
9. The concepts of general and universal are overlapping but have different ranges of association. General transcends the particular and often points to societal dimensions, whereas universal is more strongly related to the idea of mankind, for instance when talking of universal human rights.
10. We adapt this notion from Tsiamalenga-Ntumba (2008), who from an African perspective and based in the institution of "palaver", has suggested it as critically corrective to the prominent European notion of intersubjectivity.
11. In Halkær Ådal, the successful project of turning the wetlands (back) into a lake did create such engagement among many citizens, but when it came to the idea of establishing a guild, the authorities became mute.
12. Commoning could not exclusively be based on consensus building, but has to make room for dissidence—not just because this is an individual right to be defended, but also to avoid the stagnation of the whole.
13. This corresponds to a "preponderance of the object" as constitutive of the creativity, cf. Nielsen & Nielsen 2015.
14. Within Action Research, we find a strong tendency and temptation to make ethics or morality an—in this sense—abstract fundament the action researchers could and should chose as their normative starting point. We find that problematic. Action researchers cannot claim specific (high) moral or ethics for themselves and their research.
15. Parallel to this, but from his African perspective and intrinsically related to his concept of a "we-apriori", cf. Tsiamalenga-Ntumba 2008, p. 127.

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9 A Common Sense of Responsibility

Reflecting on Experiences of Commoning Among Citizens and Scientists in London

Jonas Egmose

Emerging in the wake of escalating social and ecological disasters around the world, a renewed acknowledgement of the vulnerable interdependencies of our very basic living conditions as ecological and social beings is rising. This chapter considers how increased levels of attention to our common living conditions can foster a common sense of responsibility and renewed strategies for action towards more sustainable futures by reconnecting civic initiatives and approaches of institutionalised research. Through concrete examples, I illustrate how a civic sense of responsibility for our common living conditions is a focal point in human everyday life, while citizens' initiatives taking care of these in modern societies have become somewhat de-coupled from institutional strategies, and further, how institutionalised research strategies seeking to take responsibility for social and ecological living conditions have structurally become somewhat detached from the potentials and synergies of active citizenship. On this basis, I address the question of how a common sense of responsibility and renewed approaches to action can emerge across research and civic life.

The chapter takes its outset in civic everyday life actions seeking to attain more sustainable futures, and addresses three main questions elaborating on the concept of commoning (Linebaugh 2009): how are processes of commoning rooted in citizens' everyday lives? How can synergies be made with institutionalised action for sustainability? How might Action Research strengthen such processes? Emerging in diverse forms around the world, the renewed interests of working with the concept of commoning more than anything represent historical reorientations towards understanding ecological beings as embedded in this world by processes of interdependency, reciprocity and interrelatedness, which humans might ignore but they cannot escape, since they are part of the living ecology on Earth. In this sense, the contemporary challenges of unsustainability are not only ontologically represented by the most severe degradation of planet Earth faced in human history (Hardin 1968), they are also epistemologically echoed by the erosion of cultural capabilities to understand and interact with the world as living. In its most ontological sense, Earth is a Commons. It is a Commons of fundamental living conditions in which processes of ecological and social

life are embedded, created, recreated and possibly sustained. Commons, however, can only exist as Commons as long as they are understood and treated as such.

Concurrent with the equivocal ways Western societies have changed through the previous few centuries, cultural acknowledgement of taking care of Commons and building on processes of commoning have structurally started to erode at the societal level. The consequences of human living have unequally become globally redistributed on social and geographical scales, building on processes of disguised structural interdependency, making it increasingly complex to grasp the wider relations between humans' everyday life actions and the wider ecological and social consequences thereof. Acting upon these dynamics of globalisation and enclosure, institutionalised responses might sometimes appear somewhat reactive in terms of building institutional capacities of specialised expertise to monitor, regulate and minimise the adverse effects of modern living, while proactively seeking for ways of living that are inherently sustainable in the first place; these responses appear less centre stage on the cultural agendas of Western civilisations (Sachs 2010). Without in any way underestimating the value of scientific capacity-building for understanding and making visible the subversive social and ecological consequences of modern lifestyles, this chapter implies a change in focus, moving from the increased level of acknowledgement of societal and ecological unsustainability towards strategies for renewed action towards other ways of living. Hereby, practices of citizens' everyday lives are at the very centre of understanding the potentials for living sustainably. From this starting point, I am building on the insight of understanding sustainability as an ability of living life (Shiva 2005). Sustain-ability is an immanent and emergent capability of ecological and social life to renew itself without eroding its own foundation of existence. Sustain-ability cannot be invented, but only supported (or eroded) by science. Therefore, we need to reframe science in the role of sustaining sustain-ability (Egmose 2015). Sustain-ability is a sense of responsibility for the Earth that we share. My interest in this chapter considers how processes of commoning can strengthen this sense of responsibility in civic life and institutionalised practice.

To shed light on these questions, I analytically build on Critical Utopian Action Research to draw on the experiences of a specific initiative aimed at enabling local residents to share their lived experiences of modern urban living and connect these to broader discussions of sustainability in collaboration with practitioners and researchers who are listening, learning and responding to these issues. The Citizen Science for Sustainability Project (See Box 9.1) was set up as a community-based Action Research project in North London, aimed at providing deprived urban communities with a greater say in the future of sustainability research. Although the notion of Commons and commoning was not thought of as an integrated framework for the project, it became exceedingly evident that these concepts proved useful for understanding both local initiatives and scientists' reflections on these.

BOX 9.1 THE CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

Citizen Science for Sustainability was a three-year Action Research project aimed at providing local communities with a greater say in the future of urban sustainability research. Acknowledging that deprived urban communities are often the least likely to be engaged in dialogues about how research can help to address problems of sustainability (Lucas et al. 2004), the project sought to work across local citizens, sustainability practitioners and researchers to develop a community-led agenda on urban sustainability research. The project was set up in a local community centre in Mildmay, North London, representing an UK area facing significant social and environmental challenges. The project involved panels of three resident groups (young people, lone parents and older people), a practitioners' panel of professional working with sustainability issues at the local, regional and national levels and a researchers' panel of academics working across a broad field of urban sustainability disciplines (Eames et al. 2009). The process consisted of two main parts. The first half of the project aimed to involve local residents in openly sharing what it was like to live in the local area. Rather than grounding the process within specific academic disciplines, the purpose was for the residents themselves to reflect on their lives in the local area by developing storyboards and shooting their own films, which in very different ways—dramas, documentaries, love stories—showed different community perspectives based on residents' everyday life experiences. The second half of the project was a program of several workshops, during which the residents shared these experiences expressed in the community films. The workshops were intended to engage participants in future visioning exercises envisioning what ideal futures might look like, and for researchers and practitioners to engage in shared dialogues in order to listen and reflect on how community perspectives could be taken into account in furthering research and new initiatives towards sustainability. Through several workshops, the researchers and practitioners involved were given the task to reflect on the community perspectives and respond by developing ideas and proposals for research projects and approaches responding to the perspectives raised, which were again presented back to the local community and to researchers for new initiatives to emerge (Eames et al. 2009).

COMMONING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The Citizen Science for Sustainability Project was set up in close collaboration with a local community centre that hosted a whole range of different social activities for residents in the neighbourhood. Whilst many community

activities were organised in separate ethnic groups, the shared meetings of the Action Research process provided an opportunity to jointly discover how the sense of taking responsibility for what life was like in the local area was in fact a common aspiration. What became evident through the project was how local residents related to their neighbourhood as a Commons. One of the residents had the following reflexion on the question, "What do you hope for?":

> Number one: Unity [. . .] Unity among the races. Leave colour out of it. You and I are striving for a better London, a better England, a better place to live in, a better place to bring up the kids. That's how I look at it. Leave colour out of it.
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical Research p04-OP[i])

The statement both represents hope for the future and lived experience of the past. While it was not an attempt to idealise the reality of a socially highly fragmented urban neighbourhood, it sought to address what was seen as necessary to move forward. One thing that became clear through the Action Research process was how local residents in a great many ways sought to take care of what life was like in the local area. One example was the establishment of a food club for Asian elderlies, which had been running for several years. The club was established by a couple of residents responding to the need for social spaces to meet with people of like minds in the area. Essentially, the club offered a weekly finely cooked meal at a fair price and an informal meeting space for talking, socialising and playing dominos. The founder of the club explained to me:

> Sometimes in the past, I used to beg the young people who are free on Saturdays to help the elderly and that way we could teach them how to behave and how to deal with old people, it's an interaction between the old and the young, so that way they could get some experience and it could change their behaviour. So I think we are part in that. And when they come here we talk to them, and the old people talk to them, and in that way they get some sort of information about life itself.
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical Research p04-O5[i])

Through the Action Research process, an emerging theme was how local citizens saw community activities as a way to make urban living meaningful by contributing to social life in the area, not just for themselves, but also for the neighbourhood in a broader sense. In this way, community activities represented opportunities for residents to make a difference in the area in which they lived. Clearly, many different and often conflicting interests were at stake in the neighbourhood. However, it would be a misinterpretation to understand citizen-driven activities in the local area merely as particular community interests. What the Action Research process brought to the table working across community groups was not a least a common concern: we

care about where we live. The notion of Commons was not only useful for understanding social dynamics in the area, but also related to the physical use of space and the role of nature in the urban setting. Another example from the local area was activities of community gardening run by a number of women, for whom the project provided a very welcome opportunity to actually meet their neighbours, talk about common concerns and share information that would be helpful in their daily lives. Through gardening elements of nature were also part of coping with the social challenges of deprived urban living: integrating elements of preschool qualification for the kids, providing cheap and healthy food as an alternative to depending on poor-quality supermarkets, providing a social space for social integrity and independency in the urban area. As one of the women reminded me, while talking about the struggles of modern urban life:

> You know, sometimes I just got depressed, and then I am thinking that growing flowers must make people happy, so I am just trying.
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-L10[i])

In this sense, the community garden represented a free space in everyday life: a counterinitiative taken by women empowering themselves to be less dependent on the societal structures of social deprivation. The exemplarity of the community garden is that it highlights how social and environmental concerns can be linked through everyday life actions. While most of the citizens involved were rather reflexive about the unsustainable consequences of modern urban lifestyles, capacities to act for change seemed more limited. As part of the process, residents were offered the opportunity to take part in a course on environmental justice issues. For the participants, the course provided an eye-opener on global environmental interrelations. What the project showed was that providing that knowledge, the sense of responsibility, caring about life at present and for future generations, was indeed very close to what many participants saw as essential parts of human living. As one of the participants reminded me:

> Tell you what, this is a global issue! I know we talked about the local, but at the end of the day, it is gonna be a world issue. The more people in the world, there will be no more water, less food . . . maybe not for your children but for their children's children, and in time there will be fights over food and water and everything.
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-OP5[i])

The community activities in many ways were opportunities for the residents to make a difference in the area in which they lived. They were not merely activities in their own right, but also responsive "answers" to the societal challenges faced by residents in their daily lives. While the gardening activities had a value in themselves, they also got their meaning in relation

to wider aspects of the residents' lived lives. A particular theme, which came up in relation to the community garden, was the production of waste and the dependency on an increasing number of Tesco supermarkets. The critique of the so-called "Tescopoly" of the city was rather clear:

> We need more access to shops selling healthy foods at reasonable prices, and ideally more opportunities for people to get allotments.
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p04-LP[i])

In this sense, the community gardens also were a possibility for a bit of integrity and to provide some healthy food on a low budget, thereby helping people to be less dependent on the poor-quality products offered in the cheaper supermarket chains. Throughout the project, this theme was developed further towards a rather clear message: rather than being dependent on highly unsustainable structures of food production, we want to be able to sustain ourselves. Working with these themes both represented a local community voice and a critical societal voice. Through the Action Research project, residents took part in a process of sharing problems of the present and visions for the future by deliberating on how already existing community practices were echoing contemporary societal challenges and potentially pointing towards more sustainable alternatives. From numerous conversations with community participants (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12[i]), it became on the one hand clear how understanding the world in which we live in terms of Commons, and our way of being in the world in terms of commoning, was anything but unfamiliar in these citizens' everyday lives. In fact, it is hard to imagine how family life, friendship and community activities can persist, if not by building on processes of commoning that are culturally embedded in the processes of socialisation. On the other hand, however, the Action Research process also exposed the clear difficulties for urban community activities in changing the wider structural settings framing citizens' choices in modern everyday life and their social and ecological impacts. While it is true that processes of commoning are essential in the social reproduction of everyday life, it is equally clear that in the modern, socially differentiated society, local approaches to commoning have difficulties with resolving challenges that are dependent on and reproduced through higher societal structures. This is the case not least in terms of taking care of the ecological consequences of modern urban living, which has increasingly become an issue for institutionalised systems of expertise that are somewhat detached from citizens' everyday life practices. Taking into account, however, the historically increasing levels of public concern and acknowledgement of ecological and social consequences of contemporary ways of living, the question emerges of how synergies can be made between civil processes of commoning and institutionalised action for sustainability. By enabling dialogues between local residents, scientists and sustainability practitioners, the Citizen Science for Sustainability Project provided an interesting case across these levels.

COMMONING AND SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

Approaching the challenges faced in the local urban area, practitioners and academics were invited into the project to develop ideas for how research and new initiatives could make a difference. The researchers involved were rather conscious that the task was not to enter the local area, grab the resources for academic knowledge production and disappear as nothing had ever happened. The purpose was to support sustainability in the local area. The scientists contributed to the process with important insights on social and environmental issues and reflexivity on how challenges of sustainability could be addressed at various societal levels. By involving researchers responding on the challenges identified by community participants, the project brought to the table a whole range of potential new initiatives, some of which were brought into action. The issue of community gardening fostered a number of initiatives in terms of financial support (to develop the local gardening project) and institutional strategic response (collaboration with the municipality on approaches to sustainability and community engagement), as well as a range of different proposals for research and further action: critical scientific analysis (a research proposal to analyse whether local food production is environmentally sustainable), the development of applied technical solutions (ideas for education projects inviting engineering students to work with local residents in developing new applications of technologies based on needs identified by the community itself) and research for social change (Action Research proposal aiming to counter the effects of gentrification through social activities of community food growing) (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p07,8,9[i]). The examples show the various ways in which the subject of community gardening was translated into separate academic subsystems, each having distinct approaches of responding to the challenges faced in the local area. On the one hand, this highlights how various kinds of responses can be developed on the basis of issues articulated locally. The suggested initiatives are responsive to the local challenges, in the sense that they are responding on the basis of the particular opportunities provided by the academic disciplines. In terms of making the connection between urban everyday life and the wider environmental and social consequences hereof, this is of great potential. But on the other hand, the examples also showcased a gap between the clear and outspoken aspirations of researchers to further community engagement, and the actual difficulties in establishing initiatives building on new orientations in collaboration between researchers, practitioners and the local community. When evaluating the project, the scientists involved provided a very clear message on how contemporary incentive structures of academia are currently counterproductive to establishing mutual partnerships between researchers and local communities (Eames et al. 2009). First, the logic of initiating research at the university and thereafter building in dissemination makes it hard to involve the local community at an early stage in building partnerships and developing shared

goals for the research projects. Secondly, ensuring that research also delivers practical benefits for community participants is rarely seen as a direct outcome of the project, and there is often a mismatch in modes of funding available for research and what is required for facilitating effective community involvement. Third, academia does not have attractive researcher incentives, nor does it provide recognition for non-academic research outputs, such as outputs other than those published in peer-reviewed journals (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p07[i]). One of the researchers involved reflected upon this:

> All research is done in a very local context [. . .] but the main kind of output for academic research is something that is more universal, more global than particular.
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-R1[i])

"Global" in this sense does not refer to the term societal, but to the global academic community. Thus, the local dimension of the community work confronts academic research interests. A researcher comments:

> Academics, who are generally middle class and many other kinds of particular demographic indicators, living in that kind of global class and don't really [. . .] in any kind of local community [. . .] [T]he people that do the research tend to be, you know, relatively affluent, come from all sorts of different parts of the world and are recognised for having outputs again on that kind of global stage. So their accountability is in no way [. . .] in any kind of local community UK context.
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-R1[i])

The question of researchers' accountability is crucial because it relates to researchers' role in relation to commoning. The way research is organised also has epistemological consequences. One researcher notes on his own research interest:

> It's a bit different to separate out what's most important from what's most interesting [. . .] I didn't get so excited about crime, but that's not because it's no less important, it's not just such an interest for me.
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-R2[i])

Through such reflections, the blind spots of science became visible. While researchers could offer reflexive insight and knowledge on social and environmental issues, and help translate local challenges into their structural settings in the search for alternative solutions, institutional accountability seems first and foremost to be in the research community rather than the local. While most scientists building on environmental insight had strong interests in furthering sustainable lifestyles with less burden on the global

environmental commons, local residents were advocating for what sustainability might mean in their everyday life context of modern urban living. Rather than approaching these merely as conflicting interests, the question was how to make synergies between citizen and scientists perspectives for new and potentially more sustainable ways of living. A particular example from the project was a dialogue with an older resident articulating his hope for the future: to have a huge house. The idea of starting to build huge houses in a dense urban area clearly falls outside academic categories for future urban sustainability, where space and resources are highly limited. However, the researcher in the dialogue continues the conversation with the man, asking why he wants such a big house. The man starts his explanation, revealing that what appears at first sight as a material aspiration is in fact also the articulation of a social need. The researcher reflected on the example:

> I think what we need to do is to get behind what it is that those spaces are giving them [. . .] 'cause actually one guy wanted a really big house with six bedrooms. He wanted his whole family in there, so he'd have, I suppose, grandparents, parents and children. So it's not about two people having a really big house. So what that is saying is being able to keep the family together in the community [. . .] [I]t's actually taking, 'Ok, this is physically what you said you would like', but it's working out, what is it behind that you want [. . .] And actually, what people say is sometimes just shorthand for saying other things. And it's just that conversation I had about, 'Ok, why do you want six bedrooms and a house on its own?' And then he started talking about, 'Well, because with my children, my grandchildren'. And then you think, oh well, that's a different kind of . . . and it's giving people the space to develop those ideas. And in some way [the project] was such a luxury, in a way, because you had all those different meetings and people explored different ways.
>
> (Empirical research p12-R2[i])

The example highlights that in between the meanings of citizens' everyday lives and scientists' insights on the social and ecological challenges of contemporary living, there is a potential shared learning space to start imagining alternative and possibly, more sustainable ways of living.

SOCIAL LEARNING BY DOUBLING FREE SPACE

From a methodological point of view, a particular aspect of the project was that it more or less successfully helped to enable free spaces, where voices of urban unsustainability could be addressed and aspirations for alternative futures be shared. The idea of "free space" in Critical Utopian Action Research (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006) is to foster social arenas in everyday life,

where authoritarian social structures of reality power that constrict people from thinking and speaking freely are delimitated. The social and epistemological quality of establishing free spaces in everyday life Action Research is that what is normally being suppressed or marginalised by contemporary societal power structures can potentially be articulated and shared. Such issues are often socially sensitive and highly ambiguous. Free space is not something that can just be socially installed or forced through. Rather, on the contrary, whilst one-dimensional goal orientations will always limit the emergence of free space, the exclusion of formal power relations and facilitation to create a trustful social space are among the practical ways to its establishment. The concept of free space offers a specific framework for understanding why community-based approaches can actually add important insights to further sustainability: because it makes room for articulating what is perceived as unsustainable in people's everyday lives and sharing ideas about how one might like to live in a more preferable future. However, the notion of free space became useful in a dual sense: both as a free space in citizens' everyday lives, and as a free space in an academic context. In the project, the free space was, although not free from, at least less dependent on being predetermined by academic rationalities, discourses and power structures. In this sense, it was not merely a free space for the residents, but to some extent also for the researchers involved, because a different arena for deliberating on sustainability emerged. The approach that researchers and practitioners were invited, not in the traditional role of giving expert advice, but to listen and learn from the perspectives emerging from the community work, made it possible for them, to some degree, to take part in free spaces to which they normally would not have access. Understanding this learning space, I have suggested that this particular feature could be conceptualised as the creation and doubling of free space (Egmose 2015). In the project, doubling free space in many ways confronted the underlying incentive structures of academia and had a number of different implications for the meeting between citizens and scientists:

> *First*, working with local issues, was calling for hopes and aspirations in professional work. As one of the academics noted, 'I think, being engaged with real people, with real needs and desires, I think motivates you to do better work, and more timely really. You gotta get your act together if somebody is actually waiting on you. It makes it more meaningful all round.'
>
> (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-R9[i])

In this sense, the community orientation of Action Research was prompting researchers to reflect on how their insight could make a difference, not just for the scientific community, but also in meeting local challenges of unsustainability and seeking alternative solutions that could make a difference in the context of citizens' everyday lives. *Secondly*, while working

closely with community members, the researchers started to question the institutional logic of academia, which appeared counterproductive to supporting sustainability locally. Emerging from the critique of contemporary academic incentive criteria was a common theme that "*you don't want to treat people like a laboratory*" (Egmose 2015, Empirical research p12-R9;R2;R6S;R7;R9;R12[i]). This concern most basically raised the question of whether research is building on processes of enclosure of knowledge for academic knowledge production, or contributing to processes of commoning whereby scientific insight creates shared value and furthers the possibilities for more sustainable ways of living. In this perspective, sustainable knowledge consists of insights which support people in actively maintaining ecological balances between nature and society. To do so, understanding knowledge as a Commons and research as processes of commoning seems very necessary, although not in line with the identified academic incentive structures building on the enclosure of knowledge. One of the researchers reflected on this:

> It's got me thinking about the kind of research I do. [A]t least [it] makes me think, 'Wait a second, I'm doing research that is supposed to be benefiting the sustainability of cities, then actually talking to people, but in a way that I'm listening to them and trying to really take on board their ideas, and not trying to fit them into a prescribed sort of theory or notion or ideas, but really working with them.' I think it helps me more [. . .] And then just on a personal level, less professional level, it's just thinking about [. . .] how I'd wanna create a better community for where I stay.
>
> (Empirical research p12-R12).

Hence, a *third* aspect of the process was that it reflexively began to touch upon a more fundamental question among professionals: what is the meaning of (working) life? What are the relations between my current work-life practices and the hopes and aspirations I have for the world in the future? These are reflexive questions whereby personal hopes situated in our present societal context can become activated as motivations for being part of institutionalised and professional practices. To me, this was a particularly important feature of the project: by sharing human concerns, hopes and aspirations, the gap between citizens and professionals can become somewhat transcended. Although situated across layers of social differentiation and professionalised expertise, the process in this way was a reminder that in the end, we are all citizens, and that bringing in personal hopes and aspirations for what a different future might look like is the potential common ground for transcending institutional rationalities and building on shared capacities for moving towards more sustainable futures. At least, that was what started to unfold through the project: a common sense of responsibility for the world that we share.

A COMMON SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

In this chapter, I have sought to address whether a common sense of responsibility for our common living conditions as social and ecological beings can emerge from processes across civic action and institutionalised research expertise. Through a number of examples, I have been illustrating how a civic sense of responsibility for our common living conditions is a focal point in human everyday life, while citizens' initiatives taking care of these in modern societies has become somewhat de-coupled from institutional strategies, and further, how institutionalised research strategies seeking to take responsibility for social and ecological living conditions have structurally become somewhat detached from the potentials and synergies of active citizenship. On this basis, I have been addressing the question of how a common sense of responsibility and renewed approaches to action can emerge across research and civic life. The final question of this chapter considers how Action Research might be part of enabling the social emergence of such sense of responsibility. Action Research literature already provides profound reflexions on how Action Researchers can take part in processes of social change and the dilemmas faced in doing so. Is the aim of the research process to observe or take part in processes of change (Skjervheim 1996)? Is the process researcher dominated or collaboratively driven (Westlander 2006)? What ethical principals should guide the process (Brydon-Miller 2008)? The essential methodological approach of this chapter has been to build on the Critical Utopian Action Research concept of enabling free spaces for addressing present problems and imagining visions for alternative futures (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006). By the notion of doubling free space, I have sought to highlight how free spaces can emerge across the context of everyday life and institutional capacities without being predefined by either of them (Egmose 2015). The essential orientation of this way of working is to insist on addressing the basic democratic question: how do we want to live (Nielsen & Nielsen 2006)? We should not treat this as a simple, utilitarian question of maximising personal benefits, but as a starting point of acknowledging the wider social and ecological consequences of living, and, based on inherent human values and hopes for the future, start imagining how more sustainable ways of living might come into being. While working locally is the precondition for allowing citizens and communities themselves to reflect and act upon the questions brought up, local issues are always embedded in, echoing and part of determining broader historical and societal contexts. It is by understanding the societal dimensions of the particularities of everyday life actions that understanding the world in terms of Commons is possible. Commons transcend societal scales of time and space. Therefore, working with Action Research in a Commons perspective is not a question of working merely for one local community or another. Without any doubt, the world has faced, and will face, conflicting interests over issues of Commons (Harvey 2011). Resolving pressing issues of conflicting and particular

interests, however, is only one part of taking care of the Commons. Without giving attention to how Commons emerge and can be sustained continuously, conflicting perspectives hold the potential of disbanding the very notion of Commons. This is why the concept of commoning is essential: it is the epistemological foundation for Commons continuously to emerge and sustain. What I have sought to illustrate throughout this chapter is that the process of commoning is deeply dependent on a common sense of responsibility for the world that we share. On the one hand, this common sense is rooted in human everyday life, building on the social and cultural capabilities that are necessary for life to be sustained. On the other, in modern societies, it is also framed by societal structures reproduced through institutional capacities of expertise. Strengthening the sense of responsibility for our basic social and ecological living conditions at the present state of society, however, cannot be reduced to either of these. It is by building on our human sense of responsibility—across civic action and institutionalised approaches—that more sustainable futures might emerge. This, however, is a challenge, not least for action researchers themselves, who can easily find themselves reproducing academic incentive structures of the enclosure of knowledge, thus driving the knowledge economy (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005; Ostrom & Hess 2006). Therefore, the basic step for action researchers working with Action Research processes on principles of commoning is to speak out loudly—*we don't own it*—insisting that a common sense of responsibility can only emerge *through* commoning.

NOTE

1. Empirical research materials from the Citizen Science for Sustainability (SuScit) Project and subsequent participant interviews. A detailed record is provided in Egmose 2015.

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