

Title: Activist research?

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The period of effervescence of social mobilization, that we are passing through, is accompanied -most distinctively in Europe and Latin America- by the proliferation of experiences with multiple trajectories that emerge from the intersection of political action and investigation, and that we could frame as 'social activist research'. These experiences are inspired by practices like the Latin American action-participant investigation, the Italian Conricerca (co-research) and 'worker- and metropolitan survey' and/or the French institutional analysis. Are they passages towards a new form of commitment and antagonistic subjectivity?

With this contribution to the GreenPepper Information issue we would like to bring into consideration a series of elements [and invite to their exploration], that 'swarm' around what could be understood as activist research. It is far from our intention to give a closed definition, or to present what we believe is -or should be- activist research. Neither will we enter into a debate about the validity of this concept related to other concepts with a similar meaning.

Different interconnected elements relevant to the activist focused on social research:

Research **from the action** of transform social movements. Research implied by the needs, directly or indirectly expressed by the social movements and excluded sectors of the population.

Research carried out **from the own situation**, that is, from the own experience, choosing for a strategy of partiality from below.

Nomadic and **traveling** research, adapting to changes.

Research **towards the action for the critical transformation of the present reality**. Research that pursues the creation of a knowledge that is valued for its practical effectiveness in generating changes, as opposed to an objective and contemplative theoretical knowledge in the traditional academic fashion; knowledge that gives visibility to conflicts that can then be added, like another element, to social mobilization; knowledge that generates and maximizes action; a knowledge that transforms reality when generating a new reality, and whose fruits serve the process of constituting new antagonistic subjectivities. For that matter, with an explicit political commitment to the present cycles of protests.

Research springing from the relation between the **subject-investigator** (the investigator as subject) and the **subject-investigated in a composition process**.. Non-instrumentalist research; investigation without an 'object'; rather than treating the social movements like objects of investigation, they –as well as the investigator- are subjects in a process in which everybody is left

reconstituted. It is not 'about' Social Movements; rather it is from and for Social Movements but in immanence, that is, rather than locating it-self on a position already codified, it produces the terms of the situation.

This subject-investigator participates in the situations investigated, is open about his motives and opinions, and is not necessarily a person with a specialized university education. Unlike this, the traditional role of the academic-investigator, that is questioned, is that of the prudently distant, supposedly objective and individualist specialist.

Research from the **consciousness of resistance** rather than one that is merely communicative. It is not to 'give' voice to the excluded populations but to establish cooperation, with the acknowledgement of our own exclusion from the outset. It is not constituted through a separated consciousness, but makes the research one more tool in the process of confronting the system that excludes us.

Research with **value of use**.

Research as a **strategy of re-appropriation of knowledge and self-defense in front of the apparatus of academic capture**, of an institution that reproduces power relations.

In a process of **collective creation**, it is nurtured by a **spirit of experimentation**.

The reference **methodologies** that are used are **action-participation** or/and **Co-research**.

Non-disciplinary, it looks for the overcoming of the fictitious academic compartmentalization of reality. On the contrary, reality is understood as a totality that combines manifold interconnected aspects.

Research with a **glocalist** [global+local] dimension.

Research that generates **free, public, inclusive, common and nondiscriminatory knowledge** for universal use, without property, copyright or under mercantilist aims; in accessible formats and of agile diffusion. It denounces the mercantilisation and privatization of knowledge as one of the causes of social exclusion.

The research is developed like an **effective procedure**. Its development is in itself already a result.

The principles under which it is organized are: **decentralization, horizontality, autonomy and the will for coordination and cooperation**. It is either developed by subjectivities constituted through the formal and explicit objective of doing social activism research or transversally and integrated in other scopes of action of the social movements.

Questions surrounding the practices of the activist research we meet with opening a series of debates. Which is the role and what are the relations that the subjectivities of social activism investigation establish with the set of transformative social movements which they are part of? How is the knowledge generated dynamic by social movements and the activist theorizing (and in which respects is it different from the knowledge generated in the academy or other ambits)? Does the social activism research require the formation of groups with

such concrete aims or it is developed transversally, integrated in the other acting ambits of the social movements? Where have the demands come from?...

Given the relation with the academy on several point, some questions pose themselves: Is it possible and how, to make an instrumental use of the academic institutions in benefit of the social activist research? Which are the perverse effects of the academy studying social movements? Which is the role, played by academics, in the mechanisms of the power such as the re-absorption and division of the movement into physical activists and theoretical activists, or between non-violent and violent activist? Which are the resistant practices against the academy initiated by social movements? And inversely: from the position of the academivist (someone active in the social movements that, because some personal or/and collective strategy, forms part of an academic institution): is it possible and is the academivist willing to contribute to the transformation of the academy through ethically based practices? Is it possible to carry out activist research from an academic institution? Do we establish synergies with the fights against the precariedad (from precarious) at the academy?.....

These and other debates we will resume, participating in the organization of, and within the framework of the Activist Research and Social Movements International Meeting to take place in Barcelona (Ateneu Popular de Nou Barris) from the 22nd to the 25th January 2004 (www.investigaccio.org).

ANNEX: A RACEME OF EXPERIENCE AND GROUPS DEVELOPING SOCIAL ACTIVISM RESEARCH

Universite tangente <http://www.universite-tangente.fr.st>

Bureau d'études <http://bureaudetudes.free.fr/>

Transnational Institute <http://www.tni.org/>

Copenhagen Free University <http://www.copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/>

Derive Approdi <http://www.deriveapprodi.org/>

Facoltà di fuga: esperimenti di formazione autogestita

<http://www.rekombinant.org/fuga/>

Shifting Ground <http://www.shiftingground.org>

We are everywhere Radical publication <http://www.weareeverywhere.org>

Center for research on Global movement. (Iugoslavia)

Contact: zapata@sezampro.yu

Colectivos Situaciones <http://www.situaciones.org/>

Universidad Nomada <http://www.sindominio.net/unomada/>

Social research space Glocal – Infoespai www.infoespai.org

Arxiu Arran <http://www.arran.org>

Eco-concern <http://www.pangea.org/ecoconcern>

Universidad de las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo www.madres.org

INURA (International network for Urban Research and Action)
<http://www.inura.org>

Confluence spaces:

Activism research and social movements international meeting
www.investigaccio.org

European education forum www.eef2003.org

Mobilised Investigation: www.manifestor.org/mi

Annex:

Activist Research and Social Movements International Meeting

Barcelona (Ateneu Popular Nou Barris) :: 22 – 25 January 2004
www.investigaccio.org

The objective of this meeting is to establish a space of encounter, exchange, self-formation and debate from the “social movements” (SM) in relation to activist research/investigation.

We are critical of academic research treats SMs like a mere “object” of study to be known, and the from disciplinary distinctions. We invite all of those people and collectives that are interested in (re)creating, (re)thinking, (re)inventing and (re)appropriating of these knowledges and of the formation from the focus on “activist research/investigation” to participate.

Who is organising these workshops?

This initiative comes from a group of people who do research from/of SM, some from autonomous/self-run spaces and others who work in closer relationship to academic institutions, but that try to overcome the narrow marks of academicism. The logistical work will be done mostly by people who live in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, an Organisational open assembly/committee has been put together; but we do not want that the workshops be designed solely by this organisational committee.

What and How

We want to fill the content of the conference according to the interests of the participants, and in order to do that we will begin an on-line collective debate (both on the listservs and on the interactive website). In principle, we would like to offer spaces in which groups can confront/meet, like tables of debates and “workshops”, as well as things like plenaries where we can share information, learning collectively all together. We believe that in order to take the most advantage of the time we have, we should omit grand presentations and dedicate ourselves directly to confrontations and/discussions.

Contributions, in text form, can be realised by connecting to that has self produced material that can serve as the basis for the debates.

There will be no official language for the meeting, whereas we will have a system

of simultaneous translation-interpretation using a radio circuit.

Financing

These meetings are usually autonomous/self-organised, and for this reason we are trying to produce the least expenditures as possible. We are debating the eventuality of having to put a small minimum inscription fee (to cover primarily the costs of food and materials).

We are also looking to have a small amount for basic expenses for the workshops as well as for providing small travel scholarships to those who want to come but cannot afford to.

Finally, we want to remind you how important it is that we have collaboration in the entire process of defining the meetings. Visit our website, get in contact with us, inform individuals and collectives that would be interested and get involved in what you can.

We will see each other in January!