# Bridging between Action Research Communities: A Pathway to Connectivity

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**Abstract**

The dialogic essence of Action Research (AR) poses a challenge of scope when attempting to achieve large-scale change. One way of addressing said challenge is through connectivity, an approach to the external validity of action research that focuses on the workability of new knowledge in other contexts. In this paper we propose bridging between different action research (AR) communities as a pathway to connectivity. We identify the conditions that facilitate connectivity in bridging spaces between different AR communities, and show that change can ripple beyond the group where AR takes place, maintaining its contextual nature. Our research method is comparative case studies based on semi-structured interviews with two AR communities: one in Europe and the other in Latin America.

**Keywords**: action research, connectivity, validity, bridging, action research communities

**Los espacios de encuentro entre diferentes comunidades de investigación acción pueden ser un camino hacia la conectividad**

**Resumen**

La naturaleza dialógica de la Investigación Acción (IA) supone un desafío cuando se trata de lograr un cambio a gran escala. Una forma de abordar dicho desafío es a través de la conectividad, un enfoque de la validez externa de la IA orientado a la viabilidad, en la práctica, de conocimiento nuevo en otros contextos. En este documento proponemos el concepto de espacio de encuentro entre diferentes comunidades de IA como un camino hacia la conectividad. Identificamos las condiciones que facilitan la conectividad en dichos espacios de encuentro entre diferentes comunidades de IA y mostramos que el cambio puede extenderse más allá del grupo donde tiene lugar el proceso de IA, manteniendo su naturaleza contextual. Nuestro método de investigación consiste en estudios de caso comparativos basados en entrevistas semiestructuradas a dos comunidades de IA: una en Europa y la otra en América Latina.

**Palabras clave**: investigación acción, conectividad, validez, espacio de encuentro, comunidades de investigación acción

# 1.    Introduction

In the current era of Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 lies an opportunity for transformative change that calls for relational, collaborative learning processes with experiments to provoke future learning (Bradbury, H., Waddell, S., O'Brien, K., Apgar, M., Teehankee, B., & Fazey, I., 2019). Indeed, action research is well placed to contribute to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. First, because the aim of action research is not to examine reality, but to change it (Nicholas & Hathcoat, 2014) and, second, because action research has an intrinsic transformational pedagogical dimension (Streck, 2014).

However, in order to play a transformative role at a wider scale, action research faces a challenge of scope. Said challenge is directly linked to its dialogical essence which takes place in small groups. The work carried out by Gustavsen (1992; 1996; 2003; 2014) on working life in Scandinavia and by Burns (2007; 2014) who proposes learning architectures able to involve many people in interlocking inquiry processes, are examples of approaches that try to address this challenge.

In this paper we approach the issue from a different perspective. We start with the concept of connectivity, proposed by Karlsen & Larrea (2014) as a measure of external validity of action research. Through connectivity, researchers engage with researchers and practitioners who did not participate in the context of application where the knowledge was created, in order to enhance the workability of said knowledge in other contexts. It therefore extends the learning process beyond the group in which the action research process took place.

Specifically, we propose bridging between different AR communities as a pathway to connectivity. We define bridging as a dialogue that takes place in spaces that bring together different AR communities, where connectivity can occur. We argue however, that connectivity does not occur automatically, but is dependent on several conditions. Our research question is therefore: What conditions facilitate connectivity in bridging between different AR communities?

In order to identify what those conditions are, we analyse the bridging spaces that exist between the AR communities working in two different research institutes: Orkestra-Basque Country (Spain) and Praxis-Rafaela (Argentina). In so doing, we illustrate how connectivity as a measure of external validity occurs in practice, and how it can help action research to play a transformative role at a wider scale.

The paper is divided into 6 sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents a review of the discussion in the literature on validity and connectivity in AR. The third section explains the research method followed; namely comparative case studies based on semi-structured interviews with the two different AR communities that share bridging spaces. The fourth section describes the cases and their different bridging spaces. The fifth section discusses the case, and identifies the conditions that facilitate connectivity in bridging spaces. The sixth section concludes the paper with final reflections.