

## A practitioner's journey of change: Interview with Leon Staines

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### **Danilo and Miren:**

Thank you, Leon, for this interview in *International Journal of Action Research (IJAR)*. We met you in 2020, in the IJAR symposium. You were a PhD student struggling with action research in your dissertation. You have recently finished it successfully, congratulations!

As an introduction to the interview, could you give the reader a perspective of your trajectory?

### **Leon:**

I graduated as an architect in 2007. After working for a couple of years, I decided to pursue a master's degree in the history of architecture at the University of Buenos Aires, where I lived for two years. Upon returning, I initially intended to focus on the historical aspect of architecture. However, having lived in a city with excellent public spaces and a good transportation system for two years, I became increasingly interested in the functional aspect of cities. I began delving deeper into these topics, and a year later, I decided to pursue a second master's degree in urban planning in Mexico. This was aimed at gaining more insights into how cities could be modified to create more human-centric environments with healthier atmospheres. I excelled in my master's program, and in the second semester, I took a class by the then Director of the Urban Planning Office of Monterrey, who invited me to join his team.

As an urban planner, I had the opportunity to work on projects related to traffic calming, sidewalk expansion, and overall improvement of public spaces. Professionally, it was a period of significant growth. However, I noticed that there was resistance from some segments of the population when future projects were announced. For a while, I could not understand why more trees and better public spaces could be met with objections. I realized that while the intentions behind these projects were good, there was a deep distrust of authorities and a lack of effective communication about the projects (and the processes involved). Residents did not see them as positive changes; instead, these initiatives were perceived as impositions.

This realization led me to focus on integrating citizen participation in decision-making processes. As a result, I decided to pursue a PhD at the University of Texas in Austin. My goal was not only to make cities more sustainable and inclusive but also to ensure that this transformation was guided by the collective imagination of the community.

### **Danilo and Miren:**

You come from the field of architecture and urbanism. What is your experience of action research in this field?