

To help participants prepare for the assembly, a call also was sent out globally to regional networks of action researchers encouraging these networks to organize workshops in the months prior to the June 2017 assembly around the theme of reconciling epistemological, ideological and political differences in the interest of a sustainable and socially just world (Wood, McAteer, & Whitehead, 2019). This step was taken to honor the spirit and the process of the organizing for the 1997 *World Congress of Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space, and Time*, which had been held in Cartagena, Colombia. Global Assembly organizers wished to demonstrate continuity and solidarity with the trajectory of knowledge democratization established by the 1977 *First World Symposium on Participatory Action Research*, also held in Cartagena, and the World Congress held 20 years later. In light of Fals Borda's (1998) powerful compilation and analysis of what had been presented in Cartagena in 1997, the 2017 organizers began their work with a sense of preparing respectfully for another "solemn act of reaffirmation" (Fals Borda, 1998, xii) in line with the 1977 and 1997 gatherings. Preparatory workshops for the 1997 Congress were held in Colombia and 14 other countries (Fals Borda, 1998). For the 2017 Cartagena gathering, 12 participatory workshops were convened in ten countries, including Colombia, Denmark, Ireland, Mexico, Mongolia, South Africa, Spain, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition, two virtual international workshops were organized. Reports from all of these events were posted on the knowledgedemocracy.org website (Seeley, McAteer, Sánchez, & Kenfield, 2019).

The Global Assembly was held on June 16, 2017 at the Cartagena de Indias Convention Center in Cartagena, Colombia. The event was attended by over 300 people from throughout the Americas and around the world (Seeley, McAteer, Sánchez, & Kenfield, 2019). To date, two publications have examined the Assembly, with one presenting an analysis of what took place in one phase of organizing the event (Wood, McAteer, & Whitehead, 2019) and a second exploring participants' experiences of the day itself (Seeley et al., 2019). A third article by one of the Assembly planners provides an important overview of critical questions involving participatory action research and the challenges of knowledge democracy (Stern, 2019). A fourth article (Hong & Rowell, 2019), inspired by ARNA's orientation towards knowledge mobilization and knowledge democracy, discussed building knowledge democracies in education in the U.S. All four articles were included in a two-part Special Issue on Knowledge Democracy published by the international journal, *Educational Action Research*.



Since the event, ARNA leadership has continued to reflect on the experience of the 1st Assembly, to discuss next steps, and to organize social experiments in knowledge democratization. In the spring of 2019, ARNA embarked on a strategic planning process for 2020-2025, with approval of a set of four Strategic Priorities coming in September. Strategic Priority #1 calls for developing a Knowledge Democracy Initiative that incorporates knowledge mobilization of works based on action research and participatory action research and explores democratized knowledge production and dissemination as a basis for inclusive and humanistic public discourse and public policy. The knowledgedemocracy.org website, which was originally created as a part of the organizing of the Global Assembly, is now the platform for the ARNA Knowledge Democracy Initiative.

Philosophic Considerations

Action research itself is extremely diverse, both thematically and methodologically. Its networks and communities are engaged in committed work building social solidarities, emancipatory and adult education, valuing diverse experiences through participatory knowledge approaches, empowerment in policy / advocacy, transforming gender power, making new knowledges, and grassroots transformations visible, networking for change, and forging post-colonial / post-neoliberal development pathways, to name just a few themes! It might be said that the boundaries for action research are fuzzy rather than hard.

The global assembly on knowledge democracy provided an opportunity to open to a different fuzzy boundary. This did not challenge the delineations people have made within action research and participatory research communities: it did not challenge the identity of action research.. It was an invitation to see AR approaches within a new context, the one outlined by Santos and others in the knowledge democracy space. That is to say that the AR community is not the only one working on knowledge democracy; there are others, including the World Social Forum, the Peer to Peer movement, and the Commons movement, to name a few.

Action researchers at the global assembly were not asked to 'let go' of their identity within the global action research community, but simply to play in a different space that is part of a different context of social and global transformation. There could be, over time, rich connections between the AR communities and others in the knowledge democracy space that will enrich many sides in the work of transforming knowledge-power. These connections reflect what Orlando Fals Borda (1998) addressed as "participatory convergence" at the 1997 World Conference for Participatory Convergence in Knowledge, Space and Time.

Jose Ramos, one of the 2017 global assembly organizers, views the immense challenges of the present as a call for fostering "a whole-scale social reorientation, whereby taking response-ability for our futures at personal, organizational, and planetary scales becomes commonplace" (2017, p. 839). The scale and scope of the needed reorientation goes far beyond narrow bands of expertise. Action research at all levels and in all countries and cultures has a role in nurturing and sustaining the integration of knowledge democracy with the production and dissemination of knowledge (Hong & Rowell, 2019). For Ramos, Knowledge Democracy is to be built on a proliferation of epistemologically diverse inquiries into possible futures in a process "that leads to actions/experiments that drive further learning and knowledge" (p. 828). From the perspective of the present moment, the post-pandemic world may foster massive social change initiatives and bold social experiments, with continuous learning to hold initiator-activists accountable and to guide ongoing strengthening of actions, experiments, and new policies by means of the data and analysis from the

cyclical processes of action research and participatory action research.

A little more than two months before he passed away, Paulo Friere wrote a letter to the organizers of the 1997 Cartagena gathering. He had been invited to speak and was writing to inform the organizers that his ill health would not allow for travel to the Cartagena Congress. In a poignant concluding passage in his letter, Freire asserted that “above all we must fight against the power of the dominant neoliberal ideology that keeps on offending and attacking the human nature while reproducing itself socially and historically, threatening dreams, utopias, and hopes” (cited in Fals Borda, 1998, xvii). Freire’s legacy for establishing alternative means of social reproduction built on utilizing education to uplift those in the margins of society through respecting their hopes and dreams is well established. His ideas are repeatedly referenced in the literature of action research. For example, his ideas are referenced throughout chapters of the *Palgrave International Handbook of Action Research* (2017). Ledwith (2017) discusses Freire’s concepts of *denunciation* and *annunciation* as an essential element in both critiquing the status quo while also opening space to transform the present into a better future (p. 51). For Ledwith, Freire’s ideas provided crucial insights into the power of knowledge and its production and control that led her to adopt participatory action research as “a liberating praxis” in line with what she sees as the true values of community development. Thiollent and Colette (2017) assert that Freire’s work in Latin America was crucial to the spread of participatory research in “the field of popular education, in awareness-building initiatives and liberation pedagogy” (p. 161) among other contexts.

Practical Considerations

From a practical point of view, the pandemic poses challenges and opportunities for the work of knowledge democracy. We outline some of the practical considerations that have guided ARNA’s knowledge democracy efforts in these crazy times in the hope that they might generate further dialogue and contribute to the launch of new initiatives.

- Building social solidarities in a time of social distancing and isolation. ARNA’s Knowledge Democracy Initiative team launched a small-scale photovoice project in March 2020. The aim of the project was to provide “a virtual, participatory photovoice approach to gathering photographic and text-based insights from around the world of how people are experiencing and seeing solidarity every day” (<https://knowledgedemocracy.org/projects-and-events/arna-social-solidarity-project/>). The project is further discussed by Rowell (2020).
- A space is being prepared for knowledgedemocracy.org through which ongoing dialogues will take place in a virtual circle of critique and the sharing of creative solutions to the global epistemic crisis (Ramos, 2020) and the links between this crisis and the pandemic. A first step was taken on August 11, with the convening of an ARNA webinar on “Knowledge Democratization in a Global Crisis.” This two-hour event saw 21 participants from six countries gathered to share thoughts on the role of action research in knowledge democratization and vice versa *in this historical moment* (COVID-19 and focus on racial justice), how university students and faculty, scholar-activists, and engaged citizens can work together *in this moment* to overcome knowledge monopolies blocking community-generated creative solutions to social problems, and concrete steps ARNA and the Knowledge Democracy Initiative might take to realize a vision of knowledge democratization *in this moment* and beyond? Planning is now underway for additional dialogues. All of the material associated with these dialogues will be linked with the new virtual community center to be established on knowledgedemocracy.org
- The work plan for the coming months also includes seeking partners for organizing A future project involving community-based and school-based social experiments in strengthening civic literacy and competency. The experiments may involve both web-based and in-person interactions building on the work of Arthur Lupia (see <https://www.arthurlupia.com/civic-competence>) and others. The efforts here will examine thinking and acting beyond the present “Disimagination Machine” (Giroux, 2014) of American civic life and rebuilding social capacity for imagining a better, more equitable and socially just future. Initiatives are needed that address restoring and nurturing progressive social imagination among youth and adults. How can youth and adults be encouraged to fully embrace the historical memory associated with the long-standing traumas of racism and the “big lie” (Glaude, 2020) of American history while being in a sense inoculated against the virus of disbelief, cynicism and hatred? Such a project can be built on the recognition that efforts are needed to practice knowledge democratization in the context of small group relations and social innovation and experimentation rooted in the creation of dialogic spaces, both actual and virtual.

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