

(Participatory) Action Research: Struggling between the 'social realm' and the 'political realm'

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In her search for understanding evildoing, German thinker Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) reflects on the things we human beings normally *do*. Besides labor and work, Arendt (1998) identifies action as a third type of activity, which is unique in so far as it goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things. Though labor, work and action are based on *natality* since they preserve the world for the newcomers, it is action that is most closely connected to *natality* since every time a newcomer acts, he or she makes a new beginning from such an action. Because of this, action is the political activity *par excellence*. However, for Arendt, the political realm, and action itself, is permanently challenged by the social realm.

This paper provides an account of several versions of the origins of participatory action research in relation to what has been considered its main distinctive feature: its connection to the political realm. After addressing a current problematic situation with the definition of this type of research in the literature, which leads to the use of parentheses in the acronym (P)AR, it is argued that the advance in understanding 'the political' of (P)AR has been undermined by an overwhelming concern about 'the social', as well as the social dimension of (P)AR itself. This paper draws on my PhD thesis entitled *On New Beginnings: Natality and (Participatory) Action Research in Higher Education*.

Key words: participatory action research, action research, Arendt, the political realm, the social realm

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