

Action research:  
mapping the nexus of research and political action

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Abstract

This paper aims to capture the richness and diversity of action research on the global justice movement. It starts by proposing a typology of five tendencies (participative-collective method; producing alternative content; strategic thinking for political processes; building relationships and networking connections; and opening knowledge). It goes on to present clusters of different experiences, illustrated by examples. Having provided an orientation map of action research on the global justice movement, the author concludes by presenting what in her view should characterize action research. The paper is based on participant observation, a review of the literature and personal experience.

I. Introduction

The mobilization cycle of the global justice movement has been accompanied by a proliferation of new initiatives and practices with multiple trajectories that can be located in the intersection between investigation and political action.

Within the framework of this paper I refer to it as action research. However, the term action research is not the only term referring to this nexus between research and political action. Furthermore, there is not an established concept for defining it. There is a “network” of concepts that links terms like activist research, participatory action research, *con-ricerca*, memory, reporting, systematizing and investigation, among others.

It could be argued that research is always action research and that there is no such thing as apolitical and / or neutral research. Furthermore, action research guided by a neoliberal agenda is not a minority tendency today. But in this paper I use “action research” to refer to research guided by a progressive and emancipatory approach and linked to a transformative

action in the framework of the global justice movement.

The intersection, and interaction, between political action and investigation is a very broad field without clear boundaries or points of reference, and one that easily expands. There is an inspiration effect that stimulates reflection on existing investigative practices and gives rise to new research initiatives. Looking back to previous inspirations, the main pillars are the method of the “inquiry” and co-research in the Italian “operaist” tradition, women's consciousness-raising groups and feminist epistemology, institutional analysis, and finally the Latin American tradition of participatory action research (Malo, 2004).

Within action research we find different traditions and trajectories that make up a constellation with common points, but also points of contact and oppositions.

The goal of this paper is to provide those interested in action research with a map to make sense of the variety of different approaches. I start by distinguishing five tendencies to facilitate mapping of the action research field. The five types of action research tendencies are: i) being based on a participative-collective method; ii) producing alternative content; iii) developing strategic thinking for political processes; iv) a desire to change the way in which knowledge is managed and owned; v) and, lastly, building relationships and networking connections. I also present a typology of approaches and clusters of experiences providing examples for each type. Finally, I conclude by presenting what for me are the characteristic elements of action research.

The methodology behind this work is based on participant observation of various experiences of action research, conversations with practitioners and a review of the literature and documents produced by movement groups. This paper is also the result of my personal experience. It is based on my personal experience in action research initiatives developed in the frame of social movement organising. Since 2001 I have participated in several efforts at applying research to social movement goals and in conferences and meetings addressing these area at a Catalan and a European level. It is also based on my personal experience in developing research in European and North American academic institutions. Since 2006, I am trying to give an action research orientation to a PhD project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I built the Econsensus tool in 2001 and founded Militant Investigation Network in 2002. In 2003 I founded the Glocal activist research working group and published the “Guide for social transformation in Catalonia 2003”

## II. A map of action research: five tendencies

Within the rich field of action research, I propose to distinguish five distinctive tendencies. Some types of experiences put particular attention on being based on a participative-collective method; others are focussed on producing alternative content; others develop strategic thinking for broad political processes; other are distinctive because of their attempts to build relationships and networking connections; and, lastly, others have a strong intention to change the politics of knowledge, that is the way in which knowledge is managed.

i) Participative-collective method: These experiences are characterized by being based on participative and collective oriented process. They are generally associated with specific subjects or goals.

ii) Producing alternative content: This orientation is focused on providing arguments and data related to the implementation of an alternative or to developing a critique of the status quo. It focusses on the production of content more than on transforming the way the knowledge is produced. It is thus action research in relation to the contents produced rather than with regards to how the information is generated and the methods used in doing so.

iii) Developing strategic thinking for broad political processes: This orientation is based on the goal of providing reflections and analysis concerning political strategy in broad political processes. It is not associated with a particular target or group but with movements as a whole.

Such research generally addresses questions on “deciding what to do in common” and “who we are”.

iv) Building relationships and networking connections: This orientation here is focused on

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and edited the Catalan directory of collectives ([www.movements.info](http://www.movements.info)). I co-organised, with Collective Investigació, the first international meeting of activist research and social movements in Barcelona (January 2004; [www.investigaccio.org](http://www.investigaccio.org)) and coordinated the publication of Recerca activista i moviments socials (2005 Ed. El Viejo Topo).

I founded the Euromovements techno-political network ([www.euromovements.info](http://www.euromovements.info)), the Social Forums Memory Project and systematized working group (2005-2007) and the Networked Politics collaborative research project ([www.networked-politics.info](http://www.networked-politics.info)); and organised seminars and workshops on action research at various European and World Social Fora.

I began social movements research at the Institut of Governance and Public Policies (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona). I am currently doing a PhD on the governance of online communities at the European University Institute and am a visiting researcher at the School of Information at UC Berkeley.

creating dialogue and connections between diverse subjects and knowledge trajectories. It is based on finding commonalities to support each other and on developing transthematic frames and solidarity.

v) Opening knowledge: These are experiences that start from a critique of pro-property knowledge management logics such as restrictive intellectual property and copyright. They are engaged in developing alternatives that favour creativity, accessibility and re-use.

Apart from these five different tendencies, where the research is developed from is also a distinctive aspect. There is a consciousness of a border between research done inside academia and that done outside academia.<sup>2</sup>

These five tendencies must not be considered as being necessarily in opposition to each other. Most experiences of action research discussed here are based on a combination of these five elements: Action research experiences tend to follow a participative method; to develop strategic thinking and produce alternative contents; to use open licences; and to contribute to building relationships as a result. These five tendencies refer to particular ways of combining all these aspects, putting a special emphasis on one or other of them.

### III. Clusters of experiences

Having outlined these five tendencies in action research, in this section I will list some different experiences of action research within the global justice movement. This listing is far from being comprehensive, but I hope it is useful in order to convey the richness of the field.

List of action research experiences:

- i) Co-research tradition and “consulta” method
- ii) Participatory action research for local community building and space design
- iii) Research critiquing and monitoring existing institutions and research on alternatives
- iv) Action-oriented training and empowerment

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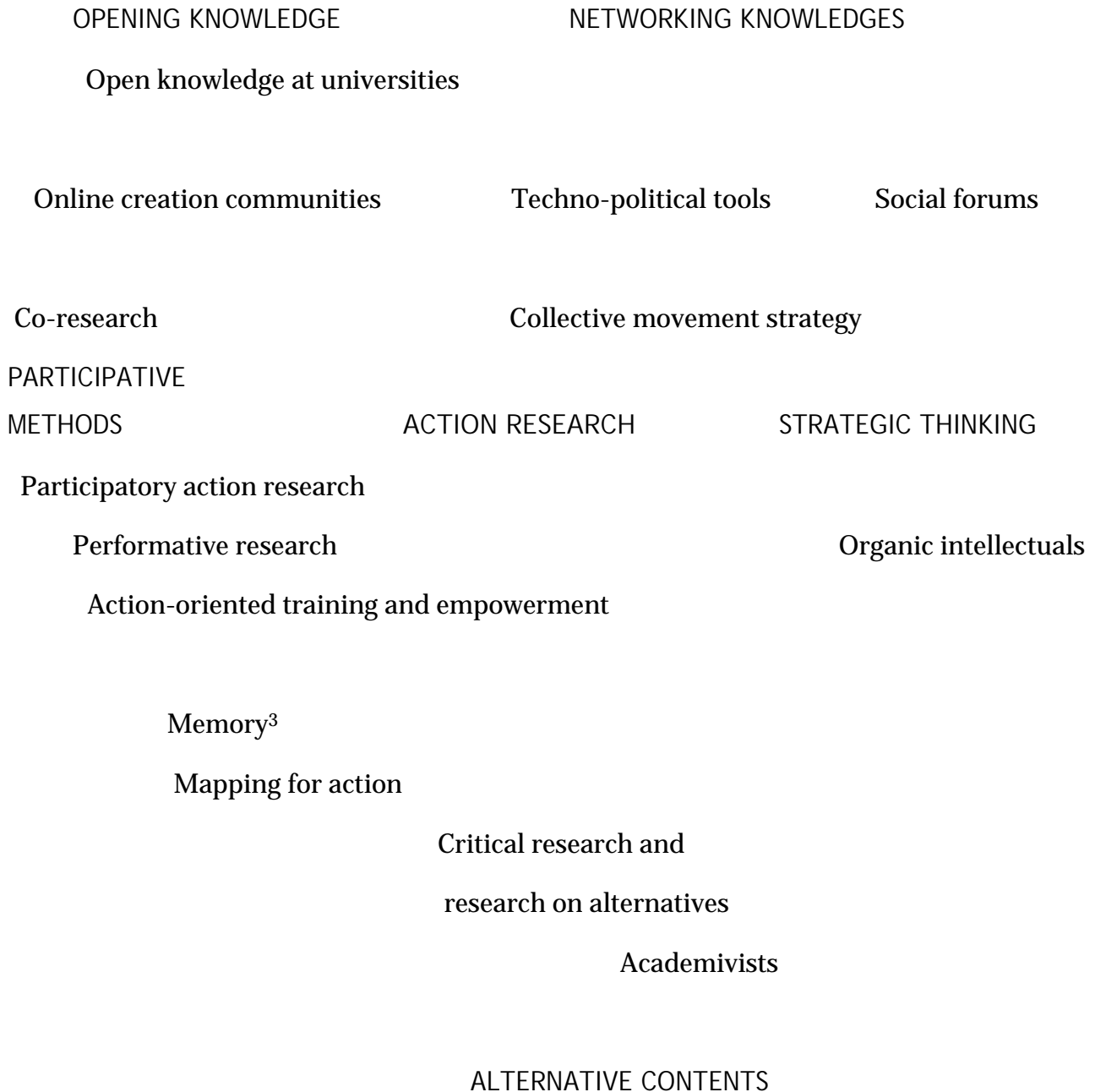
<sup>2</sup> A comparison of academic and activist theorizing can be found in Barker and Cox (2001).

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- v) Action research and art: performative research
- vi) Hubs of reflection and publications on movement strategy and organizational logics
- vii) Social Fora and the epistemology of the encounter of knowledges
- viii) Mapping for action
- ix) Memory: movement archiving and documentation
- x) Online creation communities: peer-to-peer production model
- xi) Techno-political tools: systematizing information for the creation of (networking) tools
- xii) Organic intellectuals' contributions to social movements
- xiii) Academivism: activists researching social movements from an academic institution
- xiv) Another academia is possible: actions for change in academia

In the following map, each cluster is situated according to their closeness to the five tendencies presented in the previous section. The goal of this map is to provide a simple orienting picture of action research around the global justice movement.

Map I: Action research. Distribution of types of experiences by orientations



i) Co-research tradition and “consulta” method

This approach is based on collectives that start a process of self-reflection on their identity in

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<sup>3</sup> Memory is also connected to opening knowledge orientation.

order to consider what they have in common, which is their situation, their own practices and alliances. At its base is the building of new subjectivities of transformation.

In some occasions there is an “external” affinity group that facilitates that self-reflection. This is the case for example of the Argentinian Colectivo Situaciones interventions in piquetero groups ([www.situaciones.org](http://www.situaciones.org)).

This self-reflection discussion is a common practice in social centre assemblies, such as the Roman ETC ([www.escatelier.net](http://www.escatelier.net)), although it is not necessarily being developed systematically.

The experience of the Zapatista Consulta and the Zapatista slogan “preguntar caminando” (“walking, asking questions”) is a methodological reference to this approach. Following this inspiration, some initiatives use surveys, interviews and discussion groups as an opportunity to talk to others and with themselves, to break down distances in the fragmented social space, and to search for common notions that describe personal reality and seeking forms of resistance and cooperation (Malo, 2004). Some examples of collectives with this approach are the Italian magazine *Deriva Approdi* ([www.deriveapprodi.org](http://www.deriveapprodi.org)) and *Posse* ([www.posseweb.net](http://www.posseweb.net)), and the Madrid-based *Precarias a la Deriva's* co-investigación on women’s precarity ([www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm](http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm))

## ii) Participatory action research for local community building and space design

In this case the methodology of action research is used in order to direct community interventions around the provision or coverage of social needs or taking concrete collective decisions. In the USA, there is a tradition of community building that incorporates a systematic process of reflection in order to define community needs, problems and resources; see for example the University of the Poor ([www.universityofthepoor.org](http://www.universityofthepoor.org)). Municipalities in Europe and Latin America that promote participative democracy also adopt similar methodologies, as is also the case of cooperative intervention in third countries within solidarity movements.

It is also applied outside of local community environments and within international processes. This is the case of the World Social Forum's consultation process. The Social

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Forum Consulta is applied to allow decisions on the main themes of the programme to be made in a participatory way.

iii) Research critiquing and monitoring institutions and research on alternatives

These approaches are not necessarily characterised by the methodology used or who developed it and why, but by the contents of the research.

Research critiquing and monitoring institutions refers to research efforts aimed at documenting and strengthening the movement's criticisms and critiques. Examples include the research developed by the Corporate European Observatory (CEO) ([www.corporateurope.org](http://www.corporateurope.org)) on the lobby system in European Union policies; the anti-GMO campaigns documented by ASEED ([www.aseed.net](http://www.aseed.net)); Statewatch's monitoring of political institutions ([www.statewatch.org](http://www.statewatch.org)); the Center for Research on Globalization ([www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca)) or research on the media by Source Watch in the USA ([www.sourcewatch.org](http://www.sourcewatch.org)).

By contrast, research on alternatives is focused on developing alternative solutions, such as research on Basic Income ([www.redrentabasica.org](http://www.redrentabasica.org)); the Centre Tricontinental's research on alternatives from the South ([www.cetri.be](http://www.cetri.be)); INURA, a network of people involved in action and research in localities and cities ([www.inura.org](http://www.inura.org)), or the Permaculture Network ([www.permaculture.org](http://www.permaculture.org)).

In some cases, critical research and the research on alternatives work in parallel. This is the case of the Indian center Navdanya (<http://www.navdanya.org>) which does research on GMO consequences at the same time as developing organic farming.

iv) Action-oriented training and empowerment

There are several cases of educational “institutions” created specifically to provide skills and training on social movements issues. These experiences build on the critical pedagogy put forward by Paulo Freire as a response to the traditional formal models of education where the “teacher” stands at the front and “imparts” information to “students” that are passive recipients (Freire, 1996). This is the case, for example, of the Universidad Madres de la Plaza



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de Mayo ([www.madres.org/Universidad.htm](http://www.madres.org/Universidad.htm)) or the Escuela Florestan Fernández linked to the Movement of People Without Land (Movimento Sem Terra).

v) Action Research and art: Performative research

This type of approach is characterised by developing research through artistic channels of expression. This is the case of Beehive Collective, whose mission is “To cross-pollinate the grassroots, by creating collaborative, anti-copyright images that can be used as effective educational and organizing tools for the public area” ([www.beehivecollective.org](http://www.beehivecollective.org)).

vi) Hubs of reflection and publications on movement strategy and organizational logics

Some collectives adopt a role of creating opportunities and developing critical analysis to shed light on the contradictions of processes and movement organization. This is the case for example of the Turbulence Collective , who make calls for reflection on key questions and publish the results in a magazine ([www.turbulence.org](http://www.turbulence.org)); of Networked Politics, the node for collaborating on researching new forms of political organization ([www.networked-politics.info](http://www.networked-politics.info)); or of the Team Colors collective in USA engaged in militant research to provide "strategic analysis for intervention in everyday life" (<http://teamcolors.blogspot.com>) .

Other actors important in spreading movement knowledge are the movements' publishers, such as El Viejo Topo ([www.elviejotopo.com](http://www.elviejotopo.com)) or AK Press ([www.akpress.org](http://www.akpress.org)).

vii) Social Fora and the epistemology of the encounter of knowledges

Social Fora, or the spaces for cross-movement dialogue, are the meeting points of different trajectories of knowledges, such as feminist theory, and environmental or cultural studies. This spaces are key in generating knowledge for dialogue.

In Boaventura do Sousa Santos words, “The World Social Forum (WSF) symbolizes the struggle against the monoculture of knowledge in the name of ecology of knowledges within which both scientific and lay knowledge can coexist”. The epistemology underlying the WSF is opposite to the idea of a general theory, in Santos’ point of view. “The WSF undermines the

idea that the world is an exhaustible totality, as it holds many totalities, all of them partial”.

The basic premise of the ecology of knowledges is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice (Santos, 2004). In the meeting place of different knowledges, key elements are a lack of hierarchy among the different knowledges and the building of translations. In this regard, Santos defines translation as “the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world, both available and possible, without jeopardizing their identity and autonomy, without, in other words, reducing them to homogeneous entities” (Santos, 2005). In the practice of the movements, the work of translation concerns both knowledges and actions.

The translation of knowledges consists of interpretative work between two or more cultures to identify similar concerns or aspirations among them and the different responses they provide for them. The second type of translation work is the translation of actions. It is undertaken among social practices and their agents. “All social practices imply knowledge, and as such they are also knowledge practices. When dealing with practices, however, the work of translation focuses specifically on mutual intelligibility among forms of organization and objectives and styles of action or types of struggle” (Santos, 2005).

#### viii) Mapping for action

An innovative line of research is the construction of cartographic visual maps. It is based on creating collective understanding of the complexity of new territories and highlighting relationships. Some examples are the maps of Bureau d'Études and the Université Tangente ([utangente.free.fr](http://utangente.free.fr)) showing multinational networks; the map against / about the Forum of the cultures of Barcelona ([www.sindominio.net/mapas](http://www.sindominio.net/mapas)); or the map of conflicts in metropolitan territory of Rome done by Transform! Italia ([www.transform.it](http://www.transform.it)).

#### ix) Memory: Movement archiving and documentation

Three key questions fall under this approach. First, the memory of the processes built by the actors themselves and not by external force. That is, the movements engage in building their own memory. Second, reporting on events to spread information on what happened and to

make them accessible to people who were not involved at the time. Third, preserving what happens for the future and for the accumulation of debates and conclusions, allowing continuity in the process. Memory is based on applying archiving and documenting techniques. In support of this memory building, and specially in developing it in a collective way, new information technologies have played an important role.

Some examples of this approach are the archives of reports and minutes of the Social Forums such as the Memory of the second European Social Forum at Paris 2003 ([www2.fse-esf.org](http://www2.fse-esf.org)); the Chronos archive of mobilizations ([www.euromovements.info/chronosweb](http://www.euromovements.info/chronosweb)); the E-library on social transformation ([www.openlibrary.info](http://www.openlibrary.info)) which includes an archive of 700 articles on global justice movement related issues; the project to write the movements' story of Seattle mobilization against the World Trade Organization in 1999 (<http://www.realbattleinseattle.org>) or the People's Global Action's Global Archive ([www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/en](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/en)).

x) Online creation communities: Peer-to-peer production models

An online creation community could be defined as a “loosely” collective action performed by individuals that, cooperate, communicate and interact, mainly via a platform on the Internet, with the common goal of knowledge-making (Fuster Morell, 2007).

Online creation communities are interesting examples not necessarily for their contents but for their organizational form and methodology, highlighting principles of cooperation and participation of large groups and the accessibility of knowledge.

Online creation communities are based on what Benkler defines as commons-frame peer production (Benkler, 2006). This term describe a new model of economic production in which the creative energy of large numbers of people is coordinated (usually with the aid of the Internet) into large, meaningful projects, mostly without traditional hierarchical organization or financial compensation.

The first examples of online creation communities are development communities, that is communities developed around free software programming, such as the communities around Apache, Linus, Debian or Drupal. The emergence of development communities constituted an

empowering and inspiring experience in terms of a collaborative frame of production and in terms of a “copyleft” knowledge management system that favours creativity and re-use. They are based on a decentralised community of passionate “hackers” collaborating to write the code, and leaving it open to allow it to be re-used and further developed.

The new technologies of information allow very rich processes for building collaborative working tools. A particularly good case is Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)). Wikipedia is a Web-based, multi-lingual, "copyleft" encyclopedia designed to be read and changed by anyone. It is collaboratively edited and maintained by thousands of users via wiki software. The open editing process has led to Wikipedia becoming the world's largest encyclopedia. Vandalism is a recognized problem, though much of it is caught and amended by users who monitor the recent changes. Critics claim that Wikipedia contains much inaccurate information and can never be as authoritative as a traditional encyclopedia. Nevertheless, Wikipedia is one of the most used reference sites on the World Wide Web and has been widely endorsed.

xi) Techno-political tools: Systematising information for the creation of (networking) tools

Some techno-political tools aim to generate an online creation community. Nevertheless, while online creation communities refer to a specific goal resulting from interactions online, techno-political tools are generally associated with broader processes and with processes whose offline dimension is more important than the online interaction that takes place through the tool.

Techno-political tools are defined by two key ideas. Firstly, they put an emphasis on a collaborative and open environment. Secondly, they are based on systematizing the information and knowledge generated in mobilization processes in order to build useful tools that reinforce networking and to democratize access to contact data. This approach is based on making the knowledge already driving the social networks accessible, to empower them and to articulate them. It is based on an “indirect” research approach.

In the Internet sphere, any action is translated into digital information and digital information always leaves a trace on databases. A growing part of people’s daily lives in the

North and developed countries passes through digital supports (PCs and other machines). All this growing information generated in daily life can be connected and interpreted by programmes, each time more complex, in order to extract applicable knowledge. Within the social movements, for example, this strategy has already been introduced for example in the Social Forums process, through the adoption of new digital and online protocols for and for the organization of the events: all this data normally produced by the actions necessary to organize the forum is now stored, saved, made easily accessible and utilized to offer further opportunities to produce knowledge and information and to intensify the networking process within and around this space of confluence of social movements.

This is probably a new frontier for action research: the possibility of storing and the elaboration of information produced independently from direct research aims. Apart from many other complex (legal, social, cultural, political) aspects, the interest in the potential of this information will produce a close correlation between the development of databases and protocols that organize the flow of any action in the Internet and the aim of getting more and more information potentially transformable into useful knowledge. This could open up new connections between social movements and researchers. Furthermore, this tendency suggests that in the future one of the tasks of a researcher could be the conceptual design of the protocols for storing relevant data and of the programmes to elaborate them.

The “political” in techno-political tools means that the tools are used and/or built for political ends. The “techno” means that the content and/or the mediation of such practices is carried out through technology. The “tool” it refers to the fact that objects are open to being re-appropriated; to being used for unexpected purpose. The tool aims to combine autonomy and a sense of acting jointly following the logic of Do It Yourself (DIY).

The usefulness of techno-political tools could be defined as the capacity to expand / increase the identification of actors and resources for the action and reflection.

Some examples of techno-political tools are the tools developed by Euromovements.info, like the European Directory of collectives and organisations ([www.euromovements.info/directory](http://www.euromovements.info/directory)). The directory was not built from scratch, but adapts data that the regular activity of the movements creates. For example, the main information source for the European directory is the registration databases for the European Social

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Forums.

Another example is the activism networking platform [openesf.net](http://www.openesf.net) ([www.openesf.net](http://www.openesf.net)) which is a networking platform to organise the European Social Forum.

xii) Organic Intellectuals' contributions to social movements

Although some movements resist ascribing knowledge to individuals, important contributions are nevertheless made by individuals to the movements as organic intellectuals, willing or not.

In Barker and Cox's words:

“Movement intellectuals make two kinds of theoretical contribution. The first is the justification of the movement. Here form is as important as content, for much of the ideological work of movements is dialogical, in exchanges with opponents and potential allies. The forms and settings of movement ideas vary (...): pamphlets, newspapers, posters, sermons, songs on demonstrations, informal conversations, and so on. (...)

Secondly, movement intellectuals produce strategic and tactical proposals, typically of the form “Given the overall situation, and our purposes and resources within it, this is how we should act”. “We” may be a formally defined movement or party, or may be framed as “ordinary people”, “workers”, “the Catholic community”, “Blacks”, etc.” (Barker and Cox, 2001).

There are also individuals that have been studying an issue for many years (e.g. GMO, EU lobbying) and contribute as “experts” on the area.

Some Think Tanks, such as the Transnational Institute ([www.tni.org](http://www.tni.org)) based in Amsterdam or the International Forum on Globalization based in San Francisco ([www.ifg.org](http://www.ifg.org)), support the figure of “activist-scholars,” understood as people committed to critical analyses of problems and providing intellectual support to movements. They include journalists, independent researchers and writers, academics and policy consultants.

According to Boaventura do Santos Sousa, all the experiences presented hitherto are forms of knowledge that “break the public space of the University (as institution that hold the monopoly on knowledge) in the name of a wider public space” (Santos, 2004). I now turn to

experiences of action research related to academia.

## Academia

Many participants in the global justice movement are part of universities. According to Agrikoliansky and Sommier's research on the European Social Forum (Paris 2003), 70% of the participants were related to a University (as graduate or post-graduate students) (2005). However, the relationship to academia is a live, open and multi-dimensional question in the global justice movement.

Some of the questions arising around the relationship with academia are: Is it possible and how, to make use of the academic institutions to benefit social movements? What are the perverse effects of the Academy studying social movements? Which role is played by academics in the mechanisms of power (such as the re-absorption and division of movements into physical activists and theoretical activists, or between non-violent and violent activists)? What practices of resistance to the academy are initiated by social movements? Etc.

Within the framework of academia there are several, complementary, approaches to action research around the movement.

xiii) Academivism: Activists researching social movements from an academic institution

“Academivism” can be understood as attempts to contribute to social movements through research developed in an academic framework, performed by people who have a double identity as academics and as activists. In other words, people who, while being active and part of the social movements and taking a critical approach to the academic institution, are engaged in research on social movements in an academic framework.

Some of the questions related to this position include: How can we make our work relevant to those with whom we study? What is the role of the researcher? Is it possible to carry out action research from an academic institution? How does affect the researcher to have a “double identity” of activist and research? How is the knowledge by the social movements and the activist theorised (and in what respects is it different from knowledge generated in the academy or other contexts)?

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Anthropology and ethnography, due to their fieldwork immersion methods of “being there”, are more open to these questions. Juris presents militant ethnography as “a politically engaged and collaborative form of participant observation carried out from within rather than outside of grassroots movements”. But he also considers its limitations: “If ethnographic methods driven by political commitment and guided by a theory of practice largely break down the distinction between researcher and activist during the moment of fieldwork, the same cannot be said for the moment of writing and distribution. Indeed, one has to confront vastly different systems of standards, awards, selection, and stylistic criteria”. That could explain the anger of this activist at the first International meeting on activist research and social movements who responded with: “You go back to the university and use collectively produced knowledge to earn your degrees and gain academic prestige. What’s in it for the rest of us?” (2004).

From academia there is also places based on providing education on alternative contents with an academivist orientation. This is the case of Hegoa, a Basque institute for development and international cooperation ([www.hegoa.ehu.es](http://www.hegoa.ehu.es)), of the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (Nottingham) ([www.nottingham.ac.uk/cssgj](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cssgj)) or of the Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, promoter of the Observatorio Social de America Latina ([www.clacso.org](http://www.clacso.org)).

xiv) Another academia is possible: Actions of change in Academia

Opening up the knowledge created in the universities

In the academic world, there are emerging exponents of public access to the knowledge it generates. Starting from the hard sciences, initiatives such as the Public Library of Science ([www.plos.org](http://www.plos.org)), a nonprofit open access scientific publishing project aimed at creating a library of open access journals and other scientific literature under an open content licence, are part of a wave to make science results accessible and to enlarge cooperation in research.

Another example is Interface itself, as an open access journal on social movement research ([www.interfacejournal.net](http://www.interfacejournal.net)).

These actions are connected to a broader free culture movement in favor of open knowledge



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and the defense of knowledge as a public good. At US Universities there is also an emerging movement of “Students for Free Culture” whose goal is to transform the politics of knowledge at University ([www.freeculture.org](http://www.freeculture.org)).

Initiatives to bring academia and society closer

This approach refers to efforts to build relationships between civil society and academic institutions and to increase public awareness both of research results and of the demand-driven approach to research.

Examples include the Fondation Sciences Citoyennes ([www.sciencescitoyennes.org](http://www.sciencescitoyennes.org)), the Science Shop ([www.scienceshops.org](http://www.scienceshops.org)) first established in the Netherlands in the 1970s or INOSA ([www.cs.indiana.edu/~gasser/inosa](http://www.cs.indiana.edu/~gasser/inosa)) which "promotes more egalitarian relationships of mutual learning between individuals and organizations working within universities and those in other parts of civil society".

Lastly, other types of “actions” taking place in order to change academia through ethically based practices have to do with the struggles in defence of the public university and against the proletarianisation of research.

#### IV. Authorship and ownership

In discussions on action research, a distinction and contrast between “academic research versus activist research” is commonly made, and this distinction is usually the main axes of the discussion. Useful considerations can arise from this perspective (see for example Barker and Cox, 2001). Nevertheless, I consider that this perspective limits analysis, and can be used to narrow the focus of the questions asked of action research. In this context, it can be useful to address action research from the point of view of authorship and ownership.

As presented previously, the five tendencies I proposed are not necessarily in opposition to one another. Most experiences of action research in the movement are based on a combination of these five elements: they contribute to building relationships; follow a participative method; tend to use open licences; develop strategic thinking and produce alternative contents. However, authorship and ownership is a more categorical issue. Some

experiences are based on collective authorship while others have an individual authorship and these cannot go together.

It might be worth mentioning that individual authorship does not refer to monologues or to isolation. If we look to the contexts of individual contribution generally we will find it part of a conversation. Nevertheless, in individual authorship a moment can be clearly established in which the ideas are explicitly attributed to a specific person. Collective authorship can also vary. It can include the case of a “universal” non-authorship, not attributing a explicit authorship, or collective authorship can refer to the explicit authorship of a clearly bounded group. Furthermore, the same person could in some occasions adopt an individual authorship and in some occasions a collective one.

Map II presents a simple distribution for orientation purposes of different types of experiences around authorship and ownership. The distribution of the clusters suggests that there is generally a relationship between the type of authorship and the type of ownership. Collective authorship tends to adopt “copyleft” (or formulas that favor access and re-use) approaches to ownership more easily. Further analysis and empirical research may be needed to see if this analysis holds up.

Map II: Authorship and ownership: distribution of type of experiences by authorship and ownership<sup>4</sup>

Collective  
authorship

Online creation communities  
Techno-political tools  
Social Forums  
Memory

Mapping for action  
Co-research  
Participatory action research

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4 Not included in this map are performative research and action research for training and empowerment.

Collective movement strategy

Critical research  
Research on alternatives

Individual  
ownership

Collective or accessible  
ownership

Organic intellectuals

Academivists

Open Knowledge at Universities

Individual authorship

V. Conclusion

The nexus between research and political action is rich in its diversity.

Five main tendencies can be distinguished. Some types of experiences put particular attention on being based on a participative-collective method; others are focussed on producing alternative content; others develop strategic thinking for political processes; others are distinguished by their effort at building relationships and networking connections; and, lastly, others have a strong intention to change the way in which knowledge is managed. These tendencies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but can complement one another.

The type of authorship (individual versus collective) is a sharper border and may also be related to the type of ownership. Collective ownership seems to be adopted more in collective authorship.

The defining features of action research

In conclusion, I would like to raise for consideration and exploration a number of elements that 'swarm' around action research in the global justice movement and, in my view, should

define it:

Research arising from the action of transformative social movements: that implied by the needs directly or indirectly expressed by the social movements and excluded sectors of the population.

Criticism of any theory that claims to speak from a neutral place, from where it can see everything. Instead, research should be carried out from people's own situations, that is, from personal experience, within a strategy of research from below.

Research towards action for the critical transformation of the present reality, with an explicit political commitment to the present cycle of protests: research that pursues the creation of a knowledge that is valued for its practical effectiveness in generating changes, in contrast to objective and contemplative theoretical knowledge in the traditional academic fashion; knowledge that gives visibility to conflicts; knowledge that generates and maximizes action; knowledge that transforms reality while generating a new reality.

Research with a glocalist [global+local] framing.

Non-disciplinary research which attempts to overcome the fictitious compartmentalization of reality. By contrast, reality should be understood as a totality that combines manifold interconnected aspects.

The development of research as an effective procedure, whose development is in itself already a result. The validation of research depends on its capacity to contribute to change. Research with a real use-value.

Research nurtured by a spirit of experimentation; nomadic and travelling research, adapting to changes.

The principles under which research is organized should be decentralization, horizontality, autonomy and the desire for coordination and cooperation. It is either developed by subjectivities constituted through the formal and explicit objective of social activism research, or transversally and integrated into other fields of social movement action.

Everyone participating in the research should be considered part of it, with an effort to

overcome hierarchies. This includes research springing from the relationship between the subject-researcher (the researcher as subject) and the subject-researched in a process of composition; non-instrumentalist research; investigation without an "object"; rather than treating the social movements as objects of investigation, they – as well as the researcher - 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 immanently so. In other words, rather than locating itself in a position already codified, it produces the terms of the situation.

The subject-researcher participates in the situations investigated, is open about his/her motives and opinions, and is not necessarily a person with a specialized university education. By contrast, the traditional role of the academic researcher which is questioned here is that of the prudently distant, supposedly objective and individualist specialist.

The subject-researcher become more a facilitator of the research than its owner and director.

Research from the perspective of resistance rather than one that is merely communicative. It tends to be based not on an acquisitive position, "giving" voice to excluded populations, but on establishing cooperation, with the acknowledgement of its 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 we resist.

A consciousness of the re-appropriation of knowledge and a critique of the apparatus of academic capture in relation to mechanisms that reproduce power relations and favour the expropriation of knowledge.

Knowledge management based on free, public, inclusive, common and nondiscriminatory forms for universal use, without property or copyright or under pro-profit aims. This tends to be supported by accessible formats and easily distributed as well as, when applicable, copyleft licensing. This implies a critique of the commodification and privatization of knowledge as one of the causes of social exclusion.

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