



Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management

Voicing researched activists with Responsive Action Research

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Manuscripts

	PAR (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995)	RAR ([Authors], 2017)
What is the research for?	Action	Action
Who is the research for?	Local people	Local people
Whose knowledge counts?	Local people's	Local people's
Topic choice influenced by?	Local priorities	Local priorities
Methodology chosen for?	Empowerment, mutual learning	Empowerment, mutual learning
Pros (process/output)	Democratic/topical	Pragmatic/community driven
Cons (process/output)	Demands of participation for local people/risky completion	Demands of observation/risky relevance
<i>Who takes part in the stages of research process?</i>		
Problem identification	Local people	Researcher
Data collection	Local people	Researcher
Interpretation	Local concepts and frameworks	Shared concepts and frameworks
Analysis	Local people	Researcher
Presentation of findings	Locally accessible and useful	Locally accessible and useful / By researcher to other academics or funding body
Action on findings	Integral to the process	Integral to the process
Who takes action?	Local people, with/without external support	Local people, with/without external support
Who owns the results?	Shared	Shared
What is emphasized?	Process	Process and outcome

Abstract***Purpose***

What it is like to experience being the subject of the research process when you are an actor *within* a new social movement organization? And what lessons can be learned for researchers engaging with members of New Social Movements?

Debates on engagement and the relationship between the researcher and the researched so far have taken the perspective solely of the researcher. Based on insights gained by full participation in a horizontal worker cooperative, we aim at contributing to the facilitation of more fruitful, mutually engaging research relations between organizational theory scholars and members of New Social Movement organizations by voicing the researched in this debate.

Design/methodology/approach

After providing some accounts from the researched point of view, the paper focuses on crafting an appropriate research process based on Participatory Action Research (PAR) ethos and experience.

Findings

Since our research findings suggest that PAR combines elements that both trouble and inspire research participants, namely workload/availability and relevancy/contribution in practice, we introduce and provide a case study of Responsive Action Research (RAR) that emphasizes adaptation and responsiveness in the research process instead of shared governance.

Originality/value

The originality of this article lies in voicing the research participants with the aim to aid both scholars and social movements adopt appropriate research designs for the mutual benefit of both **theory/action and researchers/researched (even when researchers are already active in the field).**

Keywords

Participatory Action Research, Critical Performativity, alternative organizing, New Social Movements, Critical Management Studies.

Type

Research paper

Introduction

Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed (Freire, 2014 p. 94).

The relationship between the researcher and the researched is one of the key areas of concern for the study of New Social Movements (NSM). In order to gain access researchers of NSM's need to develop relationships with those that research. The necessity for the NSM activists to contribute their time, to open themselves up to be interviewed, and to allow the researcher witness (and even partake) in the decision-making processes that shape the group, make building trust and maintaining relationships with all the actors involved in NSM an imperative. For instance, Marianne Maeckelbergh (2009) argues that it was only through engaging with participants she could gain access to areas that normally would have been prohibited.

However, for many researchers of NSM concern about the relationship between the researcher and the researched goes beyond such pragmatic and instrumental concerns of gaining access. Many of the researchers share ideological and political commitments with the groups that they study and these researchers are also self-styled activists (Chatterton, 2008; Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010). Furthermore, the research topics, which include issues around visible and invisible power, alternatives to hierarchical relations, collective and emancipatory education make researching in a distant way problematic and even contradictory to research within a traditional framework. Research should not simply be conducted *on* participants in NSM

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3 organizations, but the participants in such organizations, so the argument goes, should
4 also benefit from such engagements (Wray-Bliss, 2002). In short research within new
5 social movements needs to take the relationship between activists and the researcher
6 seriously. Engaging with, and making the research produced of benefit to those
7 studied, has thus become an important feature of research from a critical perspective
8 within NSM.
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12 To overcome such potential contradictory positions academic researchers have sought
13 to embed themselves in NSM organizations (Maeckelbergh, 2009), acting as full-
14 blown participants within them (Reedy *et al.*, 2016), or engaging with activists as co-
15 researchers (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010) in what they intend to
16 be fully collaborative processes. Thus, many researchers seek to use more engaged
17 forms of scholarly work such as Participatory Action Research (Chevalier and
18 Buckles, 2013; Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995) in ways that seek to work in ‘bottom-up
19 ways with the goal of actively engaging and benefiting groups outside academia so
20 that traditional barriers between “expert researcher” and “researched community” are
21 broken down’ (PyGyRG, 2016). Moreover, within Organization Studies, and
22 particularly the Critical Management Studies tradition, there is increased calls for
23 critical engagement by academics to transform organizational practice (Spicer *et al.*,
24 2009; Spicer *et al.*, 2016). This can result in well-meaning and sympathetic
25 researchers go into a social movement organization and seek to work with such
26 groups (Willmott, 2008).
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39 However, whilst we applaud this increasing focus on the relationship between
40 researchers and researched, we believe such attention has not gone far enough. The
41 debate within the literature thus far has taken the perspective solely of the researcher
42 and, somewhat ironically given the subject, the voice of the researched has been
43 excluded from this debate. Responding to the theme of this Special Issue we focus on
44 the experiences of those within social movements and popular struggles who are
45 studied, by asking what it is like to experience being the subject of the research
46 process when you are an actor *within* a new social movement organization? What do
47 those who working in, campaign as part of or act as members of NSM organizations
48 experience and get out of the process of being researched on? And what lessons can
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3 be learned for researchers who wish to engage with members of New Social
4 Movements?
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7 In order to contribute to the cultivation of more fruitful, mutually engaging research
8 relations between organizational theory scholars and members of New Social
9 Movement organizations, this paper demonstrates some tensions that can arise in the
10 research process and some indicative tips to prevent them. To address these questions
11 this paper takes as its starting point the experiences of a participant in a New Social
12 Movement Organization, [Author 1], dealing with the (im)possibilities of autonomy
13 beyond capital and state while adopting an infra-political strategy (Spicer and Böhm,
14 2007; Böhm, *et al.*, 2008). [Author 1] has been a member of Pagkaki, a Greek worker
15 cooperative and NSM organization, for nearly 10 years. In this role, he has been
16 contacted by many researchers from undergraduate students wishing to use them for
17 research projects on alternative organizations through to tenured academics writing
18 papers for international journals. Through this position as being *researched* he has
19 gained some insights into the experience of being researched, what the challenges,
20 opportunities, sources of frustration and at times insight gained through these research
21 encounters. Documenting them through a series of vignettes, he captures what this
22 experience of being researched was like and how interacting with researchers is
23 connected or not with Pagkaki's objectives. Based on these insights we argue that if
24 critical scholars' ambition is to provide relevant research for alternative organizations,
25 they must pay more attention to the specific needs and nature of such organizations.
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39 The first objective of this paper is thus to examine some reflections that have troubled
40 and disengaged [author 1] while participating in a research project as a member of a
41 political alternative organization. The second one is to explore some constraints that
42 participants and academics face in constructing theory by themselves and the third
43 one is to offer some important considerations for research which aims at being
44 relevant and supportive for social movements and go beyond simply *parroting* (Gillan
45 and Pickerill, 2012) and *cheerleading* their accomplishments (Tarlau, 2014). **The**
46 **third, drawing on these experiences, is to develop the concept of Responsive Action**
47 **Research (RAR). RAR is an attitude or approach to research which *responds* to the**
48 **problems located in the field but does not seek full commitment by the researched in**
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3 the manner that Participant Action Research (PAR) requires. Whilst we applaud the
4 ethos and approach of PAR, based on the experiences highlighted in this paper, which
5 echo the experiences of others (i.e. Chatterton et al 2007), PAR requires considerable
6 commitment in terms of time and energy by the researched which are difficult for
7 them to find. As a result, PAR is too idealistic, whereas we argue RAR, where the
8 researcher builds their research questions based on the interests of the researched but
9 without their active involvement, offers a more realistic opportunity for successful
10 research outcomes.
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17 By highlighting how researchers might forge more productive and mutually
18 compatible relationships with research participants, taking into account their needs
19 and interests in their research design, rather than considering them as merely passive
20 objects for examination, one of the central contributions of this paper is thus to
21 provide a case study for crafting an engaged, practice-based research plan building
22 both on an understanding of the research participants' interests and a fertile
23 collaboration of mutual engagement and impact between researchers and research
24 participants.
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30 This paper is organized as follows: The first part provides an overview of the
31 research-relevance debate, particularly as it pertains to research with New Social
32 Movement organizations. We examine some of the challenges that occur within
33 qualitative research of new social movements and how they have sought to be
34 rectified by methodologies such as Participatory Action Research. The second section
35 provides a retrospective reflection of [author 1's] response to various research
36 projects as a member of a work collective, problematizing practice-based theoretical
37 elaborations. The discussion then draws out the key features that [author 1] has
38 learned through this position of being researched on, before we end with some
39 recommendations, based on these experiences, for researchers to consider before and
40 during their time engaging with NSM organizations.
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49 **Engaged Scholarship**

50 The challenge of making academic work relevant to organizational practitioners has
51 become a central issue for Organization Studies scholars as well as wider business
52 researchers (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Porter and McKibbin, 1988) featuring in a
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3 number of special issues of leading journals (Hinings and Greenwood, 2002;
4 Hodgkinson et al, 2001; Rynes et al, 2001).
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7 For critical scholars, who seek not only to produce theoretical knowledge but also
8 have ambitions to change organizational theory and practice (Fournier and Grey,
9 2000) in ways which are emancipating (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992) the research
10 relevance debate has extra significance. For as Fournier and Grey state 'to be engaged
11 in critical management studies means, at the most basic level, to say that there is
12 something wrong with management, as a practice and as a body of knowledge, and
13 that it should be changed' (2000 p. 16). However academic researchers are accused of
14 critiquing from a distance (Voronov, 2005), divorced from everyday struggles (Bailey
15 and Ford, 1996), stuck within the ivory tower (Parker, 2002; Parker *et al.*, 2007),
16 unwilling or unable to transform practice. As Parker argues 'it is easier for critical B-
17 school [Business School] academics to simply be academics than the leaders of a new
18 social movement' (2002 p. 129) as they are too negative in their outlook and distant
19 from everyday practice.
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29 To remedy this situation a 'performative turn' as demonstrated by 'critical
30 performativity' has been offered as a positive, affirmative, engagement by critical
31 academics with practice rather than a negative critique at a distance (Spicer *et al.*,
32 2009; Spicer *et al.*, 2016). In this light critical scholars are called on to work with a
33 range of groups such as sweatshop workers (Boje, 1998), trade union and women's
34 groups (Fournier and Grey, 2000), 'social and environmental activists, the
35 unemployed and precarious workforce' (Fleming and Banerjee, 2016 p. 270) and a
36 range of alternative organizations (Kieser and Leiner, 2012), particularly members of
37 NSM (Reedy and Learmonth, 2009; Reedy *et al.*, 2016; Willmott, 2008) or workers
38 cooperatives (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Paraque and Willmott, 2014) that might
39 offer a more positive vision of organizational practice (King and Learmonth 2015).
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48 Such calls for engagement with a range of alternative and new social movement
49 organizations imply an activist dimension to research by researchers actively
50 participating with the groups studied to contribute to positive social change. Implicit
51 in this debate then are the possibilities for critical organizational studies scholars
52 seeking to research members of new social movements, not only out of theoretical
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3 interest, but also to contribute, in some way, to helping change their conditions and
4 possibilities. However, despite such aspirations, there are few examples of working
5 with alternative groups or systematic inquiries into how direct engagement might
6 work and, indeed, whether it is possible (King, 2015; Land and King, 2014).
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10 Working with such alternative groups, particularly members of new social
11 movements, raises the question of scholarly engagement and the relationship between
12 academic researchers and their research subjects. This performative turn therefore
13 makes it an imperative that research on NSM offers more than simply the production
14 of ever more elaborate theoretical knowledge but necessitates working with such
15 groups in a manner that has mutual benefits for both theory and the participants of
16 such groups. As with wider organizational studies (Beech *et al.*, 2010) the relationship
17 with organizational practitioners becomes of central importance.
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20 One starting point for addressing that gap, as expressed by Van de Ven (2007 p. ix) is
21 *engaged research* which ‘produces knowledge that is more penetrating and insightful
22 than when scholars or practitioners work on the problems alone’. He also echoes
23 Andrew Pettigrew (2001 p. S61&67 cited in Van de Ven, 2007 p. 6) on that ‘a deeper
24 form of research that engages both academics and practitioners is needed to produce
25 knowledge that is worthy of transfer to both science and practice’. Engaged
26 scholarship seeks to offer ways of working that develop research which is both
27 theoretically meaningful but done in a manner that is of benefit to practitioners.
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30 A more critical version of engaged scholarship is demonstrated through Participatory
31 Action Research (PAR) (Pain *et al.*, 2007). This research methodology that aims
32 (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007) for radical social change and to create accessible knowledge
33 for practitioners that is developed from areas of mutual concern. PAR exhibits a stress
34 on attention to power-relations, the emotional dimensions of close relationships with
35 participants and the consequences of seeking to bring about social change as an
36 integral part of ethnographic research. It therefore seeks to overcome the charge that
37 Wray-Bliss makes of conventional critical organizational ethnography, that it is
38 largely conducted for the benefit of the academics involved with few advantages for
39 the researched (2003).
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To sum up we have seen within critical organizational studies (and wider critical approaches such as radical geography) an interest in engaging in alternative organizations and New Social Movements, not only to broaden the pool of understanding of what constitutes forms of organizing, but significantly that the research conducted may be of benefit to those involved in practice. This literature articulates some of the possibilities that such research offers, but significantly for our purposes, it also highlights many of the challenges and struggles that researchers embarking on such forms of scholarly engagement. However, despite the expanding interest in this topic, the voice of those actually involved as researched subjects in such alternative organizations and new social movements has not been heard. This is unfortunate for if we are to truly be interested in engaged (participatory) forms of scholarship then we need to understand the viewpoint of those on the receiving end of our endeavours. It is to this issue we now turn.

Methodology

To understand the experience of what it is like to be the subject of research we now present our case study. The following accounts are based on [author 1's] long-standing involvement in a constellation of alternative organizations in Greece. Since October 2008, [author 1] has been a member of Pagkaki, a horizontal worker cooperative operating a traditional Greek cafe, that combines a new form of political struggle and employment as a response to the economic precariousness their members were facing (Varkarolis, 2012).

These accounts will be written in the form of auto-ethnographic recollections, personal narratives (Grey and Sinclair, 2006) that seek to bring out some of the experiences of being the focus of research. As such they could be considered insider accounts (Brunwick and Coghlan, 2007), that 'turn from the dramatically different "them" and towards the agonizing familiar "us"' (Bell and King, 2010 p. 432). In doing so they seek to bring to life the experiences that [author 1] underwent through engaging as a participant in research, in ways that we hope will resonate with the reader (Cohen *et al.*, 2009). Therefore [author 1] did not set-out to research what it was like being researched (for a similar example, see King (2017)), however, it is

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3 only through offering these personal experiences, and then subjecting them to analysis
4 and reflection, that such issues can be made accessible for deeper enquiry.
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7 Thus, based on [author 1's] complete participation (Spradley, 1980 p. 61), in this
8 paper, we focus on providing first-hand information from the inside and a convincing
9 account (Van Maanen, 1989 p. 31) regarding the researcher-researched relationship
10 from the perspective of the researched. The aim of this account is to help the would-
11 be researchers develop a 'better' understanding of what it is like to be researched and
12 overall facilitate research relations/processes for the mutual benefit of both
13 researchers and researched.
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18 The following account will use vignettes (Barter and Renold, 2000; Humphreys,
19 2005; Learmonth and Humphreys, 2012), to capture the experiences of being a subject
20 of research. The vignettes presented here are drawn from [author 1's] personal email
21 account, a recording of Pagkaki's assembly (21/9/2015) and of the Second
22 Euromediterranean 'Workers Economy' Meeting (30/10/2015), Pagkaki's email
23 account and internal forum with the permission of all interested parties. Two small
24 interviews have also been conducted to evaluate the experience of participating in a
25 focus group. All members of Pagkaki have indiscriminately assigned the pseudonym
26 Pagkaki X as per their request.
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34 35 **Reflections of a research-participant on researcher-researched collaboration**

36 37 *Reflection 1: Access*

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40 We, a group of people attending the EGOS conference in Athens, are
41 interested in visiting Pagkaki. Apart from raki and food, we'd like, to talk
42 with a member of Pagkaki – to tell us a few things about how the initiative
43 started, the values and organization of the collective etc., an informal chat,
44 really, and exchange of ideas [Personal email received in 29/5/2015].
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50 Gaining access to research sites is a major challenge for many researchers (Cunliffe
51 and Alcadipani, 2016). Most of the literature examines the issue from the viewpoint
52 of the researcher, however, as a member of Pagkaki, I have regularly experienced the
53 issues around access, i.e. being the subject of requests for research, from the
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viewpoint of being the researched.

Receiving requests by academics to research us, is a regular feature of our time running Pagkaki. Being a worker cooperative, particularly given the economic situation that Greece has faced, Pagkaki has been a source of interest for many academics interested in alternative ways of organizing. Some of these requests have come from established academics (such as those at attending the EGOS conference, or seeking to publish in international journals), but also undergraduate/postgraduate students from countries like Greece, Austria, Brazil, Germany, Italy, UK, Spain, and USA. Given this high number of requests, it is easy to understand that being involved in research is time-consuming. On top of that, researchers, particularly those from abroad, have often come to us with tight schedules and difficult demands for us to fulfil. Receiving email requests and exacerbated by the language barrier, and the demands of our work, has often resulted in us not always granting access. There were also times of conflict inside the group that made us less available to researchers.

Apart from such technicalities, our decision to take part in an interview or filling a questionnaire was mostly the result of a good first impression made from the researcher as s/he was explaining it to us or that we already had good relations with, instead of the anticipated result. Most of us had similar experiences in the past and wanted to be at least polite/helpful.

Fortunately, we haven't felt so far that we were treated as primary data by researchers that only wanted to boost their career which might provoked a different, more stringent attitude (Wray-Bliss, 2004). In our experience, all researchers who have contacted us, have been at least sympathetic to our efforts though this is rarely documented in their research since even well-meaning researchers are generally lead/choose to present their research within a (mainstream) disengaged, positivist attitude. See, for instance, Kadir (2016) or, in Pagkaki's case, Makris' (2014) quantitative research on the motives that drove 200 people to be employed as members of a worker cooperative in Greece, where the somewhat hidden objective was 'highlighting the advantages of working in non-profits, while looking for ways to balance the roadblocks' [Email sent from Makris to Pagkaki at 29/4/2014].

Whilst we have often sought to be accommodating for such well-meaning researchers,

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3 sometimes we have felt more like we have been asked to fit into their agendas rather
4 than our own. In this respect, there are indeed some few cases that we stalled or
5 rejected requests. To name an example, when the aim of the study was directly related
6 to exploring austerity and crisis as a *root cause* for alternative organizing, we tried to
7 politely reject these requests since the research objectives were irrelevant to our
8 situation, problems or objectives.
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14 We are terribly sorry we didn't find the time to answer your message sooner.
15 Things have been quite hectic for us lately with work and everything else. We
16 wouldn't have been able to meet your request for an interview though, since
17 we were certain from the beginning of our effort that our choice had nothing to
18 do with crisis and austerity... There is a lot more information on our views on
19 our site, which I presume you already know. We wish you and your colleague
20 all the best on your research [Pagkaki's response for an interview request in
21 3/6/2015].
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28 A basic reading of our website before contacting us, like the video-interview hosted at
29 the top of our English version of our website, would have led to a reframing of the
30 approach or a restatement of the objective in order to be more relevant and maximize
31 the chances of being welcomed.
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35 [Pagkaki's creation] has nothing to do with the crisis... The initial idea
36 preceded crisis for two years, it was a coincidence that by the time we were
37 ready to open, the crisis was here. We would have done it regardless of the
38 crisis [Video-interview by AlterNation (2013)].
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43 Summing up, whilst theoretically, most (sympathetic) researchers aim at contributing
44 to a better understanding - communication of our ideas/praxis to the wider public or
45 even informing practitioners' practices, for research participants themselves,
46 participation can prove to be quite dull and onerous, as exemplified by the following
47 report from providing two interviews.
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52 No substantive questions were raised, both researchers were delighted for
53 covering them, none of them was prepared beforehand (reading our texts). I
54 provided the standard stories of what we are doing, how we operate and so on.
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Both cases, not researchers, were very abstract-theoretical [Pagkaki's forum post in 26/9/2016].

Indeed, devoting our free time to quote our public self-presentation documents for researchers and participating in a research where the bottom line/targets are irrelevant with our situation, objectives and priorities is problematic and in the long run unsustainable.

Affinity/sympathy to social transformation and a sense of solidarity with the objectives of the collective is a key-fundamental starting point to connect/relate research to activism (Chatterton *et al.*, 2007) but beforehand preparation and consultation seems to be necessary elements, as well, in order to be mutually engaging and challenging. While a public acknowledgement of the affinity by the researcher's side within the research output is not decisive, setting up a relevant research framework seems important for maximising the chances of being welcomed and attracting advanced level of access and insight. The following reflection is dedicated to this issue.

Reflection 2: Research Methodology

The need for collaborative research design to be relevant and give back

Whilst some research methodologies, particularly PAR (Kesby *et al.*, 2007), actively encourage the contribution of research participants in the research design, in most research approaches, the research design process is seen directly as the domain of solely the researcher. As a consequence, we have regularly received requests like the following:

As part of my assignment, I need to take an interview from a member of the cooperative. I attach the questions I will ask... Please, let me know when is it possible to come because it must be done by 17/1/2013 [Email received by Pagkaki at 10/1/2013; a week before the deadline].

Most researchers come to us at a very advanced stage of their problem-finding (Merton, 1959) and research design, with the objectives for their research pre-set and most aspects of their research already planned. Sometimes, as the example given above, the times they have given us were too tight to be adapted. Till now, no

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3 researcher has asked for our input or ideas as to how the research should be
4 conducted. It is no surprise then, that the first time that I truly felt that a researcher
5 contributed to our practice, which evoked a higher sense of comradeship between us,
6 was not through the research itself. A German militant that was given our texts
7 translated in English to familiarize with us prior to proceeding with an interview,
8 came up with the idea of translating our documents in German language.

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14 Confirming Barker and Cox (2002) claim that the knowledge, interests and skills of
15 activists are largely not taken into consideration, we end up dealing with irrelevant for
16 our practice research impact targets. Based on my experience of participating in
17 numerous research projects (Aivalioti and Merkuri, 2016; Kokkinidis, 2015a;
18 Kokkinidis, 2015b; Makris, 2014; Marioli, 2016; Schmalzbauer, 2013; Sdrali *et al.*,
19 2016; Skuludaki, 2013), I am led to the conclusion that if we were at least asked to
20 provide some input early enough on the research design or even the preliminary
21 findings would result in at least higher levels of relevancy and accuracy in
22 representation. As for the latter, indicative is the remark by a VIOME worker in a
23 workshop entitled *In dialogue with VIOME* that informs the researchers of a blind
24 spot in their findings and an unidentified area of interest.

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33 I think that research on the support of workers in recuperated enterprises from
34 their families might prove extremely valuable... I'm convinced that this
35 backstage issue deserves an in-depth research [A member of VioMe
36 30/10/2016]

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40 Adopting a more inclusive, mutually engaging process resonates with Freire's (2000
41 p. 93) dialogical approach with a focus on the 'things about which they [in our case,
42 research participants] want to know more'. To facilitate such a dialogical approach,
43 Pagkaki recently introduced the role of the *research facilitator* assigned to
44 communicate with the researchers the priorities/needs of the collective and aid
45 him/her incorporate in the design as much elements possible (including research
46 questions). [Author 1] was the first one to be appointed this role from January 2015 to
47 July 2016. Today, there are two members sharing the role of the research facilitator in
48 Pagkaki, due to mainly foreign language limitations.

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56 However, looking back at 8 requests and 6 completed interviews, we have yet not

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3 been able to consult or participate in a research design to ‘lead the research to a
4 favourable direction’ [Pagkaki’s forum post in 26/9/2016]. A more formal, proactive
5 vetting process requiring ‘scholars to clarify their contribution to the movement from
6 the very beginning of the research process’ (Tarlau 2014 p. 68), like the one adopted
7 by the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil (MST), might be our next step forward
8 to balance the workload with its contribution.
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10 11 12 13 *Anonymity, representation and the focus group*

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15 Following the relevant academic ethical standards, all researchers so far have offered
16 anonymity to the research participants. This aspect was also deliberately stressed in a
17 way to reassure us and make us less reluctant to participate. However, when our
18 contribution was not hidden within a quantitative research, we preferred to be referred
19 as members of a collective and not as individuals. Kokkinidis (2015 p. 853) was the
20 first one to provide a glimpse of this stance in choosing to be referred as Pagkaki 1,
21 Pagkaki 2, Pagkaki 3.
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28 At the outset of each interview the participants were given an assurance of
29 confidentiality, although their real names are disclosed as per their request.
30 The only exception is the Pagkaki coffee shop. While the real name of the
31 collective is Pagkaki, any direct reference to my participants' views will be
32 under the name of the collective as per their request to highlight the collective
33 character of their experiment.
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39 So, our main sensibility, following Freeman’s (1972) critique of the *star* system, is to
40 communicate what is commonly decided by the group, not our individual viewpoints.
41 This is part of a political culture that aims to avoid having unaccountable, widely
42 recognizable ‘stars’ or intellectuals as spokespeople but to voice ourselves
43 collectively in public. In this regard, trying to rotate our spokespersons in public
44 events is not that easy since we don't all feel comfortable with this situation but
45 checking what the spokesperson will communicate beforehand is.
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51 Following the above from a researcher’s perspective, focus groups can generate far
52 more dense insights because they are validated on the go and ‘create a safer space for
53 people that don’t feel confident/enjoy speaking in public’ (interview with Pagkaki X
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3 that has participated in a focus group). This allows more representative details to be
4 brought to the surface and obtaining a clearer distinction between individual and
5 collective reasoning/opinions. On the other hand, a focus group is far more difficult to
6 get organized than one-to-one interviews and have been organized only two times so
7 far. Finally, anonymity and acknowledgement are not mutually exclusive. Informing
8 activists of the consequences of their choice and letting them decide what is
9 appropriate for their situation is a fair and balanced way to go.

15 ***Reflection 3: Exit***

17 Whilst the issues of gaining access, building trust and potentially even designing
18 research that is interesting to practitioners is an important feature of the debate within
19 the academic literature, the issues of exit receive considerably less attention, mostly
20 focusing on managing the *relations* with the researched while withdrawing from the
21 field (Perecman and Curran, 2006; Bryman, 2015; Beech et al. 2009; Atkinson and
22 Hammersley, 1994). My experience at Pagkaki so far backs and stresses the
23 importance of Dawson's (2009 p. 111) suggestions on pursuing an open-ended exit
24 that respects the expectations of the research participants, as well.

25
26 It is important to leave your community on good terms. Many researchers find
27 that it is helpful to stay in touch with their contacts – these people will want to
28 see what is written about them. They will be interested and may still have
29 comments to make. You may also wish to return to your community several
30 years later and conduct a follow-up study.

31
32 Indeed, it has been noticeable how few researchers have kept in touch after finishing
33 their fieldwork with us. In the early years, most researchers that completed research
34 on us did not send us their findings/reports and we had no contacts after that. The
35 division between the researcher and the researched, as expressed in the latter's
36 alienation from controlling the research process/design and its external objectives or
37 being treated as objects rather than subjects, also involved not sharing the end result
38 with the participants themselves and keeping contact.

39
40 The first time that we did receive such contact was when a lecturer asked us to
41 validate his research (Kokkinidis, 2015a).

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3 Hi, last summer, I had a conversation with Pagkaki 1, Pagkaki 2 and Pagkaki 3
4 about Pagkaki ... about your objectives, how you organize labour, how
5 decisions are being made, your policy on the distribution of profits etc. etc ...
6
7 My paper has been accepted by the journal Organization. Like I told you
8 during the interview, I'd really like you to read it, not only for commenting it
9 but also for being aware of it. I hope that you will find it interesting [Email
10 received by Pagkaki at 11/11/2013].
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14 This type of post-field communication not only gave us the opportunity to see a
15 journal article based on the stories we provided but also to resolve minor
16 misunderstandings that had led to a numerical error that could easily be fixed before
17 getting printed. Asking for validation is surely an elementary, easy way that a
18 researcher can keep contact with the participants that can later prove beneficial for
19 both sides.
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23 Since then, we require researchers to send us their final documents and we keep an
24 archive of them which we also share with interested researchers. The main reason is
25 to avoid repeating ourselves and a secondary is to document researchers'
26 understandings of our activities so as to evaluate our abilities of getting our message
27 across.
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31 Attached are some papers on Pagkaki. They might prove useful for your
32 project. When you are done, please send us your work for our archive
33 [Personal email sent on 2/3/2016].
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37 Overall, 'parachute' researching (Dawson and Sinwell, 2012) has proved to be the
38 norm and not the exception but bonding over time is required for increasing chances
39 of helpful/relevant research. Given the limits imposed by (academic) deadlines and
40 the amount of time required to bond researcher and researched, occasionally we have
41 also planted the idea to researchers to come back at a next project.
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45 Thank you so much for helping ... we will choose you for our thesis!!!
46 [Personal email received on 7/2/2016].
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Available theory/practice linking options and constraints

As the above reflections have illustrated, our experiences of being researched have proved mixed. Whilst we have seen the benefits where the researchers have affinity with our project, and have given us some areas of reflection based on their research findings, for the most part our engagement with researchers has been time-consuming and not that productive. However, while acknowledging our own limitations (including free-time for reflection) and the potentiality of academics acting as allies, most of us believe that academics, with no direct experience or in-depth interaction with practitioners, have little concrete to offer.

I personally and others felt a repulsion for academics because they were talking about something without being involved. I think Pagkaki X is a theoretician, a type of theoretician that is more endearing than others, it is not because we are friends, but for reasons that similarly made me endear Ruggeri, as well. They are both theoreticians that get their hands dirty [21/9/2015 assembly of Pagkaki].

Our role as practitioners, interested in advancing such collective endeavours faster, leads us then to two different directions regarding theory building: a) do it ourselves, or b) do it together with others. The first option is the default and reaffirms our commitment to deepening our understanding of theory, reflecting on our practice and to Praxis to advance our cause. Our 7300-words, five years' anniversary brochure on running Pagkaki (2015) is the result of such a truly participative procedure. On the other hand, we also acknowledge that this collective approach is a slow and demanding procedure that requires some flexibility. That's why for instance we have published a book based on a single member's perspective, why we operate a bookshop and a reading place around topics we want to promote reflection on and finally why we are attempting to co-develop with intellectuals (within the group or academics from the outside) outputs based on real-life experience/problems.

Here, is where as an experienced member of a work collective, I reach my limits and the academic/intellectual steps in. Being able to listen, document all similar experiences and arrive to a conclusion that I cannot make ... So, here it

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3 makes sense after 8 years to help the intellectual whether Pagkaki X or
4 Pagkaki X [21/9/2015 assembly of Pagkaki].
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7 So, there is a need for a type of connection between those that do it and those
8 that are reflecting and dealing with it in a theoretical level. That is in general
9 complicated and problematic but maybe appropriate [21/9/2015 assembly of
10 Pagkaki].
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15 Regarding academics, however, we must also keep in mind that they are also to a
16 certain extent confined by established academic conventions.
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20 There is an issue here with academics, if for example, you get in a process of
21 telling them 'listen, we have this problem, what should we do?'. Academics,
22 come, locate the problem, report and from then on, they are not in a position to
23 suggest things for moving that way. Most often, there is a problem, so for
24 another one to be born out of it, more revisions and more issues that are going
25 to be researched again by other academics within the academic community.
26 So, it's difficult [to expect] for the academic community to enter the
27 organizations 'from below' to listen to your problems [21/9/2015 assembly of
28 Pagkaki].
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36 Indeed, this consideration echoes from a reverse perspective the limitations often
37 academics face in their efforts to be relevant while targeting academic journals.
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40 As a researcher, you are more or less confined by academic conventions: a)
41 you are addressing an academic audience, b) you are obliged to write more
42 theoretically than prescriptive, c) there is an established research process
43 pattern 'literature review-> research questions-> methodology-> analysis'
44 [4/2/2017 interview with a researcher].
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50 To sum up, participants in radical alternatives interested in 'upgrading' their
51 performance often need outside critical support to boost their integral procedures of
52 self-education/self-reflection. Sympathetic academics with all the vetted institutional -
53 cultural support that goes with it (Russell, 2015), can prove useful allies or even
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3 accomplices (Nagasawa and Swadener, 2016) while activists themselves retaining a
4 protagonistic role and guiding research towards relevant problems and practices. To
5 achieve this end, however, advancing our sensibilities as (co-)researchers and dealing
6 creatively with academic conventions is a prerequisite (Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013).
7 This is what Responsive Action Research is all about, more an approach to research
8 (design, participants and outcome) rather than a distinct methodology.
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13 **Discussion: Crafting a Responsive Action Research**

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16 So, what do we learn from [Author 1's] experience being the object of research and
17 how should this understanding inform our research? We will structure the following
18 reflections around the heading we provided in the reflections section. *In doing so,*
19 *based on the experiences above, we provide a basis for RAR. A Responsive Action*
20 *Research* ethos takes as its starting point for the research endeavour an attempt at
21 understanding the needs and interests of the research participants. Like Participant
22 Action Research (PAR) it seeks to engage with the researched as collaborators, but
23 unlike PAR it does not demand full commitment or participation by the researched.
24 Rather the emphasis of RAR is for the researcher to listen and be attentive to the
25 needs and interests of the researched, to involve them as necessary, but to be mindful
26 of the researched wider commitments and challenges as they perform their everyday
27 tasks. In this sense, it is more realistic than PAR but more inclusive and participatory
28 than conventional research.
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39 *Access*

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42 Whilst most of the academic literature focuses on the issues of access and gatekeeping
43 from the viewpoint of the researcher, little attention is focused on the experiences of
44 those at the receiving end of requests. For a small organization like Pagkaki, being
45 inundated with requests for research access can be quite common, time-consuming
46 and often get in the way of everyday activities of running the organization (it is
47 notable that this concern was echoed by many other members of new social
48 movements and civil society organizations at an EGOS Workshop that [Author 2]
49 attended). Whilst Pagkaki attempted to be accommodating, short-notice requests, or
50 requests that did not seem to understand Pagkaki (including not even having read the
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website) were more a hindrance to the aims of Pagkaki than they were supportive. For many of the researchers that have contacted Pagkaki, both students and (full-time) academics, greater appreciation of the challenges that the host organization faces when being asked to get involved in research would significantly endear the group to be sympathetic to being participants in the research.

From a RAR perspective, for researchers who are seeking to connect more strongly with practice, empathy with and an understanding of the challenges in receiving researchers into their organization, including the time this requires, would significantly aid the possibilities of acceptance. **For instance, simple things such as reading the website prior to contacting, or seeking to give sufficient time to reply to access requests, can enable the establishment of a more responsive form of research.** More significantly, however, particularly from the viewpoint of the critical ‘performative turn’, understanding and appreciation of the needs and interests of the research participants and using them as a starting point for inquiry is an important aspect of developing meaningful research. **Thus, a RAR approach, even before the research is started, seeks to anticipate the needs and interests of the researched and to be mindful of their competing commitments and interests.**

Research methodology

Whilst research methodology is usually seen as the preserve of the researcher, as our case study illustrates engaging early with the researched can be important in developing research which is both more meaningful, representative and accurate. As others have illustrated (Reedy *et al.*, 2016; The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010), members of NSM often have considerable levels of knowledge of alternative forms of organizing and even research methodologies, and utilising them can aid the development of the research project considerably by highlighting unidentified areas of interest, offering advanced level of access and enabling useful, practice-based theoretical elaborations. Acknowledging the contribution of the participants is the first step to make better use of their input and develop a lasting, mutually engaging relationship.

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3 However, while PAR forms of research (Whyte, 1991) following Freire's pedagogy
4 are ideally built for that occasion, they face considerable constraints, as well. If mere
5 participation in research projects is proven to be a demanding task in terms of human
6 resources as expressed in *Reflection 1*, co-determining objectives, design and 'active
7 participation of the community in the entire research process' (Hall, 2001 p. 173),
8 indeed seems unrealistic in terms of time allocation (Campbell, 1987; Cornwall and
9 Jewkes, 1995). Especially, since often activists, as expressed in *Available*
10 *theory/practice linking options and constraints*, fail to preconceive the prospect of
11 benefiting from academic research and tend to focus more on improving everyday
12 tactics (St. Denis, 1992).
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21 As a possible way to keep most of the benefits and minimise the discouraging aspects
22 of time pressure and coordination that in general PAR involves, this paper proposes
23 an approach that emphasizes responsiveness and adaptation instead of formal
24 deliberation and shared governance. *Responsive Action Research* (RAR) offers a more
25 pragmatic/adaptive framework (Rodje, 2009) instead of an ideal/unrealistic
26 democratic approach which is consistent with Freire's (2008 p. 210) notion that
27 'democratic educators must not nullify themselves in the name of being democratic...
28 they, must not, in the name of democracy, evade the responsibility of making
29 decisions'. However, paraphrasing Mao Tse-Tung (2015), the researcher must move
30 amongst participants as a fish swims in the sea, which is something that most critical
31 scholars debating Critical Performativity are not so good at. But, how does RAR
32 works?
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42 Insert table about here

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45 Table I introduces and summarises the similarities and differences between PAR and
46 RAR which are discussed in this section. RAR builds upon a research tradition traced
47 back at early 'practical co-operators such as William King, who derived his principles
48 from watching people trying to run co-op stores' (Birchall, 2005 p. 46). Likewise, the
49 guiding force to arrive at this paper's research questions was not a literature gap or a
50 formal participatory consultation but a *response* to problems located by the [author 1]
51 in the field. So, at first, questions arose from being open to circumstances within
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everyday interaction with the researched in the field and problems they face. Only later these issues would be situated within current academic debates by [Author 2] to expand the relevancy and outreach from solely activists to academics-potential allies, as well.

Overall, the whole research process confirmed the 'power' and contested the difficulty of staging a focus group as spotted in *Anonymity, representation and the focus group*. Instead of looking for a formal *participatory* process for identifying problems, setting objectives and seeking topical solutions, it remains community-driven by encapsulating these procedures within the standard operations of the group with the researcher simply observing/responding to their everyday schedule and not adding to it. This way, the energy required by participants is transferred to the researcher's side, slightly raising the chances of irrelevancy in favour of completion. What clearly distinguishes RAR from PAR is then that it is applied to support relevant-grounded action and theory production without formal, all-the-way participation from the researched.

On the other hand, RAR and PAR share the fact that they are difficult to be pinned down with a single/simple definition. This is exacerbated by the fact that RAR draws from PAR and (Constructivist) Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser and Strauss, 1967) their capability 'of being used flexibly and responsively' to 'develop theory grounded in specific evidence' (Dick 2007 p. 398) and thus is easily adaptable to all sorts of methodologies and research methods.

Whilst what we are arguing for RAR is more an ethos/attitude than a set methodology the following questions/steps offer a useful starting point for a researcher seeking to adopt a RAR perspective:

- As a starter, communicate your objectives and express your interest to be of help (through your research or positionality) even in the most mundane areas.
- Seek ongoing consent and make yourself available for input/suggestions even by individual members. Communicate your progress as you go for better feedback without tiring the participants.
- Identify the stated aims of the researched. What difficulties do they face to

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3 achieve them?

- 4 ● Perform a scoping review of both the academic and the activist literature. Try
5 to incorporate as much of the latter in your research. If this is not possible, be
6 prepared to offer a version/report for activists.
- 7 ● Take interviews or provide questionnaires after you have a clear idea of the
8 field and your project is finally emerging so that you get the most out of them.
- 9 ● Don't promise things you probably won't be able to deliver.
- 10 ● Don't push your provisional recommendations too hard and allow time for
11 explanation and adjustment.
- 12 ● Acknowledge the contribution of research participants and offer to be of help
13 in the future.
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21 ***Research outputs***

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24 Whilst much of the research-practitioner debate has focused on making research more
25 relevant, there has been very little in this research, particularly within the Critical
26 Management Studies domain, that examines what the research recipients actually
27 consider useful or meaningful. Our experience illustrates that what might be
28 considered useful and meaningful can encompass a wide variety of activity that might
29 not be directly related to the research undertaken (such as translating articles and thus
30 giving a group a wider audience for its work). Therefore, a RAR perspective suggest
31 an openness to what might be considered impact (from the narrow definitions that
32 operate within processes such as the Research Excellent Framework, see Learmonth
33 *et al.* (2012)), which can only really come through long-term and respectful
34 engagement.
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44 For instance, in conducting his research with Pagkaki one of the contributions that
45 [author 1] has provided back to the community with this paper has been to compile
46 scattered pieces of information spanning for years to a coherent narrative that
47 positions the problem of aligning (collective) theoretical elaboration with research
48 allies in Pagkaki. This process enables new members that have recently joined the
49 group to have an overall picture of the issues raised so far in order to take informed
50 decisions on how this processes can be stirred up and provide researchers a heads-up
51 prior to engaging with participants culminating the grounds for a mutually engaging
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3 research framework that serves the needs of the participants. We see this as one such
4 example of the type of contribution that academic researchers could engage in, first
5 understand the situation and document, then intervene/propose possible alternatives
6 and let the participants decide. Thus, from a RAR perspective being conscious,
7 throughout the whole research process of the way that research might contribute to the
8 needs and interests of the researched can support the group being studied can have
9 considerable benefits.
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15 *Exit*

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18 Whilst for the researcher leaving the field might mean the end of engaging with the
19 organization, the experience of [author 1] illustrates the importance of not closing the
20 door behind and getting a good exit from the viewpoint of the organization, as well.
21 All too often researchers have ended working with Pagkaki without offering much
22 back in terms of their research insights or conclusions, which may (or may not) aid
23 the organization's development. A RAR perspective, whilst recognising the pressures
24 to publish and other scholarly commitments, based on the experiences narrated above,
25 would stress the importance of considering the exit phrase of the research as much as
26 the challenges of gaining access to avoid leaving participants with a bitter taste of
27 being used. Being respectful of the time participants have offered requires at least
28 sharing the end result of their contribution and thanking them. For instance, RAR
29 inspired researchers might share preliminary findings with the researched (long before
30 the often slow processes of academic publication), or make research findings
31 available to a wider audience (for instance through more accessible mediums such as
32 blogs). In doing so the researcher is able to offer insights and views that are useful for
33 the long-term development of the group studied, rather than leaving the field without
34 offering a contribution back to those studied.
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48 **Conclusions**

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51 This paper argues that if academic knowledge aims at serving prefigurative projects
52 by (co-)crafting appropriate tools or theories that militants can use in their real-life
53 practices 'grasping the logic of activist practice' (Juris, 2007 p. 165) or immersion-
54 absorption (Gordon, 2007) is a fundamental starting point. A set of qualitative
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3 research designs should thus be utilized to ‘arrive at an understanding of a particular
4 phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it’ (Woodgate, 2000 p. 194).
5
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7 Research participants' acceptance of a given research project is then a fundamental,
8 central requirement connected with their own political agenda/objectives.
9 Consequently, critical scholars interested in being relevant and give back pragmatic
10 aid are advised to align into one coherent strategy participants' political and
11 researcher's academical research objectives (Pain and Francis, 2003). Only through
12 such a methodological strategy theoretical abstractions like Critical Performativity
13 can materialize.
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20 Activists' need of another pair of hands to help with the everyday mundanities of
21 practical organizing (The Autonomous Geographies Collective, 2010) can be a
22 starting point for developing relations of understanding and over time trust decisive
23 for meaningful theories to emerge. Indeed, paying more attention to the specific
24 needs/nature of such organizations and retaining a healthy/productive relationship is a
25 crucial prerequisite that can prove a tentative and demanding task.
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31 Given the widely-acknowledged need for self-reflection inside social movements, we
32 also propose militants to experiment in working with allies inside academia with
33 cautiously, collectively designed procedures and criteria that will protect them from
34 harm, co-optation and wasting time.
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39 This paper was thus written as a contribution that will hopefully aid both scholars and
40 social movements adopt more appropriate research designs and establish solidararian
41 relations. By utilizing [author's 1] experience as both a research participant and a
42 militant-researcher to voice research participants' interests, we hope that we have
43 provided some useful insights that can be further elaborated by fellow researchers and
44 activists.
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