Handelingsonderzoek als exemplarisch leren
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Summary

The object of this book is to extend action-research from a way of carrying out investigation to a methodology for an emancipatory social-scientific research programme. Given this objective, it follows that all sorts of elements which belong in various scientific disciplines must be brought into relation with, and geared to each other.

In the various chapters of the book, questions arise of a scientific-theoretical, methodological and methodical-technical nature. Equally, the relationship between theory and practice of scientific research, so important for action-research is also given attention. The book comprises four parts.

Part I A first basis of exemplary action-research
In this first part, attention is focused on the work of Freire and Negt. Both are of great importance in the development of exemplary action-research, particularly with regards to the early stages.

Chapter 1 deals with the work of Paulo Freire. In the design of his conceptions, marxist and phenomenological elements are intermingled. As regards exemplary action-research, important elements in his work are the way in which he sees research as a learning-process, the phasing which he applies to his thematic research and the discrimination of themes. Also important is his conception that the relation between researcher and those being investigated must be a subject-subject relationship and not that of subject-object.

Chapter 2 is comparable to the approach employed in the previous chapter as it concerns the work of Oskar Negt in as far as it relates to exemplary learning. Negt advocates a form of open Marxism. He is not concerned with questions regarding the organization of research as such. An important notion for exemplary action-research is the mutual involvement of reflection and action; acting is necessary in order to let new knowledge sink in. He also brings learning processes into political context. He brings adult education into conjunction with the trade union and seeks in this political context for exemplary themes which are a reflection of the surrounding social context. Although in his proposals for exemplary learning, Negt has no universal pretentions, he has evoked a general theoretical discussion, amongst other things, concerning the connection between experience and theory.

Part II Proposal for a research-model of exemplary action-research
In this part, I not only indicate what, in my opinion, a sensible model of action-research is, but I also deal with existing literature concerning this type of research. In this respect, with particular regard to as clear as possible a definition of objectives and characteristics of this research. The influence of Freire and Negt on the research-model in the form in which it eventually emerged, is clear to see from this. A further definition of a number of methodological tenets at issue follows in the next part.

In chapter 3, I present a first definition of theme and example and I show the model of exemplary action-research. I compare this model with other proposals for the structure of social-scientific research: the empirical cycle of De Groot and the regulative cycle of Van Strien. Subsequently I offer a first material descrip-
tion, of successively, the theme phase, the crystallization phase and the exemplary phase. The intention of this model is to arrive at as concrete as possible a definition of the objective of research and at the same time to keep an eye open for the social dynamic which can change the given objectives. Resulting changes can be discounted in the model.

In chapter 4, attention is focused on objectives and characteristics of variants of practical, problem-solving research, such as those which are dealt with in social-scientific literature. This leads to a further determination of objectives and characteristics of exemplary action-research and to a redefinition of exemplary action-research as a whole.

Part III A theoretical social-scientific basis of exemplary action-research

In this chapter, another exercise is carried out: the theoretical completion of exemplary action-research as a research programme, and the further structural development of a number of important social-scientific subjects, which occur in relation to questions and problems which arise when one attempts to approach action-research following the model and the objectives of exemplary action-research as described in part II. It becomes clear that the structuration-theory can complement the research programme of exemplary action-research. This is particularly so in that the structuration-theory can enlighten epistemological and methodological problems which exemplary action-research finds itself confronted with.

Chapter 5 consists of a presentation of the structuration-theory, which has enjoyed, in the last few years, a growing social-scientific interest. After a description of the orthodox consensus in the social sciences, against which the structuration-theory profiles, there follows an account of the premisses of the structuration-theory which, in my opinion, are important for the structuration-theory itself and for the methodology of exemplary action-research. The most important presuppositions in this context are those which relate to the nature of the objective of the social-sciences and to the view of society implied therein. Subsequent to these premisses, I attempt to give a brief summary of the structuration-theory and I explain the first basic connections between structuration-theory and social-scientific research.

In chapter 6, I highlight in particular the meaning of the structuration-theory for social science and the methodology of social-scientific research. Beginning with the observation that the orthodox consensus has never been completely absolute, I try to sketch an historical line in the thought concerning social-scientific research between social scientists of the interpretative breed, such as Schutz and Cicourel, and the disciples of the structuration-theory. I give concrete form to the line at two cardinal points for the organization of social-scientific research, the relation between objectivity and engagement and between validity and adequacy. At the end of the chapter, I investigate further the relationship between structuration-theory and exemplary action-research.

Chapter 7 is devoted entirely to the relationship between researcher and those being investigated. Many problems and developments in this subject come together when one is engaged in exemplary action-research, hence the fact that it has a chapter to itself. I try to extend the more general and theoretical deductions of the previous chapter to concrete research-relationships. In addition, I have felt
duty-bound to supply new information concerning the points at which the strucutration-theory shows gaps when seen from research practice. It concerns firstly a subject important for the practical structure of the research: the discourse-theory, whereby Habermas and Moser in particular are dealt with. Secondly, it deals with questions concerning the scientific forum: who is competent with regard to problems posed in social-scientific research? The central theme: both researcher and those under investigation must make the best possible use of the diversity in vision and perception, based on difference in position.

Part IV A practical-research basis: reconstruction of an exemplary action-research project

The last part is devoted entirely to the research-practice of a completed investigation. As the title of this part indicates, the reconstruction of a completed investigation has for me the function of a practical-research basis for the proposed research programme. The term reconstruction gains with that a content which varies from that which is usually meant and which is summarized by Bayertz [1980, 15] as follows: „the elimination of all theories in which the propositions are shown, by experience, to be without, or without sufficient support and of which the empirical significance is therefore in doubt”.

The reconstruction which is offered, has, in the first place, a methodological function whereby the accent lies on the production process in which scientific facts are arrived at, bearing in mind the nature of the research-programme described. My first point of interest in this context concerns the actions of researchers and those under investigation, the vision which they employ in research, the methods and the research strategy. The object is to gain sight of the actual research-practice and the relevant changes and inconsistencies which occur in the course of the research.

Besides this methodological function, there is also a more theoretically-based reason to resort to reconstruction in establishing a research model such as exemplary action-research. This type of investigation requires a practical-research basis due to the theoretical conception concerning the context-bound character of science and research. On the one hand, the research context will always have to be indicated as the research results will never be able to withdraw completely from this context. On the other hand, reconstruction of research carried out can clearly indicate the more general features of the investigation.

In addition, the reconstruction also has a ‘forum function’, not so much as to judge the chosen research (the earlier issued research-reports serve this function) but to make easier the indication and pin-pointing of weak points which have remained in the elaboration of the research-programme presented in this book. As a reconstruction, I have chosen an investigation carried-out at the transport concern of Van Gend en Loos, and this for various reasons. The first is that the model of exemplary action-research assumed its present form, as presented in this book, during this investigation. In addition, due to my personal involvement in this research, I am well acquainted the project. A third reason is that the investigation dates from the first phase of development of exemplary action-research: with relevance to exemplary action-research there were no problems partly or completely solved, with the result that all types of things which can give rise to problems in connection with exemplary action-research can be dealt with here.
The functions which the reconstruction must fulfil have demanded a very detailed report of the research occurrences. Only by a minute description of the actual proceedings can it become clear how much the constant recognition of those under investigation, as fellow-researchers, demands a very flexible attitude from the investigators, due to the influence of all kinds of current processes. Constant evaluation and the relevant adjustment are more or less the only stable ‘techniques’ in this respect.

A detailed approach has also been chosen, because only in this way can the personal evaluations of success and failure in this reconstruction be put to criticism.

Chapter 8 concerns the theme phase of the investigation. In this section important topics are: the development a relationship of confidence with those concerned, the settling into the social situation and the problems presented.

The research into the themes is described: the collection and analysis of data is dealt with in the search for themes.

In chapter 9 the crystallization phase is considered. The investigation is directed towards further analysis of data from the first phase, but especially the choice of an example from the available themes.

The further analysis takes place at the beginning of this phase. The discussion between researcher and those under investigation is then a validation strategy.

Accordingly, thought then centres on the choice of an example and concerns the discussion of the proposed choice and the relevant work-plan. At the start of this chapter, I direct attention towards the assumption of a definitive form for the research-model as a whole and the crystallization phase in particular.

In conclusion, the exemplary phase is described in chapter 10. The chosen example in this investigation concerns the relationship between the trade union group and the works council of Van Gend en Loos. With respect to the example, specific changes are carried through and evaluated. This whole process is observed and assessed: how problems related to the execution of the work-plan lead to its adjustment, and what the results of these changes are. Finally, the further course of the research is briefly described as is how it reached its conclusion.