

# **Utilizing participative action research with storytelling interventions to create sustainability in Danish Farming**

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## **Abstract**

We explain how Participatory Action Research (PAR) and storytelling methods have been used to create a new intersubjective awareness of sustainability potential among a group of farmers in Denmark. We asked the following intervention question: How can PAR be combined with storytelling to create new intersubjective perceptions about farmers' sustainability in their daily work life? The question of creating voluntary democratic participation was crucial for all stakeholders in this project. Through a storytelling 'futures workshop' concept the need for a new story about the industry was acknowledged and initiated to make choice of a non-status quo future. In this process, we utilized PAR to create new beliefs about being part of a sustainable food production. The participants decided to co-author a counternarrative to the dominant political economy narrative about agriculture in Denmark. First, we contribute an understanding of the difference between PAR and AR. PAR develops collective storytelling approach, whereas AR stays with the intervenor's narrative. Our second contribution is to overcome several shortcomings of the triple-bottom line approach. In particular, we developed metrics and objectives to flex out the people and planet aspects, rather than the usual reductions of these to profit metrics.

**Keywords:** Storytelling, Sensemaking, Prejudices, Positioning, Ownership, Participatory Action Research, Sustainability, Social Symbiosis

## Introduction

The aim of this project was to use Participative Action Research (PAR) (Reason & Bradbury, 2008) and storytelling intervention methods (Boje, 1991) in an Organization Development (OD) process that potentially creates a new interorganizational awareness about sustainability for a local group of farmers in Denmark. We focused on collective storytelling interventions that could change mindsets and perceptions of sustainability among a group of Danish farmers.

We follow Flyvbjerg (2010) in challenging the usefulness of retrospective narrative interviews in producing an adequate collection of real storytelling dynamics for a non-participative, external, ‘action researcher’s’ toolkit. Therefore, our field material for this paper is a series of PAR workshops held in 2018 with a group of Danish farmers, in which ‘conversational storytelling sessions’ was a novel approach to PAR. When trying to understand the field of OD in a specific change context to understand dysfunctions and/or goals of interorganizational systems, we offer the field an alternative to the earlier praxis that has been a more functional approach to improve the effectiveness of a particular organization and its people. This study offers an alternative to the traditional approach and introduces the Action Research philosophy to the organization to enable practitioners adopt new approaches in Organization Development that are much more dynamic and interorganizational in nature.

This paper draws on a phenomenological, hermeneutic understanding framework and the dialog tradition within action research (Alrø & Hansen, 2017; Berger & Luchmann, 1971; Bourdieu, 2008; Coghlan & Brannick, 2010; Gadamer, 2013; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Recognizing that a knowledge of science and a knowledge of practice are different issues is not to say that the two stand in opposition to each other; rather, they complement one another (Van De Ven, 2007, p.3). This case study (Flyvbjerg, 2010) focuses on interaction-driven research with a group of farmers. Doing scientific work in a somewhat emotionally vulnerable, loosely connected group requires more than merely copying methodological blueprints from textbooks; it also entails applying research methods in the complex settings of the social world—settings characterized by fear and insecurity (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p.57).

The structure of the presentation is as follows: We begin with some theory background to our interpretation of PAR with storytelling interventions, in particular conversational storytelling, and prospective sensemaking. We then describe the methods of the intervention and conclude with how the approach has a potential to overcome difficulties with Triple Bottom Line versions of sustainable development.

### **From Action Research to Participative Action Research**

The essence of OD is normally to increase organizational effectiveness through planned interventions in the organization's 'processes,' using knowledge of behavioral science (Beckhard, 1969). This is mostly important in present day organizations due to rapidly changing environment; hence the ability to manage change is indispensable. In order to enhance OD, this study attempt to encourage members in an organization to expand their knowledge, awareness and experience with colleagues to the develop new images of the organization. This method has been shown to improve work relationship among workers and increase personal and organizational goals at the long run. Failure in this approach can also help these workers to understand possible reasons for the failure and employ meaningful strategies in light of this understanding to improve personal and organizational goals (Nielsen, 1984).

When we normally work with OD we focus to increase organization effectiveness through planned interventions in the organization's 'processes,' using behavioral-science knowledge (Beckhard, 1969, p.9), but we don't do it as planned and managed from the top, as Beckhard asserted. Today's organizations operate in a rapidly changing environment and consequently, the most important assets for an organization is the ability to manage change. Our perspective to OD is an attempt to influence the members of an organization to expand their own awareness with each other about their views of the organization and their experience in it. The assumption behind our organization changes it is that when people pursue both of these objectives simultaneously, they are likely to discover new ways of working together that they experience as more effective for achieving their own and their shared goals about sustainable agriculture. And when this does not happen, story making by action research helps them to understand why and to make meaningful choices about what to do in light of this understanding (Nielsen, 1984, p.2). Furthermore, in order to achieve PAR, researchers need to participate or

take action by sharing stories with the participants, instead of pretending not to be involved and unbiased about the situation under discussion.

When we as researchers are so privileged as to be invited into an organization, it is crucial that we behave respectfully and ethically (Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2018). Here, respectfulness means that we sincerely try to listen to the actors' stories about participating in the organization. How is everyday life experienced by the individual subject, and what problems are in play? A very widespread approach to research in social contexts is action research, which connects practice with more theoretical approaches to research in social contexts. For many of the farmer participants in this study, PAR is not only a completely new approach to change and learning but also a new image of what research can be. PAR is as much a philosophy of life as it is a method, a feeling as much as a conviction (Fals-Borda, 1997, p. 111). PAR is a process in which professionals and social researchers operate as full collaborators with other group members. While a complete review of differences between PAR and current modes of AR (without much participation) is beyond the scope of this article, we do observe that contemporary AR has moved away from full participation of the researcher-intervenors.

Storytelling dynamics is also an emergent process in which participants change their hypotheses, aims, and interpretations as the process of more or less participation develops (Greenwood, Whyte, & Harkavy, 1993, p. 3; Kristiansen & Bloch-Poulsen, 2018, p. 131). PAR is an ongoing learning process and a research approach that emphasizes co-learning, participation and organizational transformation (Greenwood et al., 1993; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). As Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 5) claim, there are three key elements of PAR: democratic involvement, action and real participative research. Action research can also be used to understand a phenomenon by trying to change elements within it, without active forms of participation (Bargal, 2006; Burnes, 2004). The actual approach to PAR is based on a participatory methodology, implying a dialectical tradition of democratic involvement and real influence (Bargal, 2006, p. 379). PAR emphasizes collective inquiry, action and experimentation grounded in actual experience of praxis, and it is not a monolithic set of ideas and methods but rather a pluralistic orientation toward knowledge creation and real social change (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). As professionals, researchers can create a balance of support through a variety of actions, including providing direct feedback, reflecting in written form, pointing out comparable

cases, and citing cases from the professional literature where similar problems, opportunities, or processes have occurred (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 125).

## **Storytelling Theory Background**

It has been recognized in prior research of managers and researchers working with OD, storytelling is an essential and critical skill, to attract, hold and keep the involved employed focused and engaged in OD (Davidson, 2016). Since storytelling is fundamental to all cultures and societies, and we have told stories for thousands of years, we can change the way we look at the world. Storytelling is therefore a critical skill that managers and researchers need to learn if they wish to have success with OD. Each of us can likely identify one or more stories that we found to be so well told that they held us enthralled (Davison, 2016). One interesting aspect of storytelling is that identity can be explored through the stories we tell about ourselves (Sparre 2020A).

We use retrospective storytelling to make sense of our being in the world, which we call sensemaking (Weick, 2009) or common sense (Schutz, 2005, p. 27). The underlying emphasis of retrospection on reflexivity and the belief that storytelling is an active process of summation where we represent an aspect of our lives (Hyland, 2018). Our storytelling relationships (dominant narratives, living stories, retrospective and prospective sensemaking standpoints) are never “pure” but are framed by language, discourse, culture and power (Boje & Jørgensen, 2014).

While storytelling is considered the preferred sensemaking modality of people in organizations (Boje, 1991; Sparre, 2016), there is some controversy about the relation of retrospective and prospective sensemaking. Retrospective narrative sensemaking has begun to incorporate prospective sensemaking (Weick, 2009 (1995)). Karl Weick originally defined narrative retrospective sensemaking as: “typically searching for a causal chain”, “the plot follows - either the sequence beginning-middle-end or the sequence situation-transformation-situation. The problem with retrospective sensemaking is it does not give adequate attention to how new situations arise that do not fit past patterns. Recently Weick (2012) has recognized the value of antenarrative processes of prospective sensemaking thereby extending his pioneering work retrospective narrative sensemaking. For Boje (2001) and Weick (2012) it is the assemblage of

antenarrative ‘bets on the future’ in prospective sensemaking. A prospective sensemaking storytelling approach provides reflexivity grounded in common sense (Schutz, 2005). It allows a questioning of the received narrative identity of our lives (Hyland, 2018). Some western narrative approaches reduce storytelling to hide the identities of storytellers (Bamberg & Georgeakopoulos, 2008).

Several narrative theorists assert that analyzing stories told by people about themselves gives clear and meaningful understanding of the storytellers’ lives (Hyland, 2018). However, alternative storytelling theory, which is rooted in Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK), depicts stories told at a specific place, time, and aliveness in the community (Kaylynn, 1997, 2000; Kaylynn & Kolan, 2016; Rosile, 2016). There is an inseparably intertwined Western Ways of Knowing (WWOK) in our narratives of dominant culture, and the IWOK living stories of local communities, despite WWOK’s preference for retrospective narrative sense-making of storytelling and IWOK’s preference for prospective sensemaking (Antenarrative processes) of storytelling. Although the relationships of storytelling framed by language, discourse, culture and power are never ‘pure’ (Boje & Jørgensen, 2014), this has brought light to the importance of Antenarrative processes in sensemaking and interpretative work (Weick, 2012).

## **The Intervention Methods**

We assume that every person in the Danish farming group is unique and possesses his or her own subjective lifeworld (Schutz, 2005). We let the subjects help define a common experience of reality in the form of an intersubjective understanding (Crossley, 1996) of, for example, the farming industry, which they define and possess in common. The subjects have thus partly created a picture of farming based on their own lifeworld’s, which, unfortunately, may later function to limit their own ideas. Scharmer writes: *"Thoughts create organizations and so can organizations keep people locked"* (Scharmer, 2010, p. 62). Berger and Luckmann (1971) argue that all knowledge is socially constructed, which does not mean that all knowledge is equally valid. Each individual participant had a unique perception of Danish farming, and these images can be difficult to change, but working together in this action research project can create opportunities for a new intersubjective understanding. Bakhtin uses the metaphor of a carnival,

where it was legitimate to be submitted to parody, mockery and laughter, to indicate instances and places that have allowed new innovative language to emerge. This kind of celebration is very spontaneous and different from an official party in which everything was said to be stable, immutable and stubborn (Bakhtin in Vice, 1997, p. 149). We see our workshops as a carnival in which new stories can be told.

In order to do PAR, we contend that the researchers, need to share stories, back and forth with the participants, instead of pretending to be some kind of non-involved, unbiased, bystander to the situation. To be a participant in the storytelling community means to be engaged, to be part of the storytelling organization dynamic events of the intervention unfolding. According to storytelling organization theory, storytelling is the preferred sensemaking modality of people in organizations (Boje, 1991, p.106). Our conversational storytelling interviewing approach is strongly inspired by (PAR), which has its roots in research in communities that emphasize participation and action in social contexts (Freire, 1970/2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 31). Specifically, we challenge the social science practice of semi-structured interviewing as a practice which based on the Hawthorne study findings, should have been abandoned, in favor of conversational interviewing approaches (Roethlisberger, Dickson, Wright, & Pforzheimer, 1939). Elton Mayo initiated in the Hawthorne studies in 1929, after 1600 interviews, changed their interviewing method from semi-structured and structured interviews they called the ‘direct approach to questioning’ to the ‘indirect approach’ in which people told their accounts and stories, without interruption, without trying to herd the conversation back to some a priori topics and sub-topic themes (Roethlisberger, Dickson, Wright, & Pforzheimer, 1939, p. 203).

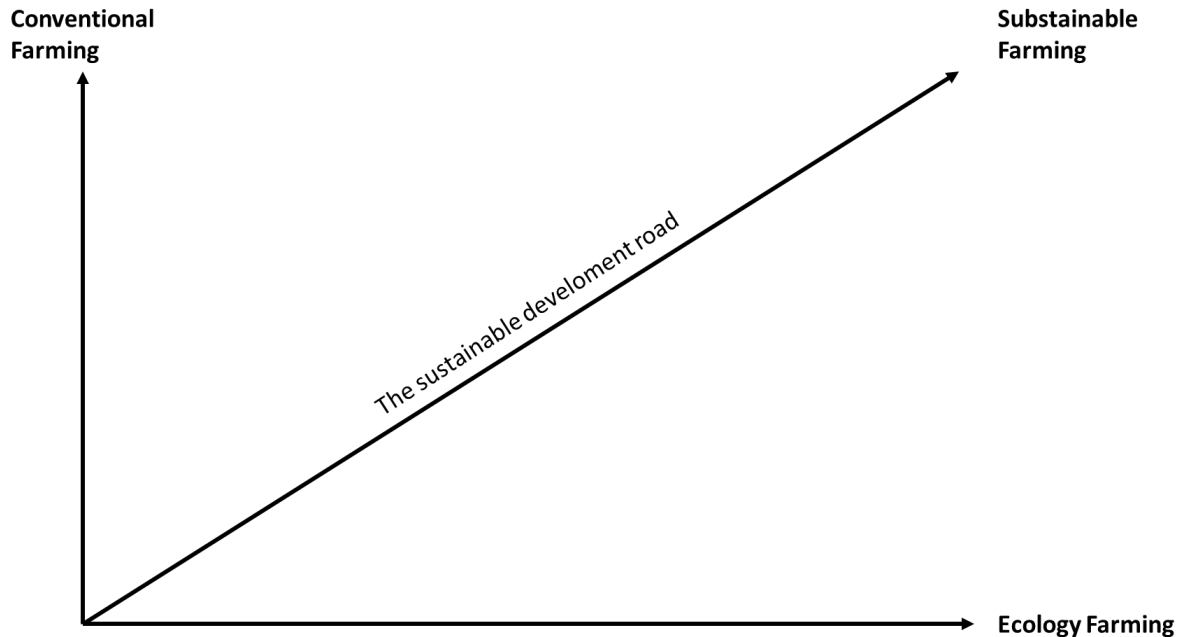
### **Storytelling Intervention for the Danish Farmers**

The participants in this case were a group of independent farmers and farmer-researchers from Seges, which is a Danish Research Institute funded by Danish farmers. The participants did not constitute a specific organization as the project began, and it was not our intention to create one. In so doing, all the participants were co-researchers in the project. We therefore assumed it crucial to have both the farmers and the researchers, and facilitators of the event, to do storytelling from their all’s own lifeworld.



**Figure 1.**

**An illustration of Conventional farming contra Ecology Farming and Sustainable farming**



Many farmers find it difficult to separate sustainable farming from controlled ecology farming. At figure 1, we try to make an illustration to show the three unique positions of farming in Denmark. Greenpeace has seven principles of controlled ecological farming (Tirado, 2015):

1. Food sovereignty,
2. Benefitting farmers and rural communities,
3. Smart food production and yields,
4. Biodiversity and diverse seed systems,
5. Sustainable soil health and cleaner water,
6. Ecological pest protection, and
7. Climate resilient food production.

The common narratives on Danish agriculture assert that ecologists are the good guys and that conventional producers are the bad guys as their agricultural activity is believed to

pollute the environment unnecessarily. A counternarrative asked the following questions: Is ecology farming always sustainable for our society? What happens if efforts are made to make conventional farming more sustainable? Seges Agriculture & Food is working with Aalborg University to create new stories about how conventional farmers can be sustainable producers of agricultural goods without organic production.

All the participants were co-researchers in the project, and the inability to control the results of a PAR project may result in great uncertainty for all stakeholders involved (Sparre, 2016). The participants were a group of independent farmers and farmer-researchers from Seges, but they do not constitute a specific storytelling organization. Rather, evolving one was our intervention focus. We therefore assumed it crucial to have both the farmers and the researchers, and facilitators of the event, to do storytelling from their own standpoints. The participants were invited to engage in some group work related to sustainability in Danish farming. Many farmers find it difficult to separate sustainable farming from controlled ecology farming.

In our case, we invited some proactive and influential farmers to participate, and together with farmer-researchers from the farmer research department, Seges, we arranged one eight-hour workshop and 3 four-hour workshops. From the four workshops, the resultant four groups held working meetings with self-chosen topics that were selected from the future workshop concept.

PAR is a cyclical process, and between the workshops collected we feedback which was used to arrange the next workshop. In and between the workshops there were collective dialectical reflections processes. The epistemology and ontology of action research are based on the fact that we, as individuals, are connected to each other and can be recognized as social beings only by virtue of the presence of others. Opinions are something we create with others. This interconnected, dynamic relationship of unique life values is more complex than any of the reduced theories we have available. A lifeworld is the life we live in our natural setting, and it can never in itself become an object for us; on the contrary, the lifeworld is the pregiven basis for all experience (Gadamer, 2013, p. 235). The lifeworld is an individual world, but it includes an intersubjective element that is shared with other subjects. Thus, we are integral components of each other's lifeworld. One can therefore perceive the participants as competent experts in their own everyday working life. This understanding of organizational members means that they must be perceived as actors who think and act independently. We can only truly understand these

loosely coupled connections (Weick, 2009) when we come to know them and influence them by our mere presence. Working together with a field of local co-researchers does not mean that a researcher therefore becomes part of the field or “one of the herd.” It is important that researchers continue to be a kind of guest or “friendly outsider” throughout their action research simply because, as researchers, they have concrete insight into social processes and action research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 54).

## **Our opportunity**

Changes in a group of farmers’ perceptions about their own praxis requires change in their acknowledgement of the need for real change in their daily lives. When we work with action research and take our role as a co-researcher seriously, it may seem a little contradictory to set up a specific research question before starting the action research case study. In this case, we transformed our research question into an opportunity. We therefore asked the following question about the approach we selected for our research: *How can action research be utilized to create new intersubjective perceptions about farmers' sustainability in their daily work life?*

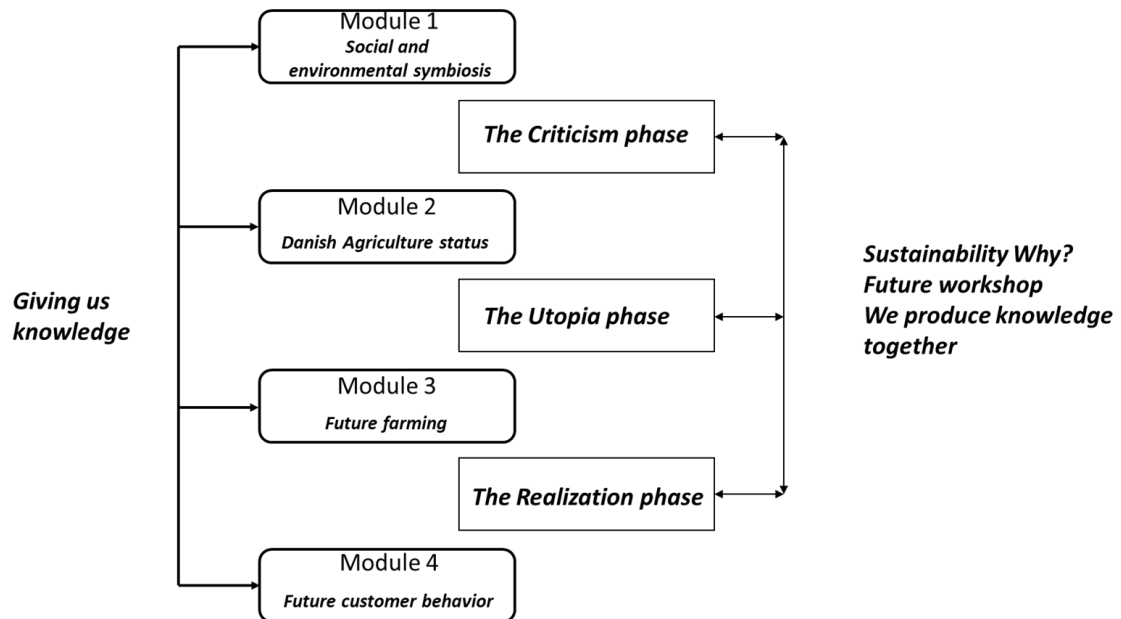
## **How did we organize the process?**

The group of participants had a very broad range of professional interests and backgrounds. There were representatives of consumer organizations, environmental interests, production environments, farmers and researchers. All of these groups have different interests and power relations within the farming industry, and the participants represented different interests, each with their own agendas to promote. We could not ignore the fact that there were a large number of researchers in the group who were considering the issues from an educational standpoint and offering technical insights; therefore, through dialog, we constantly worked to downplay the researchers' roles and input. Of course, this is not always successful, but the researchers’ power (Foucault, 1980) was reduced through the group formation, where we actively ensured that the dialogs could grow. Thus, no researchers were involved in the working meetings that took place between our workshops. The Seges researchers also had the opportunity to present their work on sustainability, and by doing so, they influenced all the co-researchers. During the full-day workshop, we introduced the co-researchers to the basic principles of the action research approach to change the common-sense perception of what it means to be a farmer in Denmark.

**Figure 2.**

The agenda of the first workshop. We changed the module between learning elements and participating workshops.

## Kick-off workshop



The agenda was divided into modules where external speakers presented their own theories and current perception of agriculture in Denmark and Europe. Between these modules, the participants themselves had to produce new insights, and we began with the three-phase future workshop concept (Figure 2): the critical phase, the utopia phase and the realization phase (Jungk & Müllert, 1987). Each group worked through the three phases and presented their work in a plenary session.

## From knowledge consumers to knowledge creators

Most of the co-researchers in this project were not accustomed to producing knowledge. The changes in personal organizational paradigms 'from knowledge customer to knowledge creator' we're not without frustrations among the co-researchers. Going from reactive to proactive is a complicated process that takes time, and all participants must be very patient in that process

(Sparre, 2020A). The changes in personal organizational paradigms from knowledge customer to knowledge creator were not without frustrations among the co-researchers. Going from reactive to proactive is a complicated process that takes time, and all participants must be very patient in that process. Learning is commonly done through practice, and this often includes someone presenting a good example for learners to subsequently reflect on. Learning from best practice is a widely used form of learning in Danish agriculture (Rasmussen, 2019). There is therefore a major paradigm shift involved when learners must create their own new knowledge (Eikeland, 2012). Many of the participants found this conversion process difficult. The fact that nothing happened if they did not do something themselves was, for many, a daunting challenge. For a long time, many of the participants have obtained the necessary competencies through the knowledge organization, Seges. Therefore, the belief that they could produce valuable knowledge themselves, and the confidence that comes with that, was not customary among the participants. During most of the process, several of the participants had difficulty with the fact that they were not presented with proposals and ready-made solutions. We heard questions such as the following: *What should emerge from all this group work and talk?*

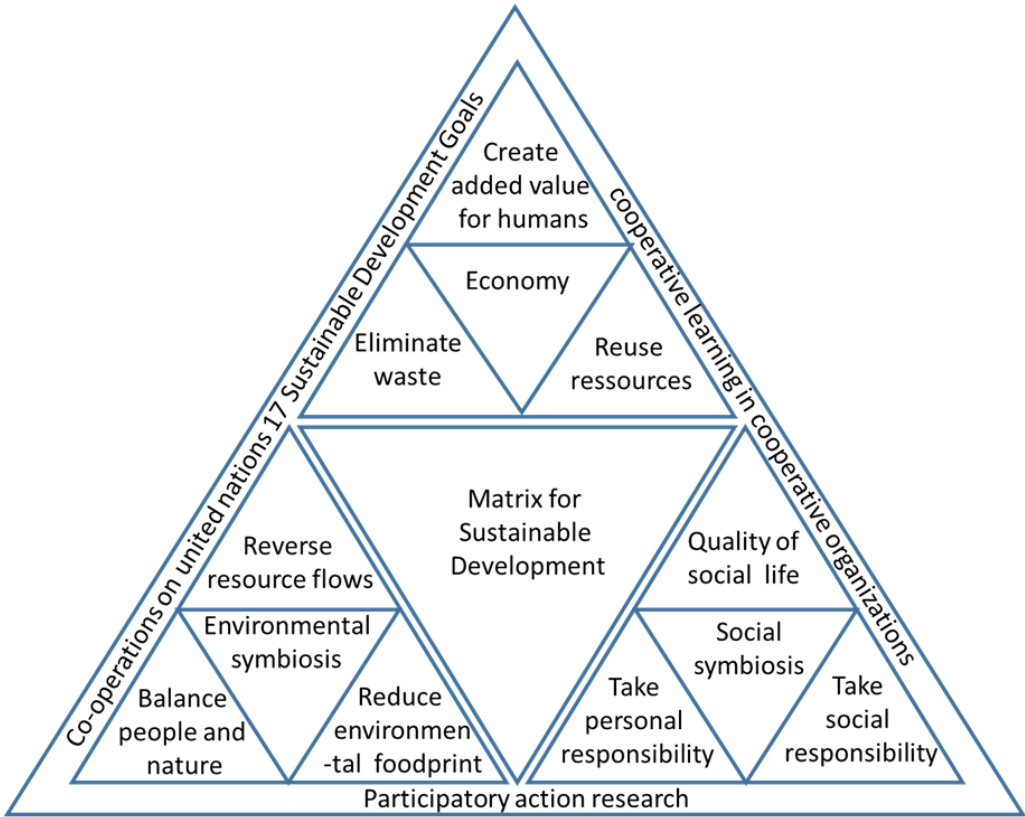
## **Our hopes for a new story about sustainable farming**

Several of the researchers from Seges have worked with and tried to disseminate a new agenda for sustainability. A Danish version of Figure 3, showing a matrix of how we can understand sustainable development in agriculture, was presented to the co-researchers. Some co-researchers were skeptical, but the model was a good example of the knowledge the Seges researchers and other co-researchers brought to the discussion.

The sustainability matrix in Figure 3 is based on three basic principles that require cocreation, transparency and systemic thinking about agricultural organizations. At the first workshop, four groups were formed, each of them choosing which themes they would work with between the four workshops. The topics included animal welfare, sustainability, rewriting of the story of Danish agriculture and a new definition of sustainability in agriculture, among many others. Industrial symbiosis can be seen as a subset of industrial ecology and is a network of diverse organizations or partners that can foster eco-innovation and long-term culture change, create and share mutually profitable transactions and improve business and technical processes for all

involved (Lombardi & Laybourn, 2012). One group’s waste product is another group’s raw materials.

**Figure 3.**  
Matrix inspired, modified and translated from co-researchers in the actual action research project with Seges (Nielsen & Bisp, 2018).



For many years, a company affiliated with Danish agriculture, ARLA, considered whey to be a waste product from cheese production, and today, ARLA earns more money from using whey than it does from producing milk for consumers. Today, organizations must take social responsibility for their business, and in doing so, they should consider social symbiosis. Understanding the skills and resources that different people have and utilizing these for everyone's common benefit constitute social symbiosis. Everyone can contribute, but not everyone can contribute immediately. Danish agriculture actors must learn to work proactively with the resources available.

**Table 1.**

## Content analysis (Elo S. & Kyngas H. 2008)

Nr.	Source	Types of data	Type of use
8	Danish Farmers own work	Reports and interviews	Observations
6	The steering group	Reports and interviews	Dialogs
4	18 farms and 6 consultants	Story creating	Workshops
2	Danish Farmers own work	Flip overs notes	Dialogs and analyze
4	Taped during process	Electronic	Transcriptions
3	The steering group	PowerPoints	Dialogs

## Input in the storytelling process

One of the four working groups in the project chose to work on creating a new story for the future of the agricultural field. The group wanted to change normal Danes' perceptions of Danish agriculture. It was also important for the group that they give the many employees in the industry a new narrative about one possible future. The group worked for four months, culminating with a presentation at the third workshop. Excerpts from the presentation are below (*the presentation was in Danish, so the text included here is our translation*). The co-researchers from Seges presented a definition of sustainable development in agriculture:

*Sustainable development on a farm is a management strategy for operational planning and action with the aim of constantly improving the living conditions of the owners, employees, population and environment. Two guiding principles indicate the direction of the agricultural sectors' efforts for sustainable development. Agriculture must produce competitive goods for human consumption, animal feed, energy production and materials, while also doing the following:*

*Guiding principle 1: Agriculture is constantly working to reduce its resource intensity and environmental impact by producing the same goods (eco-efficiency).*

*Guiding principle 2: Agriculture is constantly working to reduce its negative impacts and increase its positive consequences for farm employees and the population as a whole (socioefficiency).*

The product from the co-researcher workgroups resulted in a number of concrete proposals for changing the language surrounding Danish agriculture. The many topics from the future workshop concept thus initiated the working groups' subsequent production of new elements to rewrite the reputation of Danish agriculture. In Table 2, we see some elements useful for changing our language about Danish agriculture. Wittgenstein (1953/2009) talks about creating and recognizing our world through our language.

**Table 2.**

**The co-researchers' material for a new narrative of Danish agriculture**

*'Prepared by a group of farmers, advisors and employees at Seges as part of an action research project on 'Growth with sustainability'.*

The classic narrative of Danish agriculture	The new narrative of Danish agriculture
High food and delivery security	Local production and marketing
High quality	Ecology
High transparency at all stages of production	Animal welfare
Security throughout the value chain	Health (for consumers)
	Economic sustainability
	Environmental sustainability
	Social sustainability

The co-researchers began creating a new language about farming in Denmark, and they produced the following (our translation):

*We dream that tomorrow's agriculture is diverse and that all organizations work on a common agenda. A common agenda where sustainability is the goal across sizes, operations and forms of production. In the future, this means the following for all agricultural organizations:*

- *We are trying to leave the globe in a better condition than we found it in.*
- *All organizations in Danish agriculture are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable.*
- *All agricultural organizations have a sustainability profile where we measure and report on our sustainable development.*
- *We have a common language on sustainability in our profession.*



- *We take joint responsibility and create committed communities for sustainable initiatives across consumers, agriculture, authorities and politicians.*
- *We are in an open and transparent profession that creates experiences and close relationships with our citizens by inviting them into our organizations and the nature that we manage.*
- *We regain the joy and pride of agriculture and pass it on.*

## **Action Research Results**

Action research is applied research, i.e., an organizational strategy or development process, without being descriptive and without real, basic research (Brøgger & Eikeland, 2009, p. 16). Schutz (2005) focuses specifically on understanding, through intersubjectivity, how we, in our own lifeworld's, understand each other. Our co-researchers in this project gained a common new intersubjective understanding of the challenge that Danish farming is facing. Despite all the successes, we also learned how important it is to be aware of the process of gaining project members (Sparre 2020B, p.182). Despite our effort to invite as many different stakeholders as possible, some of the participants voiced a request for additional critical members to be included in the group. Moreover, the participants were not sufficiently informed about and instructed on the work required for participation. The unfortunate result was a large number of participants dropping out of the project.

Although all the participants proved to be important for working on the challenges of agriculture, those who did not adapt well to the form of work quickly found excuses to be absent. When we work collaboratively, as we do in action research, it is crucial that we ensure an expectation of reconciliation. We must work proactively to define the expected resource consumption, and importantly, we must ensure that there is an appropriate distribution of knowledge and power in the processes. We learned in this process that the onboarding process is very important. It is also very important that the people invited into a project are used to working in a more involved way or are willing to do so. Project members should want to embark on the journey from being knowledge consumers to being knowledge creators. This part was unfortunately neglected in this project.

## **Findings and concluding remarks**

Action research work and reports are often called “storytelling”, which is a dismissive attempt to disregard or discount the general knowledge gained from an action research study (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p 67). The process of action research involves understanding the world as the participants have come to understand it and facilitating their understanding and choices about change as well as attempting to create new realities through communicative processes such as dialog (Friedman & Rogers, 2009, p. 33). Regardless of the significant research results of action research, it has long been a less widely accepted approach to research. However, in this case, we wanted to work proactively by involving stakeholders in their own lifeworld’s, and we were aware that the participants were socialized into contexts with other people. These socializations create a unique lifeworld, which is a way to conceive of the subject's unique life experience.

That we succeeded in creating new stories and visions of the future of Danish agriculture through this project is of course a good result. That we created suggestions for a new story through this project is not the same as succeeding in creating a new story in Danish agriculture. The research unit at Seges, which is now working on spreading the new understanding through various publications, will do further work on spreading the new vision. Many of our participants told us that they now have a much more nuanced view of the concept of sustainability. Obtaining explicit definitions of the concept while also considering ecology as an option rather than as an enemy, has also been of great importance. The participants who remained until the end were those who could see the possibilities and opportunities in action research.

When we started this project, we did not have a clear understanding of a specific problem. It became evident throughout the process that the participants were also unable put words on their issues. When we speak, we literally hear ourselves thinking, and this initiates a relationship with ourselves (Crossley, 1996, p. 58). So, when we work and talk together, we create a new understanding, which we can put on words. In the many workshops we held, our groups had many dialogs, which created new external and internal shared learning points. We worked proactively with listen-to-learn sessions. Listening is probably the least explicit of the four language skills, making it the most difficult skill to learn. The key medium of most social interactions for

Wittgenstein, Schutz and Mead is language” (Crossley, 1996, p. 38). This is precisely why storytelling is a unique process for developing these insights. When the players in the field cannot express their challenges, it is more than doubtful that we could have come to usable results through a more traditional research approach.

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