The participatory researcher: developing the concept of ‘accompanying research’

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ABSTRACT
The article investigates a specific type of participatory methodology that we consider under-described in the current literature on research methods and research roles in social and cultural analysis. Influenced by Bergold & Thomas’ (2012) definition of participatory methodologies we understand this as based on a partnership between practitioners and academic researchers who follow each other – cf. the term ‘accompanying’ – for a period of time with the double purpose of researching and being researched and with the terms of the collaboration being jointly defined. Taking inspiration also from Andersen (2008) we understand accompanying research as something we do, perform and develop in collaboration, and in the article we unfold accompanying
research as a process and way of organizing to have consequences also for the specific methods used as well as the output of the research. Our understanding of the methodology will be developed through three case-studies of accompanying research engagements of our own – ‘Ej blot til lyst’, ‘Rødder’, and ‘Sager der samler’ – and a concluding discussion of how to create research outputs in and through these types of collaboration.

**Key words**
participatory research | research methodology | accompanying research | research roles | partnerships | participation

**SAMMENFATNING**

**Nøgleord**
deltagesforskning | lensageforskning | forskningsmetodologi | forskerroller | partnerskaber | participation

**INTRODUCTION**
This article discusses how participation can be seen as a productive challenge to research practices within the field of cultural and social analysis. What happens when academic researchers in cultural and social analysis engage in participatory research processes? How can research processes be co-decided? Reflecting on our own confrontations with these questions in research-practice collaborations, the authors of this article present the concept of ‘accompanying research,’¹ a specific research endeavour that we understand as a part of a more

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¹. The term ‘accompanying research’ derives from the Danish term ‘følgeforskning’, which do not have a direct English equivalent. For us the idea of accompanying each other is an important aspect of the research-practice relationship that we explore in the article, which is why we have chosen the term.
general participatory turn, one that challenges not just cultural and media practices or political decision-making processes, but also research practices.

The concept of ‘participation’ has increasingly come to the fore in recent years in various forms of academic cultural and social analysis. This is due to a number of intertwined transformational developments over recent decades – technological transformations (e.g. the rise of digital and social media), transformations in modes of consumption and production (e.g. from using to producing/co-creating services and experiences), institutional transformations (e.g. an increasing need for social and cultural legitimisation through impact measurement), and economic transformations (e.g. welfare cuts, free labour), combined with a growing democratic interest in investigating and securing the voices and perspectives of citizens and users in the processes of urban/regional planning and development (Arnstein 1969; Cornwall 2008; Norman & Uphoff 2011/1980), media production and communication (Kelty et al. 2015; Bruns 2008; Carpentier 2011; Delwiche & Henderson 2013), participation in cultural institutions (Simon 2010), and political decision-making (Pateman 1970). In other words, the validity and legitimacy of solutions, ideas and transformations is increasingly being linked to their embeddedness in participatory processes that involve citizens and users in more or less sustained ways.

PARTICIPATION AS POWER REDISTRIBUTION

The conceptualisation of ‘participation’ used in this article draws on the work of power- and democracy-oriented scholars such as Carole Pateman (1970), Sherry Arnstein (1969) and Nico Carpentier (2011). This is not because they necessarily represent the only way to conceptualise participation and its impacts (Stage & Ingerslev 2015; Reestorff et al. 2014), but rather because their focus on participation as power redistribution helps to pinpoint the changes in research practices that we wish to investigate here. Although working within different disciplines – Pateman in political science, Arnstein in development studies, and Carpentier in media studies – all three scholars agree that participation as used in academic research has had the problematic tendency of being too loose, so that it has often ended up creating more confusion than clarity in a range of activities involving some element of collaboration and collective communication. To avoid this confusion, Pateman, Arnstein and Carpentier all link participation to processes that redistribute power by creating equal decision-making among the participants. Examples could be municipalities allowing local residents to co-decide the planning of the area, or cultural institutions that invite their users to design exhibitions or art events. In other words, these scholars see participation as intrinsically linked to democratisation, equality, and changes in the established power hierarchies.

In this sense, participation ‘happens’ when the power to decide moves from authorities or stakeholders who usually call the shots to a more distributed field of participants (involving ordinary users and citizens) who take decisions
together. Pateman furthermore suggests a distinction between partial participation as “a process in which two or more parties influence each other in the making of decisions but the final power to decide rests with one party only” (Pateman 1970:70), and full participation as “a process where each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions” (Pateman 1970:71). And according to Arnstein, participation is based on the transformation of “nobodies” into “somebodies,” of citizens into co-deciders (Arnstein 1969) or – as we will argue based on our case study – of informants becoming partners, co-writers and co-designers of the research process.

According to Bergold and Thomas, we are witnessing an increasing interest in participatory methodologies, where what used to be seen as informants or objects are transformed into “somebodies” with the opportunity to co-produce research, data and knowledge. Examples could be research strategies like (participatory) action research, participatory design, citizen science, cooperative inquiry, participatory rural appraisal, or participatory learning and action (Bergold & Thomas 2012:3). ‘Participatory research’, in short, “involves a joint process of knowledge that leads to new insights on the part of both scientists and practitioners” (ibid 2012:4). There are many reasons for engaging in participatory research – to gain access to lifeworld perspectives and to firmly embed research in them, to engage with and develop existing practices, to ensure that participants in the process are heard and feel heard, and to take part in more experimental and innovative research processes. However, in terms of research, the ideal of full participation and citizen control is a huge challenge leaving researchers using this approach in a field of multiple tensions. As Bergold and Thomas state, “Unless people are involved in decisions – and, therefore, research partners, or (co-)researchers – it is not participatory research” (2012:8). But this loss of researcher control also seems at odds with traditional understandings of what independent, autonomous, critical, valid research is, and should be.

The challenges motivated by this increasing focus on participatory methodologies have led us to identify four key points of focus in relation to how we present and understand our own collaborative research processes in this paper. The four points of focus are these:

– What does a participatory research process consist in?
– How are power, decisions and roles/competences to be (re-)distributed?
– How does the collaborative process inform the methodologies applied in the process?
– What might the outputs of such processes be?

One way of dealing with some of these tensions is to acknowledge that “objectivity and neutrality must be replaced by reflective subjectivity” in the development of new participatory methods (Bergold & Thomas 2012:9). A part of creating this reflexivity is that it has to be clear during the research process who has the power to decide what (2012:8) and what kind of contract is being
developed. In this way, the tensions and challenges can be reflected upon transparently and directly so as to foster and qualify, rather than block, new and valuable research engagements. That is precisely the aim of this article. In the following, we will explore these challenges, tensions and opportunities as played out in three examples of participatory research processes undertaken by us. Through these case-studies we have developed a specific meta-methodological concept, which we entitle accompanying research and understand as a very specific way of developing a participatory research engagement. This is our attempt to cultivate a new methodological sensitivity: one that uses the loss of traditional researcher power to develop new types of relationality, knowledge and value through participatory research engagements.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methodological reflections and suggestions of this article can be described on four levels: Firstly, and fundamentally, the article is presenting a meta-methodological concept, accompanying research, designating a collaborative research process strategy in which practitioners in a given field and the academic researcher accompany each other both in the practices of a specific project or practice and in reflecting on it and on its investigation.

Secondly, using a multiple case-study model (Flyvbjerg 2010), the article analyses three specific cases that describe research processes performed by various combinations of the authors of this article. At the time they were played out, these processes were not all conceptualised as accompanying research; but the similarities between the cases and our discussions of the challenges they represent for us as researchers prompted us to reflect on the need for a new methodological framework to describe and develop this kind of research. This article is thus a step in the direction of giving a more systematic account of these characteristics, for the benefit of future research activities. Rather than being fully fledged examples of accompanying research at work, the cases chosen involved parallel research relationships which the participating researcher found it difficult to account for fully using established methodological concepts. In this way the cases analysed describe the collective development of a certain methodological practice, which, however, first became visible and possible to reflect on when they were brought together.

Thirdly, in the accompanying research processes analysed in the three cases, various theoretical concepts such as ‘theatricality’ (Féral 2002), ‘ritualisation’ (Seligman et al. 2008; Bell 1997; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994) and ‘assemblage’ (Delanda 2006; Anderson et al. 2012) have been applied as analytical and methodological concepts in the practice of the projects. They are included because they can illuminate how we, as researchers, can contribute to various projects by converting theoretical knowledge into practical strategies. The choice of these analytical and methodological concepts is case-dependent, and dependent also on the theoretical background of the participating researcher.
Moreover, each of the cases is characterised by its own data-gathering methods (e.g. observation, interviews). As these are not the primary focus of this paper, however, we will not describe them in detail (for further descriptions of the data-gathering strategies see Stage and Ingerslev 2015; Krøgholt 2015; Hansen 2015).

Fourthly, this in turn points to the fact that accompanying research should be understood as a kind of ‘meta-method’ for how to create and develop research relationships, rather than a specific set of guidelines for how to collect or process data. In that sense, traditional methods like the interview, observation or shadowing can be included as a part of a larger accompanying research design setup. In developing this meta-methodological concept, we address some of the similarities and differences between the participatory strategy of accompanying research that we propose and the existing methods and research practices (anthropological fieldwork, shadowing, evaluation, and action research). These will be discussed in the final part of the article. It is thus important to stress that accompanying research is a particular way of creating and developing a relationship between the researcher and external partners. It is characterised by a specific relationship between the partners involved, and thus by a specific research position. It is in this respect that accompanying research differs from action research or anthropological field studies. This research position is participatory, but it is a specific type of participatory research. As described by Bergold and Thomas (2012), participatory research is an umbrella concept for a range of methodologies that transfer power away from the researcher to research partners. Accompanying research would thus be one of several possible ways to handle or enact this redistribution of power. We will return to these points after the analysis of the cases.

CASE I: EJ BLOT TIL LYST (IDA KRØGHOLT, IK)

Performing accompanying research

At present, IK conducts process-based research on a ‘theatre meet school’-project, Ej blot til lyst (It’s not just about pleasure). The project involves theatre educators from Aarhus Theatre and Danish teachers from local primary schools, and the research was developed and is being conducted in close cooperation with the theatre staff (Krøgholt 2015). Together, the participants discuss the direction of the project, its values and objectives as well as the concept, and IK persistently meets with the theatre and presents and debates both her observations and the design of the research process. The aim is to examine the specific procedures used by the theatre when it opens its doors to school teachers and school students.

IK observes how the school participants experience the course of action, and analyses how the efforts lead to new patterns in both theatre and school. She is also examining the collaborative process. Hence the key challenge is that the project has built in a feedback loop between the research, the theatre and the
school that is present when the participants come together from their different backgrounds and engage in joint decision-making. This challenge illustrates why we identify accompanying research as a meta-method in this article, since the ongoing negotiation and changing opportunity of the process have made it more crucial to set a direction than to specify methods for data-gathering. In this case, for example, the exploration of the specific values of the project and the terms used to describe the values came into particularly sharp focus during the first project period, and this will most likely be an ongoing issue. One of the consequences of this is also that expectations about the impact have to be reworked on an ongoing basis. There are therefore two parallel tracks in the research case. The first is the participatory process, consisting of meetings in which the partners discuss values, terms and the project’s directions, together with workshops and open-space events at which ownership of the process is materialised through shared practice and decision-making, and where the researcher and the theatre and school practitioners also discuss what the impact could be. This includes ongoing evaluation of the impacts that arise. The second track is the research findings, for which IK is responsible. This involves recurrent communication of results to the partners, as well as more traditional research tasks such as publication in research journals with a view to exploring how the case can provide a theoretical framework.

To recap the problem, the accompanying researcher in this case considers herself to be, like the partners, one participant in the shared activity. But due to her role as academic researcher, she also takes into account the opportunity of illuminating the process and bringing self-reflection into the relation. Thus the general question highlighted by this specific case is how participants in such processes can improve as observers of their own values, and how the researcher in practice can be both participant and facilitator of the reflective process.

Comparing the purposes of the three collaborative positions in the case – theatre, education, science – one sees an interesting theme. Even though theatre, schools and researcher clearly have different reasons for joining in the project, they all in one way or another need to adapt to change and to a stated openness
and interest in transdisciplinary knowledge production. This is a likely reason for the shared interest in the collaborative research process.

As mentioned, observations are continually discussed and reworked with the theatre. IK and a research team explore how the theatre feeds back into the school learning environment as new activities and new patterns of action. They also observe and analyse how the school activities feed into the theatre as audience responses, as new ways of producing theatre for children, and as activities for participating audiences. One finding is that accompanying research depends on the researcher’s ability to switch between perspectives and roles, e.g. between an affirmative and intuitive role as co-designer of ideas and concrete collaborative events and workshops, a more critical role as observer and analyst of events and designed material, and finally a role as facilitator of participation and communication.

As a consequence, we have taken the idea of roles as a route to observing and achieving different kinds of knowledge a bit further. We propose ‘performative research’ (Brad Haseman 2006) and ‘theatricality’ (Josette Féral 2002) as attitudes that can regulate behaviour and increase awareness of the role performed as accompanying researcher in participatory processes. Here we also wish to point to the importance of all participants being able both to undertake self-observation and to observe others. Josette Féral’s theatricality theory includes the thesis that the theatrical gaze is a cognitive and perceptual competence that perceives tensions between signs and meanings. Seen in Féral’s terms, the theatrical observer is capable of re-semiotising things or events, to interpret them differently from the habitual. Subsequently, theatrical observation involves the ability to view the gap between for instance reality and fiction, and to distinguish different ways of observation (Féral 2002:7).

Féral’s theory raises more general ideas about observation and of becoming a theatrical observer of events, objects or actions in the everyday. Following her idea, theatricality is a process that states an awareness of looking or being looked at. It is a method by which values can be observed in more than one perspective, as long as the observer’s theatrical intention is addressed. The accompanying researcher could be seen as one that facilitates observations, because by participating in various activities and taking different roles in the process he/she is capable of addressing the participants’ theatrical gaze, i.e. of seeing own values in more than one perspective. The case supports this thesis given that the partnership between theatre, schools and researcher develops as a sensitive and self-reflective collaboration – even if the participants do not share similar values and even though they have totally different expectations of the outcome.

The present case suggests that performative perspectives can be supportive and energising. But it has also emphasised, that new learning is required. Having to hold back analytical thoughts and explore other participants’ ideas and observations as they emerge and before they are fully formed, is a challenge for the researcher; but close listening to the project as it emerges is precisely
the objective in the co-work with Aarhus Theatre. To be learned from the case is that clearly framed positions, theatrical observation and changing roles and perspectives can revitalize the participants’ expectations to the collaboration. Following this, the accompanying researcher’s facilitation of observations possibly will improve both the participation-based research process and the findings of the research. The theatre and school participants in the project have shown a conspicuous engagement in the process which indicates particularly strong interest in the research, as well as in being researched. Considering the quality of the collaboration, the participative way of researching seems to elevate the research process, as it becomes reflected in a more in-depth way. It is too early to draw conclusions about the participative effect on the quality of the research outcome. At present we can just note that the accompanying research strategy has raised a particular set of questions and perspectives.

Case II: Rødder (Dorthe Refslund Christensen, DRC, and Louise Ejgod Hansen, LEH)

Exploring untrodden paths: The researcher as partner in a development project

DRC is an accompanying researcher on the project 2014–2015 project Rødder (Roots), which has been a part of the overall 2012–2017 Trædesten project (www.flaskeposter.dk). The Trædesten project was initiated in 2012 by Kulturprinsen, the centre for development of children’s culture in Viborg, and Aarhus Music School; since 2015 it has been run by Aarhus Music School. Louise Ejgod Hansen (LEH) is accompanying researcher on Trædesten, supporting the project aim – to develop the framework for projects in which children and young people can co-create artistic expressions.

DRC’s participation has mainly consisted of close collaboration with project manager Gunnild Bak de Ridder on the Rødder project, including helping to develop the concept and frame the creative processes. The main focus in this section is on how DRC has used a theoretical approach to frame the project content and processes. The partnership has been characterised by a high level of openness, a willingness to take paths previously untrodden, and close cooperation in the developing phases of the project.

In her collaborative work with Bak de Ridder, DRC drew on her research interests in ritualisation and identity. At the beginning of the partnership, Bak de Ridder and DRC established a mutual understanding about the kinds of identity work that are – or could be – a part of aesthetic projects like Rødder. Rødder offers the children a space that lets them see themselves as individuals in very different settings from their everyday spaces and relations. This is important to bear in mind as a facilitator of these processes, because the premises for performing and taking part in the Rødder processes point to abilities, preferences, competences and communities different from those of everyday life activities, and this offer some of the children the opportunity to re-think and re-understand themselves through their active experiences of being part in an aesthetic process and modes of thought.
Rituals can play a crucial role in such processes. Seligman et al. in *Ritual and its Consequences* (Seligman et al. 2008) argue that ritualisations basically create a subjunctive time-space, an “as if” or “could be” universe (Seligman et al. 2008:7ff.). Ritualisation, as a performative modus points to certain aspects of life and creates modifications, differentiations and demarcations in the socio-cultural world, while, at the same time, it negotiates the very premises of the social while being performed within an experimenting and meta-reflexive framework. These basic understandings of ritual and ritualisations were incorporated into the Rødder project on two levels. First, they established Rødder as a subjunctive time-space where children could, through engaging in aesthetic processes, negotiate and reflect on their lives in a safe space, that is, a space demarcated (as rituals are) from the rest of socio-cultural life. Second, understanding the Rødder project through the ritualisation framework, gave Bak de Ridder and other facilitators useful tools for scaffolding the creative and aesthetic processes in very firm and – for the children – recognisable patterns.

Anthropologist Catherine Bell (1997) has defined ritualisation as “the simple imperative to do something in such a way that the doing itself gives the acts a special or privileged status” (Bell 1997: 168). Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey & James Laidlaw (1994) have stressed two further characteristics of ritualisations: first, that any act can be ascribed a certain aura of importance, and, second, that a ritualisation is performed within a certain framing (cf. Sjørslev 2007; Bateson 2000) that distinguishes it from other practices.
Besides discussing with Bak de Ridder how the Rødder project could function as a ritualised space for certain reflections, time was spent designing ritualisations that might serve as scaffolds in the practical creative processes with the children. These had to be easy for the children to pick up and imitate. Before the start of a session, the facilitator could pose questions like: What is being said? What is being done? Which movements? Are we sitting in a particular way? Are there some objects that are always used? One example would be to design a way to make visible and physical the concept of time (inspired by time sociologist Michael Flaherty (2011)). Within a creative process involving repeated sequences, rather than using a clock that rings and “disturbs” (also aesthetically) the children’s work, a time circle was designed, so that the children can take turns walking wearing a particular article of clothing to mark that they are the time-keepers. Through ritualisation, time thus becomes a part of the aesthetic process rather than disturbing it.

This form of collaboration was based on a high level of trust between the partners in the project. Rather than a prior definition of the exact input or outcome of the research contribution, dialogue has been ongoing between the partners to identify the challenges of the project and the ways in which the researcher could contribute to developing more or less tentative solutions. Compared to other accompanying research projects (see Hansen 2015), this is a special relationship, and thus one that is worth reflecting on.² We will briefly do that by referring to one theoretical framings of the accompanying research process: Andrew Van de Ven’s concept of engaged scholarship (2007). He defines engaged scholarship as “a participatory form of research […] exploiting differences in the kinds of knowledge that scholars and other stakeholders can bring forth on a problem. I argue that engaged scholarship produces knowledge that is more penetrating and insightful than when scholars or practitioners work on problems alone” (2007:ix).

His approach includes understanding the engagement as a mutual engagement (“with practice” rather than “for practice,” (2007:10)), which can include different kinds of collaboration between researcher and practitioner in different types of research activities: problem formulation, theory-building, research design and problem-solving. A central point is that collaboration between practice and research can include any of these activities, not just the last one, which is probably the most common anticipated. In the case of the Trædesten project in general and the Rødder project in particular, the research outcome was conceptual discussion and model-building rather than empirical analysis of the projects themselves. As a result, the research activities have developed fruitfully into what Van de Ven calls ‘theory-building activities’, developing a conceptual framework in which to understand the project rather than analysing the outcomes.

² See Hansen (2015) for a presentation of various different types of engaged scholarship and co-production of knowledge.
Case III: Sager der samler (Carsten Stage, CS)

Creating researched assemblages

The final case investigates a specific study of citizen participation between a community-based organisation called Sager der Samler (Causes that gather, or SDS), a Central Denmark Region task force, and one of the authors (CS). CS wrote a research article about this case with one of the SDS co-founders (Karen Ingerslev, KI, see Stage & Ingerslev 2015), and that article provides a resource for the present paper to reflect on the particular strategy of co-writing as a way of creating a research outcome of accompanying research. In retrospect, what characterised the research process was that researcher and researched chose each other rather than one of them being chosen by the other; that the contract established was centred on the researcher following the organisation for a while without knowing how the process would necessarily end; that CS, KI and SDS along the way negotiated the goal and established a partnership around writing up the research; and that the research process in itself helped to develop or to add self-reflection to both the process under investigation and the research itself. This project combined various forms of expertise – KI’s expertise in relation to the organisation, in the healthcare sector, in the task force process, CS’s expertise on existing theories and work on participation, and the collective expertise of all parties on methods and academic knowledge production.

First, a bit about the specific process being investigated. In 2012, the Central Denmark Region established a cross-sector ‘task force’ staffed by representatives from the regional administrative authority, hospitals, municipalities, and general practitioners in order to gather ideas for innovation in the healthcare services. The collaboration with SDS was established when the task force initiated a second round of applications, focusing on employment and mental health issues (Regionshuset 2011). Members of the task force participated in all these steps, and received a final report presenting the ideas generated and a strategy for testing some of them through ‘everyday labs.’ KI and CS followed the process, and studied it through observations and through the documents produced. We went along and documented and discussed on an ongoing basis what was unfolding and what kind of research should be created (for a further description of the process see Stage and Ingerslev 2015).

In their article, CS and KI investigated the relevance of the concept of ‘the assemblage’ in understanding the specific participatory process created by SDS. In this paper, we argue that the assemblage concept can also be a way of understanding what this type of partnership-based research does. Taking an ‘assemblage approach’ to citizen participation would simply look at it as a process in which various elements are attached to each other in ways that transform their singular properties into (more or less empowering) capacities (Delanda 2006; Anderson et al. 2012). In a sense, CS as a researcher was added to the assemblage – a process of citizen participation involving SDS itself, Central Region Denmark and ordinary citizens – and thus CS together with KI changed
the assemblage’s logics and capacities to act and produce something different, while also being changed and given new capacities. The assemblage approach can simply offer a way of describing accompanying research as a way of creating a research assemblage, or perhaps rather a ‘researched assemblage.’

As the process began, CS and KI naively expected to take rather distinct positions as participant in (KI) and observer of (CS) the process. However, as the process unfolded, the boundary between outside and inside became increasingly difficult to uphold. CS found himself becoming personally engaged in the content of the matter under study, and KI became more engaged than planned in the research process. In this process of establishing a research position and a relationship, the concept accompanying research could have been used to guide the process, as it would have made the approach more flexible and open and the messiness of the positions more acceptable. But how was the actual research process impacted by evolving as a dynamic research partnership, manifested most clearly in the process of co-writing? As we saw it, the research was strengthened in various ways. To conclude, we list some of these strengths:

1) It helped the partners focus on multiple values and effects
First of all, the insider–outsider research team helped maintain a more complexity-oriented approach to the case-study, because the external gaze was continually balanced by an internal gaze, or perhaps the becoming internal of the external gaze and vice versa. This made too-quick outsider evaluations of the process impossible. As KI explained some of the rationalities behind what had been done and produced during the process, CS was forced to look into the rationalities of the investigated context more closely. This happened because the analysis was developed in an ongoing discussion between the theoretical lenses, questions and problematisations provided by CS, and the situated knowledge of the context provided by KI. The result became more balanced for that reason. CS and KI’s article also made a stronger contribution to research on participation, because the partners needed another way of talking about what was produced, and thus chose ‘the assemblage’ as a new analytical point of departure.

2) It helped the partners focus on contextual specificity
The specific research relation established forced the particular study to acknowledge the specificity of the context investigated along with its rationalities and logics. Of course this kind of research risks ‘going native,’ and therefore there was some anxiety about how academic reviewers would react to the mixed roles, but active reflection on the blurring of insider and outsider perspectives, we would argue, lends an additional level of complexity and awareness to the relevance of various analytical gazes.

3) It helped the partners’ focus on how research can become more participatory
Maybe the possibility of writing research together only existed because one of the people in the organisation (here KI) was already a researcher. In this sense, co-writing will not always be the best solution. But a point would be that par-
The specific research position made the research more valuable for the organisation, because one of the researchers, KI, was able to bring back the analysis in the right and most relevant way. The article thus got to circulate within the organisation and within Central Denmark Region, which thus reflected on the process together while CS and KI received feedback on the article.

Summing up, the research position and relationship developed in this collaboration is interesting because the collaboration acted on an intuition – the feeling that something interesting was going on that needed to be pursued – but it also allowed the researcher to insist on the importance of waiting and reflecting on what the collaboration could actually be during the research process. This is an interesting research position, because it helps the researcher to enter into an extended zone of uncertainty regarding what should and could be produced, while also strengthening the contextual awareness and impact of the research.

OUTLINING ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH

The three cases share certain commonalities. Each case focused on a different aspect of accompanying research: Ej blot til lyst emphasised the participatory process, Rødder addressed participatory concept development, and SDS included participatory writing. We believe however that the similarities shared by the cases are strong enough to start building an understanding of these participatory research practices within the framework of a common research meta-methodology.

In framing the cases as examples of accompanying research, we are sketching out a new collaborative research meta-method different from other types of research-practice relationships. In the final part of the present paper we will present our reflections on the interrelations between accompanying research and anthropological fieldwork (with and without intervention), shadowing, evaluation, and action research. We will investigate how these research approaches resemble and also differ from accompanying research. Pointing back to the theoretical discussion above of participation as a redistribution of power, as well as to the four questions to be posed to participatory research practice, we will frame all three cases as accompanying research, thus offering a new, precise and workable definition of a participatory research method.

Based on our case we argue that accompanying research is a specific participatory-research meta-methodology. As our case-study demonstrate, accompanying research is characterised by a process-based form of research practice or
‘partnering’ (Andersen 2008) in which both university and non-university stakeholders (e.g. an organisation, a theatre, a company, a school, an artist) accompany each other for a certain time-period with the dual purpose of researching and being researched. In the presentations of the cases we have focused on the four questions, outlined in the beginning of the article. In regard to these questions, the cases make it clear that accompanying research relies on a special type of dynamic contract between researchers and practitioners: a contract that differs, on the meta-level, from those implicit in anthropological field study, evaluation, action research and shadowing.

POSITIONING ACCOMPANYING RESEARCH: EXISTING METHODOLOGIES

Focusing on the relationship between accompanying research and existing methodologies, we argue for a distinction to be made between those methodological concepts that describe a research position (or a relationship between research and practice) and those that describe ways of gathering or generating data. None of the methods listed below are incompatible with accompanying research on a data-gathering level. It is thus possible to use observation both in anthropological fieldwork and in accompanying research; and it is possible to include shadowing as a way of generating data in an accompanying research process. Our argument here is that the positioning of the researcher is different in these two approaches, and that this difference needs to be understood and reflected upon at a meta-methodological level, because both the research process and the research outcome are influenced by it.

The anthropologist Ernestine Gammeltoftsgade (2003) recently reflected on changes in the anthropologist’s role as observer in fieldwork, arguing for strengthened awareness of the creation and maintenance of professional distance from the object studied. Some anthropologists have studied how intervention could play a role in, for example, participant observation (Marcus et al, in press). Intervention can take the form of ‘obstructions,’ where the intention, rather than contributing to overcoming socio-cultural challenges, is to give the researcher the possibility of observing the result of provoked variations in practice that cannot be observed otherwise.

Both types of participant observation differ from accompanying research in their insistence on an external observer position. The accompanying researcher is involved as a significant and intentional stimulator of the development of practice. Affecting the research context is approached not as a methodological problem, but rather as the whole idea behind doing the research. This gives the researcher a more involved role as a co-developer of the process being studied – and also because the research agenda in accompanying research is often less defined than in interventionist fieldwork. But as mentioned, it is quite possible to integrate phases of observation into the overall process of doing accompanying research.
This is also the case with ‘shadowing,’ a research method in which the researcher – for a shorter or longer period – shadows a single (always consenting) person by following him/her quite concretely in all the processes in which he or she is involved (McDonald 2005:456). During the operation, the researcher takes notes on the observed, with the consequence that the method generally results in very large amounts of empirical data. This method gives full access to the complexity and the often-fragmented character of everyday practices. These practices can also be observed free of the observed agencies’ own interpretations, but it is of course still a major risk that the examined everyday practices may change significantly due to the presence of the shadowing researcher.

Shadowing is similar to accompanying research, in the sense that the method is based upon the researcher and the researched subject accompanying each other over time, and also in the sense that it aims to in examine practitioner subjects “richly contextualised by mood, body language, pace, organisational setting” (McDonald 2005:467). But the clear-cut division in shadowing between the exploring and the explored subjects, as well as the clearly researcher-driven process, is quite different from the partnership-based relationship of accompanying research processes. Nor does shadowing have the inherent aim of qualifying or developing the practices being investigated.

One part of evaluation, as traditionally defined (Vedung 1998), that covers accompanying research is the intention of playing a role in practical decision-making processes. However, it is a crucial difference between evaluation and accompanying research that a judgement is included in an evaluation (Vedung 1998; Dahler-Larsen 2004). The role of the evaluator inevitably includes the role of assessor, a position of power that has certain consequences for the cooperative relationship. This remains so even when the difference between the external, ideally objective evaluator and the cooperating and engaged accompanying researcher is challenged by alternative forms of evaluation such as ‘deliberative evaluation’ (Greene 2000; House & Howe 2000), in which the focus is on the participants’ own knowledge production as an important part of the evaluation process and the evaluator’s role as facilitator of reflection and change of practice.

Precisely because of the similarities between the role of the evaluator and the role of the accompanying researcher, evaluation theory can be considered a source of inspiration for reflection on everything from the process of designing an evaluation to establishing partnerships in relation to accompanying research. Nevertheless, we maintain that there is a difference, which we attribute primarily to the fact that the role of the evaluator is linked to the requirement for a judgement or assessment. The awareness that the project will be evaluated and the way in which this is done will impact on the behaviour of the evaluated agencies and thus on the results of the process, a phenomenon which in evaluation research has been addressed as the ‘problem’ of constitutive effects (Dahler-Larsen 2014). In addition, evaluation privileges practice over
research. Evaluations are commissioned either by the practitioners themselves or by funders of a particular project or scheme.

The way in which action research is related to the creation of knowledge as innovative, future-oriented and emergent parallels our idea of accompanying research. Historically action research is a critical, social-scientific reaction to positivism, which seeks qualitatively different knowledge than traditional research (Lewin 1948). Action research thus has as its goal that the social settings and practices under investigation are also the recipients of the knowledge created. And the idea is that scholars and practitioners share the findings obtained (Toulmin 1996). Thus there is a participant and development orientation in action research that parallels that of accompanying research. But the idea of research tasks and opportunities here is not identical with those of accompanying research. In action research, the final aim of the innovative processes is to a large extent defined and designed by the researcher, while the basic principle of accompanying research is that both parties are receptive to each other’s responses. The regular feedback and conversation also on the level of the research design is therefore of far greater importance than in action research.

Summing up, accompanying research is distinct from, but capable of integrating, methodologies that do not in themselves dictate a non-participatory relationship between researcher and external partners. An important point is that feedback that in other contexts might seem like disturbances of research and of practice is, rather, understood as an opportunity to reflect and develop. This stresses how accompanying research is primarily dedicated to establishing a certain type of participatory researcher–partner relation, and not so much to specific ways of collecting empirical material. And for this reason, existing methodologies – which leave less room for ongoing feedback and for the open negotiation of process and results – are less compatible with doing accompanying research.

DISCUSSION

We thus argue that accompanying research establishes a different kind of horizon of expectations and relation between researchers and practitioners than is the case in, for instance, anthropological field study, action research, evaluation and shadowing, which are mostly deployed on the researcher’s initiative and premises. At the same time, accompanying research also differs from evaluation and from commissioned research, where the non-university party clearly defines both the study question and how the researcher should deliver on it. In the latter case, the researcher must meet the demands and expectations of the external practitioner. This might be developed in a dialogue, but the product will often be defined by external wants and needs that the researcher must meet – often including the requirement of a research-based outcome. The peculiarity of accompanying research is that neither the researcher nor the external practitioner uniquely defines the premises for cooperation.
In terms of the expectation horizon, there seems to be a shared, but differing expectation of accompanying research: that (1) it produces research; (2) it will / may have transformational perspectives for the object being researched (e.g. in the form of process development, innovation, new reflexivity); (3) it is mutually appreciative (researcher recognised as a researcher and partner as ‘worthy of research’); and (4) it can support the development of an optimised, but not predefined, future.

The accompanying research relation is characterised in that 1) it couples otherwise relatively separate social systems (e.g. theatre and university), 2) unlike commissioned work it has no precise contract for a result, 3) it involves diffuse, but often unarticulated, strategic interests of both parties, 4) it is based on a committed mutual interest in exploring a common space of possibilities, 5) it is characterised by a kind of temporal openness, where the partners agree to ‘go together,’ but often not being accurate about for how long, and 6) it begins the relationship as one between two negotiating subjects (what are we going to do together?), but might end with one subject’s (the researcher’s) research on an object (the external partner) and the external partners execution / completion of his or her project practice.

How does accompanying research concretely become a joint venture – and how do you frame it as a researcher? Since the researcher and the external practitioner seek differing forms of knowledge, one cannot expect them to have the same expectations about the outcome. As a cooperative relationship, at its best accompanying research creates a constructive irritation between the two different parties. Basically, the external executive is usually interested in research as a benefit that may contribute to the development of specific products or functions. The researcher’s interest is often different: for him / her knowledge is simply important because there is something we do not yet have knowledge of (see Andersen 2008) – possibly combined with desiring that his or her research might have impact.

Although there are often a variety of interests in an accompanying research process, it is constructive to establish a common clarity and framing of the process. The premise for this discussion, however, is that the negotiation cannot be settled once and for all; the common goals cannot be predetermined. The discussions about the expectations might sharpen the different sets of expectation. Based on the case-studies, our experiences are that the negotiations of expectations with the participants have led us into new directions, as we have had to reinforce our own roles as researchers. The cases describe how the collaborations inspired each of us to reconsider our own attitudes towards for instance the quality parameters of the research, the usability of the knowledge produced, the ownership of both the process and of the impact, and the traditional balances between distance and involvement with the objects being researched.

What should accompanying research lead to? It should lead to both the study of semantics – i.e. the concepts of what is done – and to practical tests and
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experiments. The condition for a successful experiment is that there is an interest in becoming clear on the project, that there is an interest in how the project functions as form/practice and a willingness to study variability within its own spectrum. Therefore, accompanying research has to shift between the mode of listening sensitively to process or material taking shape and the mode of experimenting with the naming of things and forms, in order to give the process a language. The purpose of this is to assist in the process of turning small experiments into something that can be observed, compared and contextualised while maintaining an understanding of its specificity and uniqueness. Accompanying research should fertilise the experimental setting through a relationship built on mutual trust. It can e.g. be obtained by framing the difference between researcher and practitioner in a non-hierarchical way, seeing the two as different expert perspectives. There will then be at least two specific forms of expertise in play: the practice experts that have exceptional expertise in their specific kind of practice. And the expert observers, who can respond sensitively to the practitioner’s project while being able to process the observations analytically, and to detect patterns in it in a systematic way. The challenge of accompanying research is thus to use the expertise of both parties optimally. In this way it always constitutes an experiment of how to find collaborative forms where researchers and practitioners can share knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Our primary purpose here is to present and develop accompanying research as a special, new form of humanistic academic practice that it is more and more relevant to reflect on due to the increasing interaction with external partners within the humanities. We have identified accompanying research as a participatory process which prioritises the actual meeting between participants, and basically this separates the term from comparable approaches and methods. Thus through three case-studies, we have developed our approach to accompanying research as a ‘meta-method,’ which aims at participatory involvement and collaboration in research processes. It is our argument that such collaborations will be able to generate knowledge through the interaction between the divergent experts that are implied, and for that reason it is vital that every single position of knowledge will have the opportunity to come into play in an accompanying research process. Consequently, the meta-method of accompanying research will, at best, lead to processes where the research becomes more participatory. Moreover, this includes a strengthened awareness of the process and of the options for interactivity and feedback, a sensibility in observation and communication and a strong common interest in framing situations whereby the participants’ knowledge can be exchanged.

3. The discussion about participatory research and the impact of research-practice cooperation is relevant within a social science context as well. One example of this discussion is Pain et. al. (2016).
REFERENCES


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