

IN MEMORIAM

Francisco 'Pancho' Vio Grossi (1943-2025) Grassroots Activism and Participatory Action Research

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Born in the coastal Chilean city of Valparaíso, Chile in 1943, Francisco Vio Grossi's life can be understood best within the tumultuous road to democracy and beyond that Chile has experienced over the past 80 years. I met Pancho at the University of Sussex in 1974 in England during his years of exile having escaped from imprisonment in the national stadium by the Pinochet government. When we first met, he told me that his Father had been the lawyer who brought a legal suit against Coca Cola to reveal its recipe before it could be imported into Chile. Coca Cola won that legal challenge, but Pancho learned the importance to working for justice.

His first degree was in law. He was an activist during the Allende years working in agrarian reform with peasants to take control and manage the farms where they had previously been workers. He gained insights that would eventually lead to his contribution to the field of participatory research. He ran for political office under the MAPU political party of the day. When the Pinochet coup of 1973 happened, Pancho and thousands of others were arrested and taken to the national stadium for processing.

He travelled through the mountains to Argentina and was in Buenos Aires for some time exploring what he and his wife might do in exile. He was fortunate to get a scholarship to come to the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, UK under the mentorship of Prof. Emmanuel de Kadt, a Chilean sociologist aligned with the resistance to Pinochet. His PhD was written about the Mexican agrarian reform movement. My friendship with Pancho began in Sussex. I shared the

ideas that we had developed in Tanzania called participatory research. He related that that was the way that many of them had been working during Salvador Allende's days. Pancho wrote an article about his work in Chile in the first journal written about participatory research which came out in 1975.

I moved to Toronto, Canada in 1975 to work with Prof J. Roby Kidd on the creation of the International Council for Adult Education. We organized the first World Conference on Adult Education in Tanzania in 1976. Pancho participated in that along with Paulo Freire and many others of that generation. Pancho was key in the decision to create the International Participatory Research Network. After his years in England, he took a job as a Professor in Simon Rodriguez University in Caracas, Venezuela. It was from Caracas that Pancho created both the Latin American Network in Participatory Research and later the Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL). Pancho led the Latin American group to the first international meeting of the participatory research network in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia in 1980.

Once the security situation was more favourable, Pancho was able to return to Chile and began working with the remarkable network of grass roots activists and intellectuals who were all working for the return to democracy in Chile. Pancho and his colleagues eventually were able to build the legendary popular education centre, El Canelo de Nos. Pancho was the architect of the Third World Assembly of Adult Education that took place in Buenos Aires in 1985. With Alfonsín giving the keynote address, the Buenos Aires conference brought the Latin American popular education movement together with the global adult education movement. In 1990 he was elected to the position of President of the International Council for Adult Education. He was also appointed as President of the Universidad Bolivariana. Once democracy was regained in Chile, Pancho also served as the Director of the Chilean Agency for International Cooperation in the government of President Eduardo Frei Ruiz Tagle. He was subsequently appointed as Ambassador from Chile to Guatemala. Upon return to Chile for health reasons he resumed his role as Director of El Canelo and later as President. He welcomed all the progressive Presidents of Chile, the legendary Brazilian, Paulo Freire, Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere of Tanzania and thousands of Chilean activists.

Pancho's passing is a deep loss for me. We supported each other in our various projects over the years. He was full of joy. He could dance both the Cueca and the Tango. He had a vision of what true democracy could be and the skills to bring democracy to life. He is survived by his talented wife Cecilia and his adult children Panchito and Daniela. He would certainly join us in saying, 'Hasta la Victoria.....Siempre'.