20. Unlocking inter and transdisciplinary approaches to urban research projects

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Format: roundtable

As a transnational space is being created for the academic to become an anchor source of inter and transdisciplinary knowledge on urban changes, the rise of new opportunities is paired by emerging concerns. While the role played by the universities is often framed and conditioned by overarching political and policy aims (e.g. Sustainable Development Goals, New Urban Agenda, etc.), research projects are often partnership-led and variably funded by local authorities, international organisations, and/or the universities themselves to achieve their goals in the short, medium or long run. This sort of multi-actor and multi-layered ecosystems wherein urban researchers can find themselves to develop their investigation is a privileged space to unfold a meta-reflection about the negotiations of meaning-making among multiple interests and claims at stake, and the practical implications of inter and transdisciplinary approaches on urban research. Whereas researchers are expected to produce highly qualified evidence-based knowledge in synergy with other scientific and non-scientific actors towards purposes generally based on urban changes, a set of interlocked issues is brought to light. How to pursue high quality of the interdisciplinary investigation within policy-framed, and often constrained, research projects? How to ensure that the ethical requirements of the research project agenda are appropriately observed and the actors’ needs and interests respected? And how to effectively translate findings from transdisciplinary research in order to improve their accessibility to multiple publics and the usability for policy purposes? At the edges of the questions above, issues that can be perceived as lateral to core investigation rather dictate the realpolitik of everyday life in research projects. From a broader angle, urban researchers often work in precarious conditions, like a growing amount of researchers in all disciplinary fields today, that necessarily have an impact over the decisions to be made either at the outset of, or during, their involvement in a research project. From a more situated angle, inter and transdisciplinary research projects often require situated interventions that tend to blur the distinction between research and policy agencies, which rises ethical concerns as to the pasteurization of proper state and/or market functions on the field. Last, the paramount ambition to publish research in top-ranked peer-reviewed journals can lead academics to face the dilemma on whether and how local participants will ever read and have the ownership over their original
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ccontributions. The roundtable is open to researchers and practitioners that wish to address some or all of the issues above to unfold a collective reflection on the experience with research projects that aim to have an impact over urban changes.