

20. Unlocking action/research on urban transformations

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Academic has increasingly become an anchor source of inter and transdisciplinary knowledge on urban transformations. While action research has helped shift the paradigm of scientific knowledge production by engaging with local actors, its application is often oriented – and/or constrained – by dominant political narratives and overarching policy goals of urban transformations that influence research funding schemes. The mushrooming of initiatives led by partnerships composed of public and private agencies, including universities, testifies that action/research is currently framed within a new transnational and multi-layered space where different – opposite, at occasion – views on urban transformations create new fields of forces. Action/researchers are expected to produce highly qualified evidence-based knowledge at the intersection of these forces, which raises new interlocked issues in the light of the impacts of the Covid19 pandemic.

Is it always possible to conduct genuine interdisciplinary investigation within certain policy-oriented funding schemes today? How to ensure that the ethical requirements of action/research are appropriately observed and accomplished when considering the exacerbation of urban problems and inequalities occurred in the last few weeks? And, regardless the duration of confinement and social distancing measures, how to effectively implement transdisciplinary approaches to engage with multiple publics and make findings available to social and policy-based purposes in the light of the dramatic socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic?

At the edges of these issues, the *realpolitik* of everyday life of researchers matters more than ever. The accelerated course of events related to the spread of the covid19 has worsened, in many cases, life and labor conditions of precarious workers, with a negative impact over the practical chance (and availability of time) to make a significant meta-reflection on work. From a broader angle, action/research requires situated practice that may end up blurring the agendas in place. In some cases, research and policy agendas may overlap – or conflict – and widen the gap with social needs. This raises, furthermore, ethical concerns as to the role of the academic in the pasteurization of proper state and/or market functions with local communities. Last but not least, the legitimate ambition to publish research outputs in top-ranked peer-reviewed journals may lead academics to face the dilemma on whether and how local participants will ever read and have the ownership over their original contributions.

This roundtable is open to researchers and practitioners that wish to address some or all the issues above to unfold a collective meta-reflection on action/research and urban transformations.