

RT01 | TOWARDS KNOWLEDGE THAT CHANGES THINGS? THE CHALLENGES OF ENGAGED PLANNING THEORY AND PRACTICE

Chairs:

- Heather Campbell, U. of Sheffield

Presenters:

- Luca Bertolini, U. of Amsterdam;
- Tuna Tasan-Kok, U. of Amsterdam;
- Simone Tulumello, ICS, U. Lisboa;
- Francesco Lo Piccolo, U. of Palermo, AESOP Vice-president;
- Michael Harris, Royal Town Planning Institute.

Description

This roundtable will generate debate and reflection about the knowledge required to shape more equitable and sustainable urban futures; the challenges this poses for prevailing models of academic knowledge production; and how such knowledge can be translated into practice in ways that make a difference.

Mainstream approaches to Social Sciences and the Humanities (SSH) often appear ill-equipped to address the major economic, environmental and societal challenges generated by contemporary urbanisation. The barriers are formidable: contemporary social sciences are dominated by an 'entrenched empiricism' (Brenner and Schmid, 2013) that prevents the production of novel, and theoretically/critically informed, paradigms. Disciplinary barriers meanwhile stymie the creation of holistic knowledge (Davoudi, 2010). All in all, SSH have arguably been too focused on studying the past and present and have therefore failed to take seriously the challenges involved in shaping the future (Appadurai, 2013).

This is particularly important for planning, an inherently interdisciplinary field with a strong orientation towards the future (see Cole, 2001), but where knowledge and practices continue to fall short of realizing the promises of sustainable development.

In the face of the major challenges planning addresses, it is also important to continue exploring actual and perceived gaps that separate the worlds of academic knowledge production from the sites where such knowledge is put into practice (e.g. Tasan Kok et al, 2016). Campbell's (2012) call to understand and explore a

'scholarship of engagement' remains important since, from the varied perspectives of researchers, policy-makers, practitioners, affected publics and other 'research users', theory-practice relations remain troublesome; requiring ongoing reflection and new thinking about the variety of ways in which the connections between knowledge and action can be imagined, realised and strengthened in the face of often powerful countervailing pressures.

Organisation

This session is being jointly convened by the journal Planning Theory and Practice, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the Institute of Social Sciences (ICS) at the University of Lisbon, the COST-ACTION network INTREPID and the AESOP Young-Academics network.

Discussion will build on a one-day pre-conference seminar 'Transformative Knowledge for an era of Planetary Urbanization? Questioning the role of social sciences and humanities from an interdisciplinary perspective' that will take place at ICS in Lisbon on July the 10th, as well as previous RTPI-sponsored sessions on related themes that took place at the 2014 AESOP conference in Utrecht, the 2015 AESOP conference in Prague and the 2016 WCSP in Rio de Janeiro.

The session will begin with a short provocation based on key themes emerging from the pre-conference seminar. The panelists will each then offer further reflections before the session is opened for general discussion.

The RTPI will also announce the launch of a new 'practitioner research fund' intended to address some of the issues being considered.

References

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- Davoudi, S. (2010). Planning and interdisciplinarity. In Geppert, A. and Cotella, G. (eds.), *Planning education. Quality issues in a changing European Higher Education Area* (pp. 33-36). Leuven: AESOP.
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