

Call for Papers

Urban real-world laboratories in the context of transdisciplinary urban research and planning science

Special issue of the journal 'Raumforschung und Raumordnung | Spatial Research and Planning'

Real-world laboratories are attracting increasing research attention and being established in various social contexts in an attempt to simultaneously find and test solutions to problems associated with urban transformations (see Schöpke/Stelzer/Caniglia et al. 2018). They are rooted particularly in transformative sustainability research (see WBGU 2011) and reflect a general 'experimental turn' in the social and economic sciences, a response to increasingly complex transformations and demands which expose the limits of traditional scientific research. In line with the transdisciplinary paradigm on which real-world laboratories are based, the actors involved from both science and wider society work closely together on an equal footing (see Wanner/Hilger/Westerkowski et al. 2018). Real-world laboratories aim to generate evidence about socially robust solution strategies for social problems. (Real-life) experiments represent the central methodological basis and are intended to create a bridge from 'knowledge to action'. The research in real-world laboratories is understood as 'research infrastructure' and should ideally be conceived as a long-term process of reflection and learning (see Schneidewind 2014; Schneidewind/Augenstein/Stelzer et al. 2018). Real-world laboratories thus join the ranks of the international 'lab' debates with, e.g., 'Sustainable Living Labs' (see Liedtke/Baedeker/Hasselkuß et al. 2015), 'Urban Transition Labs' (see Nevens/Frantzeskaki/Gorissen et al. 2013) and 'Niche Experiments'.

At the same time experimental approaches using a participative and activating mix of methods are relatively well-established in urban research and planning sciences, especially in an international context, even though calls for their greater use are heard (see Kanning 2018; Honey-Rosés/Stevens 2019). This is due not least to the fact that cities have always been places where cultural changes emerge and culminate, and are thus per se 'spaces of social experiment'. Schneidewind (2014: 3) therefore emphasises the particular importance of cities as 'urban real-world laboratories', which may cover entire cities but may also be limited to specific urban districts or neighbourhoods as spatial settings. Real-world laboratories should not just provide stimuli for urban transformations. Rather, in keeping with the thematic character of the real-world laboratory in question, they should be used to test new patterns of production and action in concrete places and in various contexts and to create forums for the meeting, negotiation and alignment of different interests in urban space. However, the extent to which these conceptual requirements can be implemented 'in the real world' remains undetermined, as does the relationship between the German-language debate on real-world laboratories and international approaches (see Evans/Karvonen/Raven 2016; Marvin/Bulkeley/Mai et al. 2018). The way in which different cities with their specific characteristics and parameters influence the work in and with real-world laboratories is also unclear.

Against this background, the planned special issue of the journal 'Raumforschung und Raumordnung | Spatial Research and Planning' discusses the establishment of real-world laboratories as part of urban-geographical and planning research infrastructures. Due to the novelty of the real-world laboratory concept, there are many open questions and problems associated with it which vary with the concrete (urban) setting and topic of the real-world laboratory. The special issue aims to tackle these issues and seeks papers that further develop the concept, as well as ones that reflect on experiences with established real-world laboratories at the interface between urban research and planning, and that discuss the relevant methodological assumptions using examples from practice.

Possible topics and questions for papers on practice and research:

Concept/Format

- How does the real-world laboratory concept relate to established participative and experimental approaches in planning sciences and urban research?
- What methodological differences and patterns of success can be distinguished for these approaches in relation to urban space?
- What conceptual and methodological specifics are required by real-world laboratories in the context of transdisciplinary urban research and planning sciences? What is the role of experimenting here and what forms of different experimenting can be identified?

Advantageous and obstructive parameters for real-world laboratories

- What problems, challenges and opportunities have emerged from comparisons of existing real-world laboratories e.g. in terms of working with vulnerable groups and other groups of actors such as administrations and non-governmental organisations?
- What resources are required to 'successfully' implement and establish the results of real-world laboratories in cities and municipalities (e.g. in the form of new and stable exchange formats; transformations of urban form; social, transport or other similar real-world changes)?
- What specific (structural) parameters of municipal administrations and other local governance actors should be considered?
- What infrastructural parameters are required for the establishment of long-term real-world laboratories?

Effects of real-world laboratories

- What is the potential of real-world laboratories for urban research and planning following a practice-based approach? Can specific stimuli be created in planning processes by using real-world laboratories?
- What effects are achieved with the help of real-world laboratories on different spatial levels (neighbourhood/city/region)? How can these effects be captured?
- Can findings from locally based real-world laboratories be applied to other contexts? Do the contextual specifics of each case receive enough attention?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of the instrument with regards to a form of knowledge production that includes diverse actors?

Papers may be written in German or in English and may be submitted as 'Articles' or in the category 'Policy and practice perspective'. Interested authors are asked to submit a draft abstract of 150 to 250 words in advance to ensure that the topic under consideration is appropriate for the special issue. All interested authors are requested to comply with the Instructions for Authors of the journal (<https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/rara/rara-overview.xml>). All the papers submitted will undergo the usual double-blind review procedure.

The following timetable applies:

- Deadline for submission of the draft abstracts: 1 February 2020. Please send your abstract to Dr. Charlotte Räuchle (charlotte.raeuchle@fu-berlin.de).
- Feedback to the authors on the submitted abstracts by: 15 February 2020.
- Deadline for submission of papers: 1 July 2020. Papers are to be submitted via the website: <https://www.editorialmanager.com/rara/>
- The online first publication of papers will be around four weeks after acceptance of the submission in question.
- Publication of the print version of the special issue is planned for the beginning of 2021.

For any content-related questions please contact the guest editors: Dr. Charlotte Räuchle (charlotte.raeuchle@fu-berlin.de), Dr. Franziska Stelzer (franziska.stelzer@wupperinst.org), Ralf Zimmer-Hegmann (ralf.zimmer-hegmann@ils-forschung.de). For any organisational queries please contact the journal's editor-in-chief: Prof. Dr. Andreas Klee (klee@arl-net.de).

Literature

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