

Methodology as ontology? Remaking geography through experimentation in the making of NZ social science

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Work Package 2 Research Seminar

Copenhagen June 8-10, 2011

Geography, methodology, and reinterpreting 'geography is what geographers do' (Le Heron and Lewis 2011)

- What has held geography together is the disposition and sensitivity to produce situated knowledge
- How we come to know is through theorising away from the empirical. Geography is distinguished by the aggregate sum of multiple 'dos'. ... gives us a disposition to recognise the situated nature of knowledge, but if geography is what geographers do, then ours is very much a discipline of producing situated knowledge.
- This gives freedom to explore, not just a sanction to do different substantive research, but to understand the world from the doing of making the world.
- geography has always had the potential to nudge 'What is' and add more 'ands' to what is.

Methodology as ontology: A proposition

- ... we contend that ‘doing ‘is’ and ‘and’” is an ontological proposition. What follows is that the usual epistemological question of ‘How do we know this to be the case?’ needs to be extended to include ‘How do we know the world if this ‘is’ is the case? And ‘What implications ensue as we relate more ‘ands’?’” If we are saying that the world is nothing but relations, we are saying that while you do see potential or actual relationality without ‘doing’, relations do not come into being without ‘doing’.
- Settlements do not have to be around a progress narrative. Nor do they have to be around a meek acceptance of a subservient role.

Le Heron and Lewis (2011)

Connections: Positioning in seminar

- What if the value of ‘friction’ is its generative energy – is there a politics of friction?
- Engagement and enactment – relating a politics of knowledge production to action
- Beyond policy centrism (methodological polyism) – digging behind policy as a verb
- Interpreting knowledge exchange as the co-production of knowledge
- What is the consensual basis for regimes of governance – how do we engage in renegotiating this consensual basis and enact a ‘disturbance of progress’?

Starting points: ideas

- Situated knowledge (Harraway 1988): asking/knowing from situated positions, all asking/knowing is situated, embodied/embedded, all interpretation is situated
- Social enquiry 'enacts the world' at multiple sites and moments by making choices about what to bring to attention and how to elaborate upon it, and through the performative and co-constitutive roles of selected categories (Law and Urry 2004)
- Political projects: 'Strategically mobilized narratives' that marshal governmental and spatial imaginaries, diverse interests, institutions, and cultural and economic trajectories into a calculated, more or less coherent, and calculative project' (Larner et al. 2007, Lewis et al. 2008)
- Performative economies: our frames, measures and categories make the world (Callon 2010)

Starting points: Situatedness

- Being positioned and acting entrepreneurially in expanding networks
- Practicing a politics of knowledge production around institution building, collective interests, capability building
- Collapse of the disciplines and monastic academic subjectivities (homo academicus)
- Increasingly porous boundaries between universities and spaces/subjects/practices of knowledge production: impact, translation, cognotariat
- Geography (education/anthropology?) home for a turn or a disposition to practice?
- *PAR on the place of social research in social knowledge production ...*
- ... in New Zealand ('situated theorisation of situatedness')

A New Zealand setting

- Transparency and comparative openness of networks (academy-industry-policy proximity), instability of institutions, turnover of categories, immediacy and economism of the national development project.
- Makes plausible a project of expanding the knowledge production, pedagogic, and political capabilities of social science simultaneously in teaching, community and policy realms
- Potentialities beyond the department – a politics of geographical practice (interventionism in post-development outside NPM) (Le Heron and Lewis 2007)
- Directs attention to the practice of social knowledge production, co-learning, and co-constitutiveness at the interfaces between academy, policy, science and industry
- Makes plausible the notion of methodology as ontology

A proposition: Consequences of a particular present

- The disintegration of the ‘development project’ reminds us that political spaces are never fully strategised or settled, and institutions not fixed
- Post-development, advanced liberal political spaces
 - fragmented but still underpinned by social institutions
 - opportunities for different forms of politics, including opportunistic interventions and entrepreneurial institution building (interventions in assemblage, as opposed to resistance per se, or launching alternative projects)
 - engagement beyond participation, translation
- Knowledge production is often a forgotten fragmentation/privatisation in the fracture of state/nation/society/economy/territory
- The crucial question in the politics of knowledge production may be how we perform knowledge rather than its substance
- Work Packages 5&6 need to be prefigured in Work Package 2

A post-structuralist political economy?

- Deconstructing and analysing discourse to see what ideas do (or aim to do), asking what work categories do (performative dimensions of social and economic categories)
- Attentiveness to the situatedness and constitutiveness of knowledge: How, where and by whom knowledge is produced, interpreted and enacted are all crucial questions
- Projects, discourses and practices ... spaces and subjects
- The world is always both made and in the making but there are always institutions and investment and knowledge trajectories

Practising PSPE

- Social scientists experiment with and upon the world (Amin and Thrift, 2005) - social research becomes as much about what might be made and what should be brought into being as it is about investigating what appears as social reality
- Engage to enact different social realities by enhancing the generative potential of reinterpreting, reassembling and generating new knowledge in diverse ways
- Emphasise the active - generate a relevant, accessible and potentially transformative thinking and practice in situ
- Seek to escape the bounds of research, academy, discipline, institutions, and current capabilities/epistemology
- Fracture binaries between researcher and researched; and interpretations of the world and acts to transform it (know into being multiple possible worlds 'through collective experimentations' – Callon and Muniesa 2005)
- Focus on political projects of knowledge production

(Ex-post) research agenda

- What possibilities might be generated for engagement/enactment under neoliberalism?
- Is there a generative politics of knowledge production in post-development?
- Does PSPE offer us a helpful frame for mobilising a politics of knowledge production?
- What might PSPE look like (how might it be practised)?
- If community/nation depend on difference in economic topography, how can this be shaped progressively – e.g. how can we do economy/city/policy better in NZ
- Can/will collective economic practices leak into better outcomes for New Zealanders

Enactment: Projects and methodologies as ontology(?)

Project	Object of Analysis	'Engaged' subjects	Sites of Engaged Performance	Knowledge : 'Doing Fix'
Biological economies	Firms, provenance, Nexus chains/place	Enterprises Devt Agencies	Chatham House exchanges, Chatshops	Experimentation
Knowledge Spaces	Social science institutions	Science bodies, officials, politicians	A/I Ethnographies: HWT, BRCSS, RSNZ; RunningHot; Collaboratories; Ref. Group	Capability, collective action
Securing NZ geography	Discipline	Geographers	NZGS/AGTA meetings, Journals, 'Schooling' debates	What geographers do
Constructive conversations	Biopharming	Academics Sci. managers	Writing retreats Stakeholder seminars	Promissory science
Anchor organisations	Urban boosterism	Urban 'leaders'	Seminars Interviews	Leadership
Situated Knowledges	Methodological sensitivity	SKCAN	Building Collectivity, meetings	Situatedness
Third Mission	Third stream activities	Budgetariat, cognotariat	Workshops / reflexive subjects	Subjects/spaces
'Following' (in) Northland	Post-development initiatives	Iwi Trusts, Runanga	Hui, site visits with students	Alterity/diversity
Central Otago	Regional strategy	Devt agencies Enterprises	Workshops/report	Associational action

Methods?

- Centred on privileged positioning within networks (inserting, mobilising, opportunist leaps):
 - non-representational knowledge: knowing by doing (inventing interventions ‘engaged sites’ / auto/institutional ethnography)
 - being positioned – PAR without a project: non-projected, unethicised
- Balanced by interviews, discourse analysis, and document analysis / following objects, mapping practices

Some reflections

- A different mode of knowledge production – methodology as ontology?
- At centre is where/when/how/with whom we do research: not methods but performative practice ... including opportunistic/invited/unethicised engagements
- The trajectories are there – we are positioned within them (limits to access, negotiation, rights in rooms) but they are unfixed and present is emergent
- Sites and moments are crucial (Le Heron 2009): luck, planning, timing, entrepreneurial engineering
- A new entrepreneurial academic subjectivity and related politics of knowledge production (Lewis 2009b)
- Reflects and performs a new politics: reinvention of social democracy from encounter up through generative practice and institutions
- Centres ‘for whom and in whose name’ do we research – interplay with curiosity, relevance, politics, context

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List of Abbreviations from Table

- HWT – *He Waka Tangata*, Ministry of Research Science and Technology funded emerging leaders group in New Zealand social sciences
- BRCSS - Building Research Capacity in Social Sciences (5 year project funded by Tertiary Education Committee to stimulate social science networks in NZ)
- RSNZ - Royal Society of New Zealand
- RunningHot – major bi-annual interdisciplinary conference in New Zealand (co-hosted by HWT)
- SKCAN – Situated knowledges collective of Auckland and Newcastle
- NZGS – New Zealand Geographical Society
- AGTA – Auckland Geography Teachers Association