

Ethics and Emotions Around Knowledge Production – Challenges for Urban Scholars Working in Sensitive Contexts

Thematic Workshop Organized by the Urban Futures at Risk Research Group, Georg-Simmel Center for Urban Studies, Humboldt University in Berlin

October 31 – November 2, 2024

This workshop aims to conceptually and empirically explore the ethical considerations and emotional challenges surrounding the production and dissemination of authoritative knowledge in social sciences, particularly in sensitive and contentious contexts such as war and conflict. We are planning to focus on the intersection of researchers' positionalities, personal emotional engagements, and the urban contexts they study, especially highlighting the experiences of scholars who find themselves in challenging positions as 'insiders' in their research topics.

The ethical considerations surrounding the production and dissemination of authoritative knowledge in social sciences concerning sensitive and contentious events, such as war and conflict, have been extensively discussed across academic disciplines (Akesson et al., 2018, Bradley & Kavanagh, 2024, Fujii, 2012, Wood, 2006). The need for scholars to recognize their ethical obligations, particularly in socially and politically dynamic environments, as emphasized by numerous scholars (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, Cohen & Arieli, 2011, Knott, 2019), is, thus, particularly pressuring.

The significance of these ethical considerations is heightened in conflict settings, where scholars' positionalities as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' can significantly impact research dynamics, access to field sites, and participant recruitment, as argued by Berger (2015) and Von Unger (2021). Researchers conducting studies in conflict-affected environments also face personal risks, including emotional challenges and concerns about safety and well-being, as discussed by Wood (2006) and Reno (2013), not to mention the potential exposure to secondary trauma and struggle to separate their personal and professional lives. This emotional involvement can profoundly affect data gathering and interpretation.

The aim of the workshop is to bring together scholars from different contexts who direct their research into the topics that deal with urban context, but also imply personal emotional engagements and intersect with their positionalities. We aspire participation from researchers whose personal background intersect with their research topics, and who find themselves in a challenging position of being 'insiders' in their topics struggling with the distinction between 'home' and 'the field'.

Key questions to be addressed during the workshop:

- How we, social scientists dealing with personally relevant topics, can balance research outputs, research quality, and ethics, especially during times of war and conflict?
- How can we, as scholars, critically assess our roles, methodologies, and the potential impact of our research on both individuals and communities, to ensure ethical practice and minimize harm in conflict research?

- How can we approach the researchers' positionality, and critically assess the biases and preferences of being "insiders" in the topic of the research?
- Which techniques and approaches can be useful for the researchers dealing with sensitive topics to debrief, decompress, and overcome the overwhelmings of the need to constantly deal with sensitive (and, potentially, triggering and/or retraumatizing) topics? What can be the role of research community in securing the "ethics of care" for both the researchers and research participants?
- How do we, as researchers, evaluate our responsibility in knowledge production (e.g. shaping the narratives about the ongoing conflicts)?

We encourage contributions from researchers with various perspectives: social and political studies, urban planning, geography, anthropology, and other fields. We also welcome the participation of activists and practitioners from the civil society sector.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Please submit your abstract of up to 300 words to ufar-at-gsz@hu-berlin.de by September 1, 2024. You will be informed about the acceptance by September 15, 2024.

WORKSHOP FORMAT AND FEES

The workshop will happen during three days, starting on 31st October in the afternoon and ending on 2nd November lunchtime.

The participation in the workshop is free of charge. However, the participants are expected to cover their travel expenses and accommodation themselves. Limited amount of grants can be offered.

For any questions or additional information, please contact the workshop organizers at valeria.lazarenko@hu-berlin.de