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Whose knowledge? Reflecting on the plurality of knowledge production in contentious politics

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Abstract

The links between social protest and scientific research are complex and manifold. This article focuses on some of these connections, adopting a perspective on knowledge in which processes of knowledge production are located in all parts of society rather than being monopolised by academia. Drawing on the empirical example of the Port Vell conflict – a conflict about the inner-city harbour transformation in Barcelona – moments of knowledge production and reproduction are examined. The article shows that social sciences develop and apply general concepts and theories which are adopted by activists. At the same time, protest movements contribute a specific form of alternative knowledge, e.g. about processes of exclusion following current urban transformation while also including situated and embodied consequences of these processes. This perspective on knowledge in various types challenges traditional forms of research. This article forms tentative ideas about alternative roles for researchers.

Zusammenfassung

Die Verbindungen von Wissenschaft und Protest sind vielfältig. Der vorliegende Artikel hat zum Ziel, einige dieser Verknüpfungen genauer zu betrachten. Dabei nimmt er eine Perspektive auf Wissen ein, die Prozesse von Wissensproduktion in allen Teilen der Gesellschaft verortet sieht und nicht allein im akademischen Bereich. Am Fallbeispiel des Konfliktes um den innerstädtischen Yachthafen Port Vell in Barcelona werden Momente der Produktion und Reproduktion von Wissen in den Blick genommen. Während in der Wissenschaft Konzepte und Theorien, beispielsweise über Prozesse der Stadtentwicklung, entwickelt und angewendet werden, die Allgemeingültigkeit beanspruchen und auch von Aktivistinnen und Aktivisten aufgegriffen werden, können Protestbewegungen – wie im dargestellten Fallbeispiel – zu einer anderen Form von Wissen beitragen. Sie vermitteln nicht nur Kenntnisse über Exklusionsprozesse in der Folge von aktuellen Entwicklungen in der Stadt sondern auch über deren Konsequenzen und darüber, wie diese sich auf die Lage der Betroffenen auswirken. Diese neue Perspektive auf Wissen stellt traditionelle Formen des Forschens in Frage. Der Artikel wirft erste Ideen dazu auf, welche Rolle Protestforscherinnen und -forscher alternativ einnehmen können.

Keywords Knowledge in Geography, knowledge production, contentious politics, urban conflicts

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1. Introduction

Scientific research and protest movements are linked in manifold ways. Protest groups, on the one hand, are often highly interested in collaborating with scientific 'experts', since activists legitimise their actions by explicitly referring to scientific concepts, interpretation or impact assessments carried out by 'independent' researchers (Hale 2006). 'Experts' are also engaged in specific tasks within protest groups, such as elaborating legal objections. In fact, many protest movements have "their own bodies of associated research" (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009: 2). Furthermore, in some cases well-known scientists help make protests publicly visible. On the other hand, scientists have an increasing stake in cooperating with social movements, given that protest research has witnessed a renaissance in recent years. Last but not least, in many cases, including mine, the role of activist and the role of scholar are both combined in one person (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010).

During my empirical research about the transformation of the inner-city marina Port Vell in Barcelona¹, two aspects regarding the relationship between protest research and protest movement were of particular relevance. Firstly, there was an ongoing debate within the protest alliance concerning the role of activists in alternative urban development. While it was agreed that the protest alliance was fighting for an alternative way of urban planning for the citizens, opinions differed regarding the question of determining the main actor in the planning process. Visions of a pure, neighbour-based, 'real democratic' urban planning in which planners and other academics commit their skills to serving citizens were contradicted by academics attempting to impose their own understanding of citizen benefit, as far as urban planning was concerned. Secondly, the activists had a broad body of scientifically informed knowledge about urban spaces and the development of spaces at their disposal. This knowledge is fundamental for an activist understanding of the Port Vell conflict.

Of these two aspects, I will specifically focus below on the second one (although both aspects are not clearly separable, and a discussion of the latter will also touch upon the former). Drawing on a non-objectivist, non-functionalist understanding of knowledge, this article aims to elaborate upon and discuss processes of knowledge production in the context of contentious politics, and in particular the construction of knowl-

edge about space(s), in addition to reflecting upon their implications for research practices.

In order to place this article in the context of past and recent scientific debates, the following section provides an overview of current debates on knowledge production in the context of social movement research (Choudry and Kapoor 2010; Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009; Casas-Cortés et al. 2008). This article draws on an approach to knowledge creation that considers a plurality of knowledges. Section 3 analyses the processes of knowledge production in the conflict that arose around the recent transformation of Port Vell. The case study is a brief example of an analysis considering different kinds of knowledge, focusing in particular on both the peculiarities of alternative movement knowledges and the links between scientific and movement knowledge in a shared process of knowledge (co-)production.

By questioning the traditional understanding of researchers as producers of true and objective knowledge, debates about knowledge (co-)production and alternative knowledges raise questions about traditional research practices. Accordingly, some reflections on possible alternative roles for scholars of social movements are discussed in Section 4. After giving a brief overview of some debates on ethical issues in the field of social movement studies, a few alternatives are proposed, using a focus on a plurality of knowledges as a starting point for an explicitly political study of contentious politics.

This article is not a guideline on how to combine activism and research. It is rather an evaluation of and reflection on research which was not started with the purpose of doing activist research, but that continuously led the researcher to the insight that the more-or-less traditional scientific practices upon which the research was based were inadequate. This is an attempt to find better ways to do research on contentious politics. In this sense, the empirical example of Port Vell has triggered theoretical reflections on knowledge while being at the same time – in its current form – a product of these reflections and a very sketchy departure to an explicitly political approach to research on contentious politics.

2. Movement knowledge(s) and processes of knowledge construction

Half in earnest, half in jest, one of my informants described the protest situation in Barcelona thus: "It

feels like we are in a research lab" (Interview M.T., 10/05/2013²). Indeed, in the context of the 2011 wave of protests, which include the Arab Spring, the *indignados* Movement in Spain, and the manifold Occupy and anti-crisis protests in many countries worldwide, scientific interest in contentious politics has regained strength in recent years. Protests, social movements and resistance, however, have been issues in social science (Touraine 1985; Goodwin and Jasper 2009: 5f.) as well as in human geography (Sharp et al. 2000; Leitner et al. 2008; Nicholls et al. 2013) for decades.

For a long time in research on protests and social movements, a mainly positivistic understanding of knowledge production has been predominant – and in some parts still is (Jamison 2006: 45). In the positivistic understanding, science is meant to provide a kind of 'objective' knowledge, a view that allows us to speak about academics³ as the 'producers of knowledge'. Although the existence of an everyday knowledge is usually not denied, scholars distinguish scientific knowledge as "a methodological production of better, therefore more proved, more exact, more verified knowledge" (Hirschauer 2010: 210, translation by the author). This understanding of objective scientific knowledge creation is consistent with the clear separation between the realms of academics and of politics. While politics produces subjective political statements, science produces objective, 'true' knowledge.

In keeping with this 'traditional' understanding of knowledge production, and in the context of a scientific debate characterising modern society as a social movement society, protest movements were – and in a part of social movement research still are – "largely perceived as objects of knowledge for academics, rather than as knowledge producers in their own right" (Chesters 2012: 145). In consequence, "the relations between movements and scientific knowledge are seldom, if ever, examined explicitly. (...) [They] have tended to be neglected by academics and activists alike", as Jamison argues (2006: 46).

In contrast to this 'traditional' understanding of knowledge production and the role of social movements as research objects rather than research producers, other parts of social movement scholars have started, in recent decades, to recognise other forms of knowledge production, putting alternative knowledges at the centre of their work. In doing so, they have become part of a broad ongoing debate about different perspectives on knowledge in social

sciences, in particular in anthropology (Crick 1982; Geertz 1983; Barth 2002; Hale 2006; Fabian 2012) and sociology (Schützeichel 2007; Tänzler et al. 2006), as well as in debates informed by feminism (Haraway 1988) and postcolonial studies (Leyva Solano and Speed 2008; Jazeel and McFarlane 2010).

In human geography, often a rather functional understanding of knowledge has been used in order to analyse (economic) knowledge-driven spatial transformations (Kunzmann 2009; Growe 2012). Others have contributed to draw on urban models which refer to knowledge and innovation as resources in urban global competition such as smart city (Matthiesen and Mahnken 2009: 14) or the impact of spatial arrangements in knowledge institutions (Meusburger 1998). These authors consider in particular formalised and hegemonic forms of knowledge. They mainly ignore the role of knowledge as a powerful resource in society's power structures. Recently, however, more critical researchers debate the role of alternative forms of knowledge, discussing indigenous knowledge (e.g. Moyo and Moyo 2014), tacit knowledge (e.g. Curry and Kirwan 2014), and situated knowledges (e.g. Richardson-Ngwenya 2013). All these forms of alternative knowledge have in common that they are marginalised from hegemonic knowledge regimes (Reuter 2012: 300) when it comes to both their content and their methods of being produced, conserved, and circulated. This perspective on knowledge, which takes into consideration the "intertwined nature of power and knowledge" (Kothari 2002), is crucial for a great part of the work on movement knowledge presented in the following.

Many scholars argue that protest movements are important production sites of an alternative kind of creation of knowledge about the world and how it can be changed that can differ fundamentally from the knowledge produced by academics (Casas-Cortés et al. 2008; Conway 2006; Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009). In the following, this specific knowledge will be referred to as movement knowledge. The term, originally introduced by Cox and Flesher Fominaya (2009), will be used in a broader sense to include different approaches about who produces this alternative knowledge, how it is created, and what it is about.

Regarding its content, movement knowledge provides information that constructs or supports a world view different from the one promoted by officials or sovereigns. In many cases, this 'knowledge from below' is "information about society which is inconvenient to

and resisted by those above" (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009: 1). This includes public announcement of specific information concealed by the authorities, such as the risks of nuclear energy or the costs of global warming. Whether drawing on their own resources or collaborating with sympathising 'experts', social movements are generating and providing this counter expertise (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009: 2). Eyerman and Jamison (1991, see also Jamison 2006) identify three areas in which such counter-expertise is produced: world view assumptions, technical possibilities for change and organisational forms. Knowledge related to these concerns is (re-)produced in a wide range of debates. At least since the transnationalisation of protests in the context of the anti-globalisation movement these debates are not only held on the local level but circulate within a growing transnational activist network (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009: 3ff.).

From a standpoint or positionality perspective, this knowledge is not alternative mainly because it is different from that provided by the authorities, but specifically because it is produced from an alternative 'place from which we know' (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2009: 5). Consequently, disclosing this alternative knowledge to the public space always presents an invitation to see the world in a different way. Cox and Flesher Fominaya state that there is a hidden knowledge, that is, the tacit knowledge about the world of the oppressed, which has not been articulated because of fear of violent repression. Once it is communicated into the public sphere in the context of contentious politics, this tacit knowledge on the part of the people can challenge existing power structures. To name just a few examples: in the context of a postcolonial world, this can be subaltern knowledge vs. hegemonic knowledge; with reference to gendered power structures in our society, this can be a feminist or queer approach vs. an unquestioned heteronormative/patriarchal understanding of the world.

Escobar (1998), for example, discusses how the world would change if the current hegemonic understanding of biodiversity was replaced by the alternative understanding of biodiversity as a term encompassing cultural diversity as promoted by local protest movements in Colombian Amazonia. He reveals that while the network on biodiversity would change, actors and places with currently peripheral roles – namely marginalised places, local communities and social movements – would obtain a crucial role as centres of innovation and alternative worlds. According to Rancière

(2001), the moment in which alternative knowledge is placed in the public space of a world where it has been neglected thus far, or – in his words – the moment of a "presence of two worlds in one" (Rancière 2001), is a moment of real democratic politics.

Focusing primarily not on what knowledge is about or who produces it, but on how knowledge is produced, Starodub (forthcoming) draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of nomad science to describe movement knowledge production as a rhizomatic, decentralised, relational process that takes place in everyday encounters as well as in more formalised seminar or workshop settings. These spaces of knowledge creation assemble into a horizontal network of knowledge production based in particular on relationships of affinity. In contrast to academia, movement knowledge is produced in different situations and at distinct places – there is no place of knowledge production that is granted epistemological authority. This approach highlights the plurality of knowledges and knowing subjects, not only within academia and social movements, but also within a single protest group.

Finally, a few words should be mentioned in relation to the scope of movement knowledge. In spite of the fact that this knowledge is generated within contentious politics and, in many cases, is antithetic to the knowledge produced by academics and promoted by sovereigns, it is neither reducible to nor solely circulated within its own protest sphere. Indeed, "voices, ideas, perspectives, and theories produced by those engaged in social struggles are often ignored" (Choudry and Kapoor 2010: 2), yet once this knowledge is set in a public space, it can influence political decisions and is potentially reproduced by the media. Jamison (2006) shows that movement knowledge has even shaped both scientific knowledge and science itself. To prove his argument, he draws on historical examples, revealing that today's modern science would not exist without experiencing the influence of social insurgences, such as the Protestant Reformation, the English Civil War and the French Revolution. At the same time, we can observe that protests – and consequently the production of what has been called movement knowledge – are in some cases (if possibly not in all) highly influenced by and amalgamated with knowledge produced by the academic world. Recognising the plurality of (interconnected) knowledges, including alternative knowledges created in the realm of contention, is one of the challenges social movement studies contend with.

Drawing on the empirical example of Port Vell, the following chapter traces a plurality of knowledges about space which include scientific approaches to the conflict as well as activists' individual experiences transforming the city of Barcelona. The analysis focuses on how both forms of knowledge are linked together.

3. Co-production of knowledge about space: the empirical example of Port Vell

Barcelona is not only a lively city with different sub-cultural scenes, but also a city with a long history of struggle on urban issues along with a strong civil society that has actively participated in urban planning at least since the 1960s and '70s democratic transition. So it comes as no surprise that most urban development projects in Barcelona are accompanied by protests. In recent years, protests increased against major construction projects, emerging in the context of neoliberal urban transformation, such as Hotel Vela. At the same time, fast-growing urban tourism, particularly in the downtown area, has drastic consequences for the local population and has become an important issue for many activists. The following analysis focuses on the Port Vell restructuring project which is one of the latest examples for both issues.

The marina Port Vell is part of Barcelona's inner-city harbour area and is located close to the most tourist-oriented part of the city, the Old Town. It was built in the 14th century as a commercial port and was transformed into a marina during the city's preparation for the 1992 Olympic Games. In 2012, plans for a further transformation of Port Vell appeared in a newspaper article. This time, the main aim was to develop the marina as a point of reference for so-called 'megayachts', yachts with a footage of more than 180 metres. The transformation includes the construction of bigger landing stages and new buildings as well as the establishment of a new platform in the water dedicated to parking facilities and utility installations. These changes go hand-in-hand with the installation of new upscale service facilities and higher security standards (Marina Port Vell, interviews).

Shortly after information about the plans to restructure the port was released to the public, dissent against this transformation arose. A protest alliance called *Plataforma defensa el Port Vell* was founded, and during the two following years, many protest activities took place as well as discussions and work-

shops dealing critically with the transformation. However, the transformation has not been prevented and the construction works are almost completed.

After some weeks of participating in the protest activities, I realised that it had become common sense to refer to the Port Vell conflict in the context of a citywide neoliberal transformation process. While at the beginning of the protests, i.e. in spring and early summer of 2012, the harbour itself took centre stage in the protest activities and the activists' narratives, in the following months it seemed that the conflict's embeddedness in a wider transformation process gained importance. In the context of this altered framing of the Port Vell transformation, there was also a change in the discourse on being affected by the regeneration project. While in the beginning, according to activist narratives, the term had been used to specifically characterise those living or working in the direct harbour neighbourhood, such as fishermen and people living in the harbour and the nearby quarters, now even citizens living in Poble Sec, a quarter located in the south of the Old Town, were affected by the regeneration project and express a shared identity with other Port Vell activists:

"At the beginning, we as a group ('colectivo') [in Poble Sec] had actually nothing to do with the issue of Port Vell. But after investigating, researching, we realised that all urbanistic plans to be implemented follow somewhat the same logic (...) Talking with peers from Port Vell we realised that indeed Parallel Plan also addresses the reform of Port Vell" (Interview L.P., 20/06/2013).

From a network perspective, this shift can be described as the creation of new connections with other actors – in particular activists and scientists – and, as a consequence, of extending the existing network to a wider geographical scale. At the same time, symbols and pictures used on brochures and banners changed too, as pictures of the harbour itself give way to maps highlighting conflict zones in the water front area.

This development is the consequence of an assemblage of diverse interconnected processes. Most of their aspects, which for example include internal differentiation attempts, official political decisions on the city level, and the emergence of new protest movements, are not described in more depth in this article. Instead, another aspect will be accounted for: the influence of academic research and scholars in this context. Between 2012 and 2013, several

activities including conferences and workshops on the issue of Port Vell were organised by academics connected to the Port Vell protest alliance⁴, partly in cooperation with the activists. Additionally, in some cases members of the Port Vell protest alliance and the *Asamblea Portuaria Vecinal (APV)*, the two main protest groups involved in the Port Vell protests, were invited as speakers and engaged as participants in public discussions.

Given the individual academics' research interests and disciplines (namely history, historical geography, and urban planning), focus was given to the patrimonial nature of the waterfront issue as well as to the urban planning aspect and the history of Barcelona. Academic preoccupation with the Port Vell issue was characterised by the framing of the Port Vell regeneration project in terms of scientific theories and concepts. Scientific concepts such as gentrification, waterfront development and city branding were adopted to characterise developments entailed upon the Port Vell regeneration project, while theories such as *Bourdieu's* reflections on political-juridical power and the term *maritimidad* were used to discuss current urban politics⁵. Consequently, Port Vell turned into a specific example of a citywide neoliberal transformation, with processes which are similarly identified in other places. In interviews, presentations and publications, the situation in other port cities such as Valencia, Ferrol and Santander was presented in contrast with the case of Barcelona. Maps were frequently used to illustrate scientific statements. While contrasting maps highlighted the comparability between cities, other maps illustrated uniformity in various conflicts within the city of Barcelona, supporting the idea of a specific zone of affected areas/quarters.

Many speakers at the conferences/workshops were engaged in the Port Vell protests or at least showed a sympathetic relation to the Port Vell activists. They understood their academic engagement as a contribution to a public debate about alternatives to current urban politics. The organisers of the *Seminari Geocrítica* conference, held at the *Universitat de Barcelona* in June 2013, formulated the goal that "during the debates and reflections on the seminar, proposals for a more sustainable and socially just future of the transformations in the harbour area were developed" (*Tatjer and Tapia 2013*, translation by the author). Claims made for more transparency in urbanism and real participatory decision-making processes in urban politics (*Tatjer and Tapia 2013*) were closely

similar to those articulated by the protest movement. Requirements such as proposals for the yacht arrangements were directly adopted from the protest alliance (Interview F.M., 10/06/2013).

In the interviews with activists, they often referred to both the conferences/workshops organised by academics and the scientific concepts and theories discussed there. The case of the term *maritimidad* exemplifies this. It seems to be common sense that Barcelona is a city with a specific maritime 'essence'. The Port Vell protests are, in conjunction with other arguments, based on a complex discourse on Barcelona's maritime character. Following this line of argumentation, the citizens' right to participate in all decision-making processes regarding the regeneration project of Port Vell is, amongst others, grounded in the maritime culture of Barcelona and its inhabitants, giving Port Vell the important role of a place where it is possible to indulge in this maritime culture. In activists' narratives, the term *maritimidad* has been used as an umbrella term for this maritime character of Barcelona. The Port Vell transformation along with other projects in the waterfront area is identified as problematic, amongst other deficiencies, because they establish "uses that have nothing to do with the *maritimidad* of the city" (presentation of APV member, 18/06/2013). An activist describes this argument in more depth:

"The city of Barcelona has always been specifically related to the sea. (...) It's a port city and a coastal city. All through its history it has been growing economically due to maritime trade, and all handcrafts, fishing ... all this maritime life has given the city its characteristics today. We have to regain it as the heritage of all of us. This essence of the city is like a part of our collective imagination related to Barcelona, like *Gaudí's* modernist architecture. (...) to regain this maritime essence of Barcelona (...) [Port Vell] is one of the few spaces that remain from what has been the city's *maritimidad*, and we are losing this space, too. This is consequently one of the claims: the issue of *maritimidad* of the city as a definitional character of the city" (Interview M.F., 13/06/2013).

Maritimidad, originally a scientific term used by French urban planners and geographers to develop "options to appropriate the sea: the professional, cultural, recreative, sportive relations between the society and the sea" (*Géocoñfluencias 2014*, translation by the author), conceptualises the relation between city and port as a patrimonial issue. *Javier Moreno*, a mem-

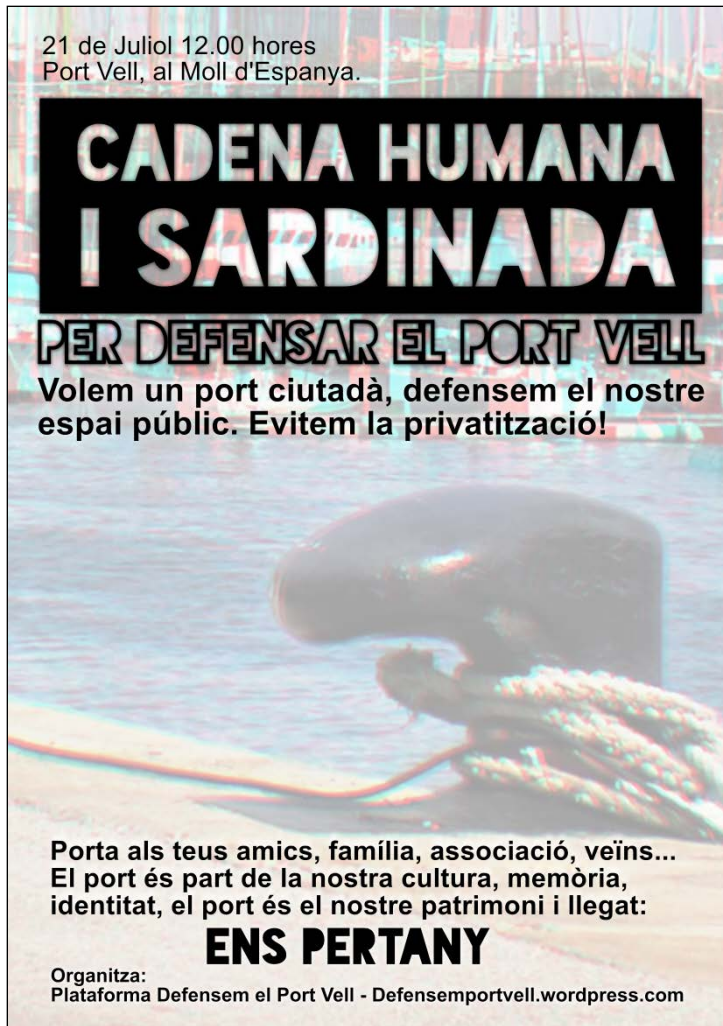


Photo 1 Poster for a protest activity. Activists performed a human chain around the Port Vell area and had a sardine barbeque.

example, is not only something people talk about, but is also experienced by its inhabitants in everyday life – for example when in some neighbourhoods fishermen repair their fishing nets on the street. Processes such as gentrification and touristification⁶ are experienced as personal losses of public spaces and daily routines in addition to creating ‘disconnectedness’ from the surrounding neighbourhood. The changes going along with these processes are said to have an impact on personal feelings of ‘tranquillity’:

“We are always less quarter (‘barrio’). El Gotico is hardly a neighbourhood. It is more a tourist area than a neighbourhood. (...) In the past, we had more relationships. (...) I remember that we, the neighbours, saw each other [on the road]. I had my neighbours around me. (...) It gave me a certain tranquillity to see them around me, having their routines. Now these routines no longer exist. (...) Routines like watching the neighbour hanging clothes, or doing the laundry, or whatever. Now these routines, part of daily life, are gone. No longer exist. No longer exist. These routines gave me a certain tranquillity, because basically, we search for routines, don’t we? (...) My own routines depend on if my neighbour hangs clothes at 3 p.m. (...) It depends on listening to the shouting from above. That’s what my routines depend on, my security, my tranquillity. When this changes – because every day tourists arrive and leave, leave, arrive, sleep, and leave – when my routines change: What do I do? I shut myself up/I enclose myself. Or I go.” (Interview T. G., 29/06/2013)

Academic terms and concepts seem to have influence on protest practices, strategies, identities and narratives, and are in part newly interpreted and embedded in movement knowledge. Gentrification has become a political catchword and is used as such, e.g. on banners and during public activities (see *Photo 1*). The argument that there is a patrimonial connection between sea and harbour is used to invite neighbours to participate in protest activities: “Bring your friends, family, members of your association, neighbours ... The harbour is part of our culture, memory, identity; the harbour is our *patrimony*, and therefore it belongs to us!” (author’s emphasis, see *Photo 2*).

ber of the *Plataforma defensem el Port Vell* who is scientifically engaged with this issue, has brought this concept into the discourse within the protest alliance and launched the online project *maritimidad en red* on the alliance’s website. Although some members dissociate themselves from the idea of *maritimidad* in a narrow, scientific sense, the term itself has become part of the movement language. Moreover, the idea of connecting maritime culture and patrimony has become a strong basis for argument in the activists’ narratives.

Maritimidad and other scientific theories and concepts, however, are not utilised in their original scientific meanings. Instead, single lines of arguments or specific terms are adopted separately from the overall scientific concept. Furthermore, the meanings of terms and the logic behind arguments are modified and adapted to the specific situation – in particular, they are complemented by everyday knowledge and framed by personal experiences. Barcelona’s maritime culture, for



Photo 2 One element of a garland of paper boats with claims written on by neighbours and activists. On this boat is written 'No Gentrification'.

To sum up, it is not possible to identify either scholars or activists as the only knowledge producers. We must admit that there is a strong mutual influence of critical social sciences at play in the Port Vell issue and the protest movement's internal production of arguments, narratives and logical progressions. Terms and concepts used in the scientific community's engagement with Port Vell are adopted by the activists. At the same time, alternative arguments, claims and ideas are shaped by activists in internal discussions and are imported into the academic sphere – where they are written down in scientific articles (like this one). Through this exchange of information, science and activism amalgamate into a complex knowledge-making assemblage that sometimes renders it impossible to definitely trace back single effects to the former or the latter. The Port Vell example shows us that in the process of co-producing knowledge, scientific terms and ideas can become mobile. While oscillating between the areas of science and protest, they are not only transformed themselves, but they also transform both the protests and the scientific work and its results – a process that has also described the mobility of urban policies (McCann and Ward 2011).

In this knowledge-making assemblage, different types of knowledge come together in form and content. While scholars contribute by adding generalisable, unlocated scientific concepts, activist knowledge is linked to personal experiences and the logical progressions of everyday life. Neoliberal urban development processes become not only but also bodily

experiences of loss or exclusion. These situated and embodied knowledges of limited locational scope occupy part of the story to be told, a story that Haraway (1988) describes as “irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges” (Haraway 1988: 583). It is precisely for this reason that these knowledges play an important role; they bring alternative views on the world to the fore and, in so doing, they create awareness of the world's contingency and, in consequence, the possibility for social change.

4. Addressing alternative knowledges in protest research

Debates on knowledge co-production, alternative knowledges and knowledge as a plurality of knowledges raise questions about practices of doing research. These debates challenge the role of researchers without offering a concrete alternative, in contrast to traditional perceptions of science in which scientists assume the clearly specified role of 'knowledge producers'. Questions arise in light of what has been discussed, such as: How do I as researcher and as individual contribute to knowledge making? Which kind of knowledge do I support and what knowledge do I actually produce and reproduce? What forms of research correspond to my ideas of being a researcher?

Today, a broad and diverse body of literature exists concerning issues related to these questions – and a great part of it was elaborated in the context of re-

search on contentious politics. Engaging with these questions, however, has not always been important to social movement researchers. As *Cox and Flesher Fominaya* (2009: 6) argue, traditional studies on contentious politics, particularly *social movement studies*, which emerged as a sub-discipline of sociology and political science in the late 1960s and early 1970s (*Haunss and Ullrich* 2013), are mainly removed from any sympathetic relation to the activist movements they analyse. Scientific interest usually does not extend beyond descriptive, analytical studies, with work based on the 'traditional' understanding of knowledge production described above. If considered at all, the relationship between science and activism is discussed as a question of expertise. Academics and intellectuals – as well as celebrities, novelists and artists – are identified as a specific group of actors in the context of protest activities. They can be members of protest movements, or sympathetic to them, and can perform 'expert' tasks such as presenting the movements' hopes and ideologies, crafting arguments, articulating values and debating tactics both inside and outside the protest movement (*Jasper* 2014: 235).

Yet, in recent decades, other social movement researchers have started to include ethical, reflective ideas about knowledge production and research practices in their work. Beside a genuine ethical-political motivation, a special need to engage with ethical questions in the field of social movement research is explained by the specific context of contentious politics, where publishing information can have serious aftermaths, such as repression. Consequently, the question of which knowledge can be publicised in scientific presentations and articles becomes more relevant (*Milan* 2014).

Many political or ethical approaches to research in the realm of contentious politics were inspired by participatory (action) research, a research methodology developed in the 1960s, specifically by researchers engaging with poor and/or oppressed communities (*Cancian* 1996: 94) and radical adult educators (*Dawson and Sinwell* 2012: 184) in the Global South. The approach is in particular informed by *Freire's* concept of the pedagogy of the oppressed (*Chesters* 2012: 147; *Hale* 2001: 14). In the context of social movement studies, participatory (action) research is adapted and modified for research on protests and activism (*Cancian* 1993; *Dawson and Sinwell* 2012). There is, however, another predecessor to activist research according to *Chatterton et al.* (2007): the writings of *Karl Marx* and *Peter Kropotkin*, which examine the rel-

evance of social science to real world concerns. This debate re-emerged in the late 1960s in the context of radical or revolutionary theories. For example, *David Harvey* (1973) discussed revolutionary theory as "verified by bringing a new (revolutionary) world into being" (*Barnes* 2007: 37).

With events like the 1990s Zapatista movement inspiring transnational meetings and the World Social Forum's upcoming protest practices and strategies being increasingly reflected by social movements themselves, approaches that tackle the question of being an activist and a researcher at the same time have become popular. Consequently, "a generation of academic-activists and activist researchers who have sought to challenge the epistemological premises of orthodox social movement studies grew up" (*Chesters* 2012: 154). In particular, the traditional divide between science and political activism has been questioned (*Milan* 2014), and a reflection on one's own role as researcher has led to questions about the "proper place of academics in social movements" (*Mason* 2013: 24) as well as about potential areas in which activism and academia can cooperate (*Milan* 2014). Different joint activist-research methods, such as scholar-activism research (e.g. *Derickson and Routledge* 2015), militant ethnography (*Juris* 2007) or solidarity action research (*Chatterton et al.* 2007), were developed in order to create solidary, ethical research on contention⁷. This debate is in particular driven by scholars' "political alignment" (*Hale* 2006: 97) with protest movements and the will to express solidarity with and support them. Besides that, however, there are additional motivations for activist-researchers; some authors pinpoint the chances of activist-research achieving "better results" (*Hale* 2001: 15; see also the discussion of scholar-ACTIVIST vs. SCHOLAR-activist in *Dawson and Sinwell* 2012: 178f.).

There are two lines of argument regarding how activist research can be implemented: the idea of reciprocity and methodological approaches to collective knowledge production. The idea of reciprocity is based on the reflection that research "is labour not only for researchers but also for research objects" (*Milan* 2014: 447). Consequently, activists who are "typically highly invested subjects" (*Milan* 2014: 446) often only give insights into their work on the condition that understanding and respect (and in some cases active support) is given to the protest movement's values and practices. Additionally, scientists who are often sympathetic to the protest movement want to

give something back to the group they research. The underlying idea of “being useful” (Taylor 2014) for the protest movement can be achieved either immediately, by supporting the protest movement with personal commitment during the data collection period, or indirectly, by producing research results that are useful for the protest movement. Both forms of reciprocity have been criticised: The former runs the risk of being used as a simple way to gain access to the research field while power inequalities between researchers and research participants as well as between scientific knowledge(s) and alternative knowledges are not directly challenged by this approach. The latter poses the danger that research results, even when they could be useful for the research participants, were often not obtainable due to accessibility costs or language barriers. Both forms of reciprocity delimit the possible research fields of the movements that researchers want to support. Necessary research on other movements such as right-wingers, consequently, requires different approaches (Gillan and Pickerill 2012).

Methodological approaches to collective knowledge production seek to blur “the boundaries between the subject and the object of knowledge and [pursue] practices of co-producing knowledge with, rather than on, movements” (Chesters 2012: 154). Research is consequently defined as a “dialogue with them [activists] to shape each phase of the process, from conception of the research topic to data collection to verification and dissemination of the results” (Hale 2006: 97). In doing so, processes of knowledge co-production, such as those that were identified as rather unconscious processes in the previous section of this article, are induced explicitly and intentionally. The aim of explicitly co-producing knowledge is to democratise knowledge production. In this process, the role of the researcher tends to merge into activist activities. Juris (2007) considers the moment of “data collection” as activist-like experience, to be a key element of activist research. If not accompanied by deeper reflection on its own position, this approach runs the risk of becoming a “checkbox approach” (Gillan and Pickerill 2012: 135) that is unable to negotiate with the ambiguity that is critical to every ethical reflection and is not sensitive to different research situations (Gillan and Pickerill 2012).

Engaging with knowledge production, however, has led me to a different ethical reflection on doing research. One lesson learned from the debate on knowledge production and even the Port Vell example is that there is no pure or even objective knowledge, and that

consequently we as researchers need to recognise that scientific creation of knowledge is never objective or unpolitical (Reuter 2012: 302). Consequently, science as a political act itself has to be recognised and intentionally practiced. There is not, however, merely one way to do explicit political research in the context of protest studies, but different situations require different forms. The way we pursue political aims in our research practices depends on our own identity between research and activism and upon our positionality in relation to both the research field (Gillan and Pickerill 2012: 135) and broader power relations. While taking into consideration reflections on alternative knowledge, different practices of doing explicit political research come to mind, distinct from best-known methodological activist-research approaches to knowledge co-production, or methods of activist-like experiences for data collection.

This may be, for example, placing practical knowledge acquired as advocate, architect etc. at the disposal of the movement’s activities to contribute to the production and promotion of a broad and heterogenous body of counter-expertise. In other contexts, the role of the social sciences in supporting political change may be to contribute to placing alternative knowledge into the public space. This could mean looking at the plurality of knowledge, specifically regarding movement knowledge as knowledge that has a specific approach to hierarchies or uneven power structures. Focusing on the plurality of knowledges and knowledge constructions as well as on situated activist knowledges can be a strategy to decentralise Western scientific ways of creating knowledge and to open up the space for hitherto unheard voices of political and knowing subjects. In terms of critiques of post-politics in our recent society, Davidson and Iveson (2014) provide another approach with their concept of the ‘method of equality’, in which scholars focus on pointing out political moments in which this alternative knowledge challenges the existing status quo.

5. Conclusion

In three steps – a theoretical reflection on what knowledge is, an empirical analysis on knowledge co-production processes in a specific protest movement, and a discussion of consequences for research practices – this article has adopted an understanding of knowledge as having a diverse form, produced as a plurality of different knowledges. Scientific knowl-

edges and alternative movement knowledges not only exist in parallel, but are linked to each other and have a mutual influence on each other, as the empirical example of Port Vell shows. They assemble in a rhizomatic fabric of knowledge construction in which it is no longer possible to clearly separate sites of knowledge creation. Nevertheless, differences in logical progressions and content can be distinguished: While academics on the one hand tend to contribute to the co-production of knowledge by creating and utilising comparableness based on scientific concepts or maps, situated and embodied knowledges on the other hand are based on individual daily experiences and practical involvement in a conflict. Despite being linked together, these different forms of knowledge do not co-exist equally – in the current knowledge regime, alternative knowledges are often marginalised in favour of hegemonic scientific knowledge.

Once the plurality of knowledges localised in all parts of society is recognised, the role of researchers and scholars as producers of knowledge is put in question. Discussing this paper with colleagues has uncovered an interesting pattern of responses to this reflection: While the argument that there are different kinds of knowledge and that science is not objective is considered old news, its conclusion is often fiercely disclaimed. In particular, the implication that scholars produce subjective knowledge and that consequently all scientific knowledge production is based on individual – and in the end political – decisions is often negated. In light of what has been discussed in this article, however, it must be argued that researchers have an ethical commitment to the knowledge they produce. Instead of hiding behind supposed ‘objectivity’ or ‘being unpolitical’, they should appropriate their own scientific work as an explicit political act. Critical approaches to contentious politics provide such explicit political research practices as discussing methods of knowledge co-production and strategies of reciprocity. Proposed alternative forms to research in the context of contentious politics focusing on movement knowledge also include contributing to the production of counter-expertise, placing alternative movement knowledge into public space, and highlighting political moments in which alternative views of the world challenge traditional and hegemonic power structures.

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Notes

¹ Both reflections on research practices and the empirical example in this article draw on own research about the recent Port Vell harbour transformation. Original empirical data about this transformation and the protests against it were collected between 2012 and 2013 through participatory observations of protest activities as well as qualitative interviews. Interviews with more than 20 activists, academics, local politicians, neighbours and members of the city and harbour administration were conducted – most of the interviewees impersonating more than one of these roles, but all being involved in the Port Vell conflict. Furthermore, documents such as pamphlets, newspaper articles, internet resources and political reports were analysed.

² All interview quotes are translated by the author. Names have been replaced by random letters for anonymisation.

³ The terms *academic*, *scientist* and *researcher* are used virtually interchangeably in this article. *Academic knowledge* is not defined as the holistic personal body of knowledge of an individual engaged in academia but as processes of knowledge production in the realm of and under the logic of academia.

⁴ e.g. ‘El Futur dels Ports de Barcelona’ (25/01. – 02/02/2013) organised by members of IntraScapeLab/ Technical University of Catalonia; ‘Seminari Geocrítica: Estratègies i conflictes en el port i el front marítim de Barcelona’ (18/06/2013) at Universitat de Barcelona; ‘Aula SOS: La Defensa del Port Vell’ (12/02/2013) organised by the NGO SOS monuments

⁵ Interviews, presentations, publications assembled at <http://www.ciutatport.com/Seminari.html>

⁶ For the use of the term touristification see *Burgold et al.* 2013. For a critical overview of the impact of tourism in Barcelona see *Capel* 2010: 181.

⁷ Many articles written by human geographers, initiatives such as the Antipode Scholar-Activist Project Award (<http://antipodefoundation.org/scholar-activist-project-awards/>), and sessions on scholar-activism at the AAG annual meeting (<http://meridian.aag.org/callforpapers/program/SessionDetail.cfm?SessionID=21824>) demonstrate human geography's contribution to this debate.

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