

Antipode

Communifesto for Fuller Geographies: Towards Mutual Security

Participatory Geographies Research Group

<http://pygyrg.org/>

Introduction

The Participatory Geographies Research Group's 'Fuller Geographies' session at the 2012 RGS/IBG Annual International Conference took as its theme 'The Insecurity of Geography and Geographers' Insecurities', with the following call for participation:

Amidst continuing debates about the relevance of geography, we find ourselves at a critical moment of increasingly uneven geographies: economic and environmental 'crises', poverty, social inequality, and disconnection between dominant political (and geopolitical) discourses and everyday lived lives. Through both our research and teaching, participatory geographers remain committed to working with communities and students in the co-construction of agencies and knowledges that can respond to these issues. Yet, this is also a time when we see academic jobs disappearing, an increase in precarious forms of academic employment, and artificially separated career tracts based on research or teaching-only positions. Collegiate and socially engaged modes of working remain undervalued, despite (we could argue) some reference to 'impact' in auditing processes across the academic world. This raises questions regarding what we are doing as geographers, to ourselves and to others, and what the academy is doing to us as we strive to teach and learn well, support each other, research where research is needed (and not just where it is funded), to work collaboratively and make our work public and useful, and attempt to have fulfilling lives beyond the academy. 'Fuller Geographies' is an open roundtable

Antipode

for discussion, inviting participants to explore possible spaces for mutual aid and to share strategies for securing our own and geography's relevance and futures.

In the heartening and creative roundtable discussion which resulted from this call participants took seriously the invitation 'to explore possible spaces for mutual aid and to share strategies for securing our own and geography's relevance and futures'. One 'outcome' of the session is an embryonic 'communifesto' (a participatory communiqué) for contesting insecurities. Following the RGS/IBG Conference the communifesto was circulated to the Participatory Geographies Research Group (PyGyRg¹) as a proposal, the aim being to develop something that human geographers, and perhaps other academic colleagues, could use in our professional practices: guidelines for creative resistance and constructive (re)engagement to contest our personal and disciplinary insecurities. Although it will always be a work in progress, something we can continue to develop, the communifesto presented below incorporates feedback from PyGyRg and is offered as a research group output, acknowledging the contribution of other colleagues from the 'Fuller Geographies' session.

Communifesto for Fuller Geographies: Towards Mutual Security

Strategies

- Refuse the imperative to become increasingly individualised in our reactions - build the 'communiversity' (mrs kinpaisby, 2008).
- Resist the monetisation and thence trading of our academic practices. If we want universities to be socially just, we must consider not only the equitable distribution of education and research but also how we value them.
- Foster an ethic of care and respect for each other: participate and reciprocate in our interactions.
- Realise our present moment and situation as an opportunity to build solidarity, finding common ground with colleagues and others within and beyond the university who share our struggle, frustration and insecurities. We do

Antipode

not have to reach consensus on all issues, but aim to find the common concerns: Solidarity can respect and accommodate difference.

- Work across disciplinary boundaries and other divisions.
- Develop solidarities across academic, administrative, support and other staff boundaries in our universities.
- Do not allow our struggles within the university to be constrained by the very ethos we seek to resist and change.

Tactics

- Compile and share an open-source list of subversion strategies and tactics which we have used to work in, against and beyond the neoliberalisation of the university. Share such ideas, including via social media.
- Suggest alternative forms of measurement - what do we want to be valued and how?
- Continue to push for a progressive interpretation of 'impact' - and enact this, realising the power of iteration.
- Communicate with colleagues, including most particularly those in management: inform them about participatory work and ethics, send them published work in this field and show them the strength of this scholarship; legitimate this approach as an alternative to the neoliberal trajectory.
- Return to university charters - and reassert original aims as core objectives for our institutions, which were not designed to be businesses but have a wide range of responsibilities. For example, many universities are charities with explicit commitments to their local communities. Raise awareness of this and hold management to account for such objectives.
- Create forums for academic trauma support - do not let the emotional pain and grief from the current situation be cleansed and erased. Where universities have welfare and well-being programmes, learn about them, critique them, and develop critical, cooperative and complementary practices.

Antipode

- Continue to share the lived experiences of working in the neoliberal university with each other, and make this experience public knowledge.
- Develop links with organisations and initiatives, including unions and community organisations.
- Feedback to government departments and other relevant institutions to improve conditions for academic job seekers, particularly facilitating applications for jobs that are complex and potentially international and/or collaborative.

August 2012

References and further reading

- Anderson C (2012) Life and time(s) in the neoliberal university: Tell me about it (seriously, do). <http://antipodefoundation.org/2012/05/21/life-and-times-in-the-neoliberal-university-tell-me-about-it-seriously-do/#comments> (last accessed 20 July 2012)
- Bailey M and Freedman D (eds) (2011) *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance*. London: Pluto
- Boden R and Epstein D (2011) A flat earth society? Imagining academic freedom. *Sociological Review* 59:476-495
- Brahinsky R (2012) Thoughts on transition: Public education, social justice, and geography. <http://antipodefoundation.org/2012/07/05/thoughts-on-transition-public-education-social-justice-and-geography/> (last accessed 17 July 2012)
- Canally C (2012) Where's our agency? The role of grading in the neoliberalization of public universities. <http://antipodefoundation.org/2012/03/30/intervention-wheres-our-agency-the-role-of-grading-in-the-neoliberalization-of-public-universities/> (last accessed 17 July 2012)
- The Carrotworkers' Collective (2012) What is work worth? A conversation with Amber

Antipode

- Langraff. <http://fusemagazine.org/2012/01/carrotworkers-collective> (last accessed 6 August 2012)
- Collini S (2012) *What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin
- Fuller D and Askins K (2007) The discomfiting rise of ‘public geographies’: A ‘public’ conversation. *Antipode* 39(4):579-601
- Holmwood J (ed) (2011) *A Manifesto for the Public University*. London: Bloomsbury
- Klocker N and Drozdowski D (2012) Career progress relative to opportunity: How many papers is a baby ‘worth’? *Environment and Planning A* 44:1271-1277
- McCreary T (2012) Popular education lives: Harnessing education as a tool for community empowerment. <http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/popular-education-lives> (last accessed 6 August 2012)
- M’Gonigle M and Starke J (2006) *Planet U: Sustaining the World, Reinventing the University*. Gabriola Island: New Society
- mrs kinpaisby (2008) Taking stock of participatory geographies: Envisioning the communitarity. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 33(3):292-299
- Nussbaum M C (2010) *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Pain R, Kesby M and Askins K (2010) Geographies of impact: Power, participation, and potential. *Area* 43(2):183-188
- Sandel M (2012) *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits to Markets*. London: Allen Lane

Sources of information

Times Higher Education

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/index.asp?navcode=92>

Guardian HE

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/higher-education>

Phil Batty on Twitter

Antipode

@phil_baty and @THEworldunirank

Prof Patrick McGhee on Twitter

@VC_UEL

Fuller Geographies on Twitter

@fuller_geogs

Wonkhe - 'the home of higher education wonks'

<http://www.wonkhe.com/>

University and College Union (UCU)

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/>

Sally Hunt (UCU General Secretary)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/sally-hunt>

Campaign for the Public University

<http://publicuniversity.org.uk/>

Jobs in science, research, academic and administrative employment in the UK and abroad

<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/>

EURAXESS - Researchers in Motion is a one-stop shop for researchers seeking to advance their careers and personal development by moving to other countries

<http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/jobs/index>

Endnote

Antipode

ⁱ There is no charge at present to join PyGyRG. There are two ways of joining: members of the RGS-IBG can join PyGyRG by ticking the PyGyRG box on the membership form. The RGS-IBG will then forward membership information to PyGyRG; and to join PyGyRG directly, please email your details to one of the committee members (<http://pygyrg.org/committee/>). An email list (PyGyWG@jiscmail.ac.uk), which you can join at jiscmail.ac.uk, is the chief means for participants to network, disseminate and discuss participatory geographies.