

# ON BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND SOCIETY

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN LITERARY AND CULTURE STUDIES



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This poster contributes to the reflection on the challenges and opportunities of the dissemination of scientific knowledge, particularly in the areas of Literary and Culture Studies. To do so, we use the metaphor of building bridges, here taken both as a concept and a practical tool. Since its relational nature necessarily implies a transdisciplinary and interdependent perspective and approach, the metaphor allows us to critically reflect on our ability to establish and maintain connections with others and the world. How does bridge-building help us to connect academia and society, as well as the different actors that combine these sectors? How can we, as researchers, move our knowledge beyond academia? What are some of the specific tools that facilitate access to this knowledge?

This poster is a kind of “self-reflexive portfolio in progress”, which is divided into three parts. The first briefly introduces the challenges, obstacles, and specific questions related to the fields of Literary and Culture Studies. The second advances the meaning of the notion of building bridges and its relevance for the dissemination of knowledge within the referenced disciplines. Finally, the third features some opportunities and solutions that are already in place in dialogue with our own contribution: the fostering of dialogic research and teaching practices that help building bridges beyond Academia. This part offers some suggestions for the researcher's practice and inter-relational approach, as well as alternative forms of dissemination. By making knowledge dissemination more accessible and participatory, it may become a tool for bridging scientific production beyond the academic community, thus contributing to the visibility and relevance of knowledge created in the Humanities for contemporary societies.

**KEYWORDS:** Dissemination and Accessibility of Knowledge in Literary and Culture Studies; Visibility and Social Impact of the Humanities; Building Bridges, Knowledge Transfer.

## INTRODUCTION

Social and political relevance and impact of research has increasingly become an issue not only for funding institutions, but also for different social and political actors. For better or worse, research is increasingly measured in terms of its transferable value and researchers find themselves confronted with the need to justify their work in terms of its contribution to the flourishing of society at large (see Reale et al. 2018). Particularly in the context of the Humanities and

Particularly in the context of the Humanities and disciplines such as Literary or Culture Studies, the call for translatability of the knowledge created within academia and its value for society confronts researchers with two major perplexities: On the one hand, the disciplinary self-understanding is often associated to precisely such a social and political commitment to social responsibilities and actively committed to contributing to a more just and equal society or even world (see Grossberg 2010). On the other, more often than not the knowledge produced in the Humanities

resists the economic logic of the criteria developed to define and measure social value and impact (see Belfiore 2015).

To address these perplexities, we have identified the major challenges and opportunities scholars in Literary and Culture Studies face when wanting to make their knowledge flourish beyond Academia. How can we as researchers build bridges to increase the relevance and show the significance of the knowledge created within our disciplines for society at large?

## CHALLENGES

The Humanities have been diagnosed to suffer from a rescinding public importance (Bachmann-Medick 2020, 13). This is associated with the difficulty to produce or show measurable impact comparable to the sciences, particularly if impact is framed in terms of economic benefits (see Belfiore 2015). Knowledge and data produced within “hard sciences” have a wider societal and political resonance than the (self-)reflexive, qualitative, and contemplative research outputs produced in the Humanities. Literary and Culture Studies are also struggling with challenges deriving from transformations that have occurred in the realm of media, culture, and societal organization. Globalization processes (however defined) and technological transformations have had profound impacts on how culture, arts and literature are articulated and studied (see for instance Spivak 2003, Bennett 2013, Bachmann-Medick et al. 2020). Particularly, literature and its role for society and culture have drastically changed over the last decades (Tygstrup 2020).

## ON BUILDING BRIDGES

The metaphor of building bridges emphasizes the importance to think about the dissemination of knowledge not merely in terms of putting it into circulation and making it available, but to foster a dialogic research practice within and beyond Academia. In our view, successful dissemination and transfer occur when they enable various social and cultural actors to appropriate and translate knowledge according to their needs and their particular “epistemic spaces” (Hall 1996, 396). This entails: i) the understanding of the causes of issues of development and of local and global inequalities in a context of interdependence; ii) the reflection on solutions to conflicts, crises and other challenges; iii) the commitment to transformative action that seeks peace, justice, and equity (Anzini et al 2021, 217). Building bridges thus refers both to the need to identify and address pressing contemporary issues and to be open to inputs, criticism, and collaboration from within and beyond Academia. It assents on attitudes, skills, and practices such as empathy, decision-making, reconciliation, cooperation and collaboration, active listening, as well as critical and reflexive knowledge.

## DIALOGIC RESEARCH AND TEACHING PRACTICES

The need to foster collaboration and dialogue within and beyond Academia has been highlighted by several authors (Reale et al. 2018, Kugele 2020). However, building bridges needs to encompass more than providing opportunities for such. Scholars have to critically interrogate their research and teaching attitudes, their abilities to observe and actively listen and to enter into dialogue with different societal and political actors. On the level of research, possible dialogic practices include: participatory formats and collaborations; open access publication; dissemination of knowledge in expositions, festivals, podcasts or other online-formats; language and accessibility aspects; among others. On the level of teaching, solutions include the formulation of curricula that are not content-based, but focus on thematic dimensions; constant self-reflection about values and attitudes; the promotion of forums and other collaborative and co-participatory formats; the reflection on the criteria and the adoption of other forms of assignments and assessment/evaluation; among others.

## CONCLUSION

Literary and Culture Studies have to show their particular contribution to thinking about and acting on the global present and developing alternative solutions for the challenges contemporary societies face. In this sense, knowledge dissemination and transfer based on dialogic research and teaching practices, here encapsulated by the metaphor of the building bridges, can play a central role in envisioning alternatives to the existing order. By doing so, bridges become a powerful source to manifest utilitarian and pragmatic knowledge and contributions as to achieve societal transformations while resisting the logic of impact associated to an increasing commercialization of Higher Education worldwide.

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