URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.

• Paper / Proposal Title:
The Role of Scientific Expertise in the Drive for ‘Smart Urbanism’

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• Abstract (300 words):
Meta processes such as digitisation lead to a redefinition of the relationship between science and politics. The increasing demand for both policy-relevant work and scientific supply of future-oriented knowledge demonstrates that the politics and science of the future are closely intertwined. This paper sheds light on the interplay of science and the city by illuminating how the changing role of higher education challenges prevailing understandings of urban-regional governance. Existing literature in the sociology of scientific knowledge demonstrates how the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) evolved from being a resource to policy and economy to being an engine of economic growth. However, only a few accounts have focussed on the ways in which scientific authority and knowledge-producing practices have been involved in the planning of urban-regional space. One example of a higher education-driven urban development project is the Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Region Deal. The latter represents a £1.3bn investment by the Scottish and UK governments and local partners over the next fifteen years, which is designed to accelerate inclusive and data-driven growth and establish the city region as the “Data Capital of Europe”. Building on 50 in-depth interviews, I argue that HEIs such as the University of Edinburgh constitute powerful urban planning agents. In addition to its core missions – teaching and research – Edinburgh University occupies centre stage in driving smart urban development. The paper concludes by emphasising that the sites and objects of politics are no longer simply those
of formal state institutions but also lie in the hands of increasingly important players such as universities. Consequently, smart urban development must be conceptualised as a political category and subjected to normative standards such as transparency and accountability.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Originally trained in political economy and economic sociology, I have developed an acute academic interest in STS intellectual perspectives and particularly in the role of imagination as key driver of economic action. Having been accepted to Edinburgh University’s sociology department in September 2018, I obtained the unique opportunity to study the processes of imagining future states and their consequences for action in urban planning. In my ESRC-funded doctoral project, I investigate the process by which urban planning agents imagine futures and the sociotechnical conditions which help establish the credibility of their expectations. Aiming to shed light on the practice of city-making, my thesis examines how urban planning agents co-produce and diffuse specific urban-regional sociotechnical imaginaries.