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(Un)clear boundaries between TD practices and professional consultancy – the case of the TD research project Co-Creating Mobility Hubs

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1. Project background

Integrated site developments and mobility solutions contribute to the careful use of scarce land resources and create livable urban space. Specifically, the future development of railway stations into intermodal mobility hubs could improve the interface between different mobility practices, particularly in suburban areas and regional population centers. As a result, railway service providers, such as the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB), are driving forward with integrated mobility and spatial planning.

When considering mobility hubs, the usual perimeter of development is expanded, connecting inner-city and supra-regional modes of transportation and seeking a strengthened urban integration of railway stations. Accordingly, this perimeter expansion leads to the inclusion of additional stakeholders, thus transforming existing cooperation patterns. For this reason, the TD research project Co-Creating Mobility Hubs (CCMH) of SBB, together with ETH Zürich and EPF Lausanne, devises methods for collaborative development and for assessing societal demands at mobility hubs.

2. Alignment with the conference stream "TD on-the-ground: making TD tangible"

Our real-time contribution aims to elicit, describe and discuss key elements to consider when setting up and running a TD project in an industry context to make it effective and impactful. Tracking and evaluating their effectiveness and impact is a challenge for TD practices (Hansson & Polk, 2018; Lang et al., 2012). Attention will be given to how unclear boundaries to professional consultancy might reduce the perceived impact and effectiveness of TD practices. Unclear boundaries might lead to wrong (consultancy-like) expectations in TD contexts and negatively affect the approach's quality.

Although not always clear-cut, TD practices differ from professional consultancy regarding several aspects, such as problem framing, process outputs, and quality control (Penker & Muhar, 2015). Further distinctions, for instance, between TD and applied research, intensify the challenge of defining clear boundaries (Hirsch Hadorn, Bradley, Pohl, Rist, & Wiesmann, 2006). Professional consultancy services are widespread, and thus TD projects are confronted with expectations and working styles that probably hinder realizing the full potential of TD practices. As a result, unclear boundaries need to be addressed and actively approached.

3. Real-time discussion enriched with pre-crafted video statements

The discussion highlights different expectations and goals within TD and consultancy contexts, presenting the CCMH project as a case study and deriving key elements from it for setting up and running a TD project. The discussion intends to address TD researchers, practitioners, and industry representatives alike. Before the conference, we hold conversations with stakeholders around the CCMH project to identify the key elements to consider when embarking on a TD project. Specifically, we focus on different expectations and how misperceptions may alter a project's outcome.

The conversations are held in two segments: First, explorative questions about the project's impact and effectiveness are discussed to raise potential key elements. Second, the stakeholders are asked to assess whether these key elements are characteristic of the project's TD practices. Enabling this assessment, the main characteristics of TD practices and boundaries to professional consultancy are explained to the stakeholders between the two interview segments (Penker & Muhar, 2015). These conversations are filmed and edited; single statements are shown to the participants during the real-time discussion. In each segment, participants and present project members will react to these statements and discuss their implications. The contribution follows the preliminary schedule below:

00:00-00:05: General introduction

- Involved roles: Co-moderators (Dunkel, Stadler Benz)
- Learnings: Goals and schedule

00:05-00:15: Presentation of the CCMH project with an infographic

- Involved roles: Co-moderators
- Learnings: Project background, common thread for following the discussion, and introduction of the stakeholders in the video statements and present project members (Hürzeler, Müller, Wehrle, Wicki)

00:15-00:20: Introduction of the first segment: Potential key elements

- Involved roles: Co-moderators
- Learnings: Overview of the goals and questions addressed in the first segment

00:20-00:45: Screening and discussion of video statements from the first segment

- Involved roles: Co-moderators, participants, present project members
- Learnings: Potential key elements and reflection

00:45-00:50: Introduction of the main TD characteristics and second segment: Comparison of key elements with TD practices and boundaries of TD practices to professional consultancy

- Involved roles: Co-moderators
- Learnings: Overview of the goals and questions addressed in the second segment

00:50-01:15: Screening and discussion of video statements from the second segment

- Involved roles: Co-moderators, participants, present project members
- Learnings: Potential differences in expectations, reflection, and experience-sharing

01:15-01:30: General open discussion and reflection, and farewell

- Involved roles: Co-moderators, participants, present project members
- Learnings: Concluding remarks and implications, limitations, and suggestions for further research

At the conference, we discuss findings derived from the conversations with participants, project members / experts from SBB (Hürzeler), TD (Wehrle, Wicki), and consultancy (Müller). This discussion also leads to a debate about the role of (un)clear boundaries between TD practices and professional consultancy, and how these can be applied and communicated. A short preliminary presentation of the CCMH project with a meaningful infographic provides the common thread for the participants. This infographic displays the tangible TD processes and practices that have taken place in the project. This procedure allows for focusing the discussion on the debate about key elements for the impact and effectiveness of TD research projects in industry contexts and the role of (un)clear boundaries towards consultancy. Finally, together with the participants, we explore how we can use the knowledge gained from this case study in TD.

4. References

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