

Call for papers

Global Students: Mapping the Field of University Lives

(December: 7th-9th, 2017, Centre for Interdisciplinary Research, Bielefeld, Germany)

“The world is going to university” titled ‘the Economist’ in the year 2015, capturing by this headline the striking expansion of the academic realm in contemporary world society: More and more people study; the number of those enrolled is expected to double within one decade. In 2016, Harvard University claimed that it enrolled students from more than 125 countries and “from every background”, indicating an increasing internationalization of studying as well as a significant change in the social composition of those enrolling and attaining an academic education. Internationalization ranks high among the strategies embraced by universities competing for power, prestige and wealth in the global race; in the quest to belong to the élite, equality is balanced against neo-liberal dictates.

The rapid expansion of the student body results in an increased heterogeneity of its rank and file, with students differing in their ascribed characteristics, their resource endowment, interests, skills, expectations, and imaginations. Academic aspirations have intensified so substantially that student debts have become an important economic factor. Comprising heterogeneity within their spatially limited material premises, universities can be seen as cross-roads where very diverse personal trajectories may intertwine, confront each other, or run parallel. Many tensions bear on the social spaces of universities, and studying can turn into a very ambivalent experience: going through a university course can be a period of greatest freedom in life, of widening horizons and social openings, but also of heteronomy, disciplining and conflicts.

This conference aims to capture the social lives of contemporary universities, concentrating on students’ trajectories, relations, and action fields and on increasingly complex interrelationships between actors representing different institutionalised procedures and political agendas involved in the expanding global higher education. It starts off from observing the striking mobilities as well as the increasing differentiation of the social spaces of universities. But to perceive of students as of a globalizing social formation may fail to acknowledge that many students are already reflexive of themselves as ‘global’. The ‘global student statement’, signed by a number of student associations formulates its dedication “to the advancement of the students’ situation through student rights, accessibility, affordability, partnerships, mobility, learning experience and social justice”. Global students demand a treatment of students as equal partners participating in shaping their university’s development, while opposing the growing commercialisation of tertiary education as well as the widespread perception of students as ‘consumers’.

The conference needs not only to capture modalities of engagement and politicization, but also the ongoing reflexion on what it means to be a student and on acting at different scales of today’s world society.

We invite contributions especially in three topical lines:

- (1) **The spatial-temporal dimensions of studying.** How to conceptualise the process of studying? Exploring the temporal dimensions, e.g. structured by critical events such as exams, accelerations and de-accelerations through employment, parenting, caring and

other obligations; the pace of studying and peer-comparisons. Socio-spatial divisions, the interplay of proximity and distance in student encounters; spatialities and temporalities in accessing universities; scalar dimensions of studying and activist engaging.

- (2) **Studying as movement.** Grasping the dimensions as well as the interconnections between spatial, social as well as political movements, e.g. translocality and transnationality; *exit-voice*-dynamics; movements and moorings; aspirations, imaginations and modalities of student mobilization opening up new perspectives on a range of actors such as those involved in application and recruitment processes, student politics and/or students' networks facilitated by digital media.
- (3) **Difference, in/equality and transformation.** Perceiving of studying as navigating in constellations of 'cohabitation' (comprising different forms of distancing and contestations); changing composition of students as challenge and as possibility of experiencing and engaging in conviviality in the social space of universities and beyond. Social re-configurations instigated by student reflexivity and engagement.

We invite paper proposals (300-500 words) by April, the 15th, 2017

Please, send your applications to joanna.pfaff@uni-bielefeld.de

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