

University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation (URGE)



Work Package 2 Research Seminar

‘Methodologies: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy’

EU funded MARIE CURIE ACTIONS

URGE Work Package 2 Research Seminar

‘Methodologies: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy’

**Copenhagen, 8 – 10 June 2011
Building D, Room D165**

Programme

WEDNESDAY, 8 June

9: 15 - 10: 30

- Welcome and introduction to the URGE project (Sue Wright)
- Introductions
- Aims and objectives of WP2 (Cris Shore)

BREAK

10: 45 – 12: 00

‘The University as Contested Space: Corporatization, Academic Freedom and the Anthropology of Disputes (Cris Shore, University of Auckland)

LUNCH

13: 30 – 14: 45

‘Enacting the university – In a double sense’ (Sue Wright)

BREAK

15: 00 – 16: 15

‘Researching Brokers and Brokerage’ (Elizabeth Rata, University of Auckland)

18: 00 – 19: 00

Progress and planning meeting for Work Package 4 (Contributors: Sue Wright, Kirsten-Marie, Sheila Trahar, Chris Tremewan, Dirk Michel + all who are interested)

Evening: Restaurant (we each pay for ourselves)

THURSDAY, 9 June

9: 15 – 10: 30

‘The Value of Narrative Inquiry in Exploring Academic Identities?’
(Sheila Trahar, University of Bristol)

BREAK

10: 45 – 12: 00

‘Academic Identity Formation in the Light of the “New University”’
(DirkMichel-Schertges, Aarhus University)

LUNCH

13: 00– 14:15

The geopolitics of international university networks: origins and shifting rationales (Christopher Tremewan, University of Auckland)

BREAK

14: 30 – 16.00

Methodology as ontology? Remaking geography through experimentation in the making of New Zealand social science (Nick Lewis, University of Auckland)

18:00 – 19.00

Planning Session for WP3 (Contributors: Roger Dale, Ole Henckel, Susana de Melo + all who are interested)

Evening: Restaurant – Conference Dinner
(we each pay for ourselves)

FRIDAY, 10 June

9: 15 – 10: 30

‘Figuration work: a fruitful methodology for studying university reform?’
(Gritt Nielsen, Aarhus University)

BREAK

10:45 – 12:00

Ethnographic Journeys in Higher Education
(Lisa Lucas, University of Bristol)

LUNCH

13: 00 –14.30

URGE Annual Assembly – future research plans/projects emerging from URGE
(DPU’s Research Support, Astrid Cermak will participate)

END

Abstracts:

Dirk Michel-Schertges, Aarhus University

‘Academic Identity Formation in the Light of the “New University”’

On the background of contemporary (inter)national developments in Higher Education restructuring form and content of the “university” as such, the paper will focus on academic identity formation. Starting with the theoretical assumption by Adorno’s “Theory of semi-Bildung” (Halbbildung) stating that “Bildung” has become a “sediment of negative objective intellect” thus socialized semi-Bildung that can be described as “the omnipresence of the alienated mind” (cf. Adorno 1997) and Lefebvre’s “Critique of Everyday Life” (2002) concentrating on the fragmentation of social praxis it is planned to operationalize patterns of alienation. Assuming aftereffects of the “new university” on academics – i.e. the dialectics between individual and institution/organization – a methodological framework (autobiographical-narrative and theme-oriented interviews) will be introduced to discover tendencies of academic alienation on various academic (and possibly administrative) levels.

Nick Lewis, University of Auckland

‘Methodology as ontology? Remaking geography through experimentation in the making of New Zealand social science’

In this paper I assemble six pieces of collaborative work that explore the idea of methodology as ontology (four with Richard Le Heron, one with Stephen FitzHerbert, and one with Cris Shore). Three of these explorations involved experimentation in social science institution building, biological economies, and constructive conversations about bio-science still in the making. In a recently published paper, Richard Le Heron and I ask whether geography is what geographers do, but from post-structuralist position. We suggest that it is and that it is by producing knowledge that we bring worlds into being. And we begin to ask what that means for a post-development politics of social science conducted from within new connections between academy and economic and political actors. With Stephen FitzHerbert, I ask more pointed questions about method in relation to the praxis generated by this intellectually and politically co-constitutive stance. The point is to do with the potential to disrupt and remake knowledge and its enactment by placing oneself into and inhabiting institutional trajectories in worlds that are topological and far less stable or hierarchically ordered than those of the development project. With Cris I have begun to think about new subjects and spaces in the university, and the particular type of academic entrepreneur that I have made myself. In the context of this workshop, I will ask pointed questions about the performance of the academic entrepreneur as a potentially progressive subject in this making of the world by doing knowledge production (in new ways).

Lisa Lucas, University of Bristol

‘Ethnographic Journeys in Higher Education’

This paper will draw on a recent piece of writing I did for an edited book where I attempted to map out the field of ethnographic work undertaken within higher

education, including areas of learning and teaching, the social and learning life of students, organizational cultures and management processes as well as policy processes within university institutions. The variety of types of ethnography was also explored, including multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Wright, forthcoming), virtual ethnography (Hemmi et al, 2009; Cashmore et al, 2010), self ethnography (Alvesson, 2003), fictional ethnography (Tierney, 1993) and ethnographic discourse analysis (Jones, 2009). Methodological issues raised around these diverse forms of ethnography and the experiences of researchers in conducting such work in universities will be discussed. Reflections on the fascinating potential of ethnographic study within higher education as well as the challenges will be given in light of my own qualitative research on policy change, management and academic work in universities.

Gritt Nielsen, Aarhus University

‘Figuration work: a fruitful methodology for studying university reform?’

The notion of ‘figuration’ has been used by feminist thinkers (e.g. Haraway) as a mode of theory for pointing to alternative visions of subjectivity (exceeding modern dualisms and moving towards notions of ‘situatedness’ and ‘becoming’). In introducing a methodological triad of ‘figure’, ‘friction’ and ‘world-making’ this paper seeks to put together theories of figuration for the use of social anthropologists when studying processes of reform. With the point of departure in a study of shifting conditions for student participation, the paper explores how, in everyday life at university and in people’s engagement with policy processes, ‘the student’ is located at different but intersecting scales and thus ‘figured’ in conflicting ways. It argues that anthropological analysis of such competing figuration processes may work to open up spaces for alternative visions of both subjectivity and of policy-making.

Elizabeth Rata, University of Auckland

‘Researching Brokers and Brokerage’

In this workshop presentation I draw on my research into the way neo-tribal capitalism has developed in New Zealand to shed light on how corporate capitalism is developing in the university more widely. I suggest that university leaders serve as brokers between a corporatised university and the knowledge and financial capitalism of the contemporary global marketplace. It is the structural position of university leaders that makes the brokerage particularly effective. Acting as intermediaries between academic labour and the global higher education market, brokers commodify the knowledge product in the act of serving the international demand. Within the brokerage function, this group emerges as a self-interested bourgeoisie.

The methodological issue to be addressed in researching brokers and brokerage concerns how to analyse the entire brokerage process. This ranges from identifying the agents, their networks, and the various structures that are established as a result of the brokerage function, as well as analysing that function through brokerage discourse and policy development.

Cris Shore, University of Auckland
‘The University as Contested Space: Corporatization, Academic Freedom and the Anthropology of Disputes’

Since January 2011 the University of Auckland has been locked in a growing dispute between academics staff and university management over the Vice Chancellor’s attempt to remove key conditions from the staff employment agreement, including provisions governing academic promotion, discipline and research and study leave. The rationale for these changes, according to the VC, was that they would bring ‘efficiency gains’ and help align individual contracts more closely with the university’s strategic plan. What began as a minor dispute with the union over the location of employment policies has escalated into a full-blown conflict between academics and management over principles of academic freedom and the question of ‘who owns the university’? As part of an on-going ethnographic study of university reform in New Zealand, this paper tracks the genealogy of the dispute and what it reveals about the current state of New Zealand’s universities.

The methodological issues addressed in this study concern the uses of ethnography and legal anthropology – particularly the anthropology of disputes - to analyse situations of conflict. These approaches provide a valuable framework for analysing wider social processes and societal transformation. Disputes are about social relations as well as the right to make decisions, but, I suggest, they also provide a diagnostic tool for disclosing the socio-cultural order at large.

Sheila Trahar, University of Bristol
‘The Value of Narrative Inquiry in Exploring Academic Identities?’

Methodological approaches such as narrative inquiry, life history and autoethnography, are particularly valuable and becoming increasingly common in practitioner research and in researching professional identities. They are, however, less common in higher education research. In this session, I shall share the ways in which I have used narrative inquiry and autoethnography in a range of higher education projects with the aim of facilitating conversations about their potential for, in particular, WP6.

Christopher Tremewan, University of Auckland
‘The geopolitics of international university networks: origins and shifting rationales’

This presentation traces the origins and development paths of three university networks: Universitas 21, the Association of Pacific Rim Universities and the Worldwide University Network. It identifies factors impelling the formation of international alliances, the associated geopolitics of higher education, their potential and the key challenges they face. Who really needs them? Are they a transitional phenomenon? Do they have unrealistic aspirations? How do they reflect the international relations of states and broader globalisation trends?

Sue Wright, Aarhus University
'Enacting the university – In a double sense'

Denmark has proved to be a very good prism through which to study high octane doses of international university reform. This presentation will introduce the research project 'New Management, New Identities? Danish University Reform in an International Context' which ran from 2004 to 2009. The project team is now writing a book *Enacting the University*. The presentation will focus on the particular methodological problem of taking multiple perspectives on university reform. International and national policy makers tend to take an 'authoritative approach' to policy (Shore and Wright 2011) assuming that once they have 'enacted' their view of the future university in legislation, then this will be translated into institutional forms and management techniques, and 'trickle down' to change the practices of academics and students at the chalk face. In contrast, we take a 'democratic and contested' approach to policy, in which top-down, authoritative views are only one of multiple ways of imagining the university, which managers, academics and students enact through formal initiatives and small everyday practices. The book aims to keep both kinds of enactment in play and to hold them in tension, so as to conceive of the university as 'enacted' in both ways at once. The workshop presentation offers this approach as a contribution to the methodological puzzle of how to combine insights from political economy and ethnography in the study of university reform.