

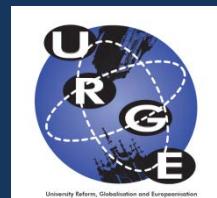
Working Papers on University Reform

Working Paper 21:

Methodologies For Studying University Reform and Globalization: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy

Summative Working Paper for URGE Work Package 2

Cris Shore and Miri Davidson
(with Gritt Nielsen, Elizabeth Rata, Dirk Michel
Schertges, Sheila Trahar, Chris Tremewan and
Susan Wright)



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Education, Policy and Organisation
in the Knowledge Economy

Methodologies For Studying University Reform and Globalization: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy
Summative Working Paper for URGE Work Package 2

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Methodologies For Studying University Reform and Globalization: Combining Ethnography and Political Economy

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Preface

This Working Paper is part of the FP7 (PEOPLE) IRSES project entitled ‘University Reform, Globalisation and Europeanisation’ (‘URGE’). The project involves ‘knowledge exchange’ between three research groups in the universities of Aarhus, Auckland and Bristol. This working paper is an outcome of two international symposia held at the University of Bristol (2010) and Aarhus University (2011), as well as a series of workshops and reading group discussions held during 2010 – 2012.

The aim of this paper is to build upon the conceptual framework developed in Work Package 1 (‘Working Paper 20: Globalisation and Regionalisation in Higher Education: Toward a New Conceptual Framework’) by sketching out a set of methodological tools that exemplify the group’s approach to higher education reform. The participants’ methodological diversity has been a source of insight and a valuable stimulus for situating our individual research projects within the wider interdisciplinary context of URGE. It is the task of this working paper to reflect upon the links between these methods and to elaborate on their implications for future research within the URGE framework.

This Working Paper sets out to develop a methodology that will lay the foundations for subsequent joint research proposals and grant applications involving the European and third country partners in longer-term collaborative research.

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1. Aims and Objectives of this Working Paper

There is now a substantial body of literature on the globalization of higher education, much of which focuses on the policies and processes affecting tertiary education. By contrast, there are relatively few detailed ethnographic accounts that reveal exactly how those who work and study in universities engage with these processes (Currie and Newson, 1998; Deem 2001; Nelson and Watt 2004; Leisyte, Enders and De Boer, 2008). Bringing together these macro-level perspectives with an account of their micro-level or everyday enactments requires new methodologies for exploring the connections between these different analytical scales whilst also questioning received understandings about the relationship between policy, practice, place and scale in higher education.

Problematizing understandings of space and scale has been one of the underpinning features of the Marie-Curie IRSES project entitled University Reform, Globalization and Europeanization ('URGE'). Work Package 1, based on two workshops held in Bristol and Auckland in 2011, gave an overview of the key actors and institutions involved in the globalization of higher education and the rise of new regional entities. It began the work of creating a new conceptual framework to map the major global trends that are reshaping higher education and to provide different theoretical perspectives on these processes, with a particular focus on universities in Europe and Australasia (Robertson et al. 2012). The aim of Work Package 2 was to advance this theoretical framework by providing practical tools for analyzing the different ways in which institutions and individuals are engaging with these processes and provide an evidence-base of what is actually happening to universities 'on the ground' as they try to adapt to the challenges of the global knowledge economy. The question we ask is how can we study these processes in ways that add empirical flesh to these theoretical bones – or better still, in ways that provide new conceptual understandings about the anatomy of university reform in an era characterized by the entrenchment of the organizing principles of neoliberalism and New Public Management? To grasp more

fully the implications of global higher education reforms in what some critics have termed the age of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ (Wacquant 2012) it is necessary to combine the already prominent macro-level, quantitative, or broad theoretical perspectives with an attention to those ‘implicit, un-marked, signifying practices ... [which] often slip below the threshold of discursivity but profoundly alter how bodies are oriented, how lives are lived, and how subjects are formed’ (Gupta and Ferguson 2002: 984). It is essential that our methodology – as a means both of generating empirical data and shaping our theoretical stance – is situated within everyday practice as much as in the wider political economy context.

2. Background: Mapping Global Trends in University Reform

Public universities everywhere are facing similar sets of reforms that aim to make them more efficient, economical and competitive, and more responsive to the needs of industry, government and other ‘stakeholders’. Our hypothesis is that these changes are bringing about a profound transformation of the meaning and mission of the public university. These changes can be linked to three major developments in the political economy of higher education:

1. The growing emphasis that governments and international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank and the EU now place on the idea of the ‘global knowledge economy’ as the driving force of modernity and as the system within which all countries must now compete. If globalization was previously viewed by policy makers as an economic process that universities had to adapt to in order to ensure national competitiveness, today it is higher education itself and the knowledge it produces that is seen as a key driver of globalization (Wright and Rabo 2010) – so long as it can be corralled, copyrighted and commercialized. As Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (2004: 17) put it: ‘Corporations in the new economy treat advanced knowledge

as a raw material that can be claimed through legal devices, owned, and marketed as a product or service'. The commercialization of research and related 'Third Stream' activities are themselves seen by many 'entrepreneurial academics' as a new form of 'public good', complementary rather than in conflict with the university's traditional teaching and research missions (Hoffman 2011; Shore and McLauchlan 2012).

2. A corresponding post-1990s change in the conception of the university and the purpose of a university degree: this has entailed a shift from the idea of not-for-profit institutions producing 'public good' knowledge and education for critical citizenship to higher education increasingly being viewed as a private investment for the sake of employability. This is reflected in New Zealand and the UK (but not Denmark) in the retreat of state support for higher education, rising fees and levels of debt, and the university's quest for new fee-paying consumers online or overseas.
3. The spread of New Public Management principles and practices and a new common sense based around 'new human capital theory'. These are manifest in the increasing application of discourses of 'economy' to the management and governance of human conduct in the workplace, in increasingly capsulized and 'flexible' employment contracts, and in administrative systems that demand 'excellence'. We are now in a phase of 'embedded neoliberalism' in which the rationality of instrumentalism has become *doxa* in discussions of the value of higher education. The paradox here is that even where there is diminishing government investment in universities this is often coupled with increasing state intervention and regulation – which further incentivizes universities to be financially independent and free of government interference.

Are these developments evidence of a 'globally structured agenda of university reform?' (Dale 2000), or is it more a case of convergence around a loosely shared set

of international norms? And are these processes having a homogenizing effect on universities? While different institutions try to respond to these challenges in their own particular way, which are far from homogeneous, what we are witnessing is an increasing set of convergences or ‘mimetic isomorphisms’ (McLennan, Osborne and Vaux 2005: 242). If the idea of the university was once epitomized by terms like ‘disinterested knowledge’, ‘blue-skies research’, ‘higher learning’, ‘scholarship’ and ‘teaching’, this is increasingly being replaced by an emphasis on terms like ‘impacts’, ‘outputs’, ‘relevance’, ‘skills training’, ‘knowledge transfer’, ‘commercialization’ and ‘innovation’. This is also evident in the re-naming of government ministries responsible for research and higher education: in NZ, the Ministry for Research, Science and Technology (MoRST) was recently re-branded the Ministry for Science and Innovation (MSI) and, barely a year later, re-organized and re-named the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). A similar trajectory of ministerial mergers can be seen in other countries, including the UK, where universities now come under the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Together, these trends exemplify the ‘entrepreneurial university’ paradigm that is developing across a number of different sites (Marginson and Considine 2000). These trends may not be new, but what is novel is the extent to which they have become embedded, institutionalized and ‘doxic’ (i.e. orthodoxy) in Bourdieu’s sense of the term.

The world’s leading public universities have been described as institutions situated precariously between ‘tradition and enterprise’ (see Vernon 2010; Thift 2011). This is particularly germane with regard to the rise of so-called ‘Third Stream’ activities, concerned with the commercialization of university knowledge and assets. Many proponents argue that there is no reason why commercialization conflicts with the more traditional teaching and research missions of the university: commercialization is viewed as a positive-sum activity, and indeed these activities are seen by many ‘entrepreneurial academics’ as themselves a new form of public good. The problem, however, is that the entrepreneurial university model is based on very different principles and priorities – which give rise to most of the major tensions and conflicts

we see within universities today (for example, tensions over funding priorities, between management and staff, as well as between different categories of employee). Business models and the logic of commerce are refashioning the way universities are managed and governed, but more importantly, they are also reshaping the very ‘idea’ of the university. The modern university is increasingly conceptualized by policy makers, vice-chancellors and university administrators as a transnational business corporation operating in a competitive global market, whose main objective is to generate income or deliver economic value. Significantly, this is a very different idea to that held by most academics and students. This is another reason why deeper analysis is needed to probe the connections and disjunctions between macro-policy narratives and local understandings of those discourses.

3. Bringing Working Papers 1 and 2 into Alignment

Part of the aim of this Working Paper is to translate the theoretical framework outlined in Working Paper 1 into a methodology and research strategy which can provide the foundations for future research and longer-term collaborative projects. We therefore take as our starting point four of the key conceptual themes from Working Paper 1:

Deconstructing the ‘isms’

Working Paper 1 highlighted the various ‘isms’ that dominate scholarship on global higher education reform. ‘Methodological nationalism’ refers to the tendency to analyze societies in terms of the nation-states that are seen to contain them, limiting statistical analysis to national or at best international descriptions. ‘Methodological statism’ refers to the reification of the state as ‘a universal form rather than a particular representation that has been universalized’ (Robertson et al. 2012: 15), leading to assumptions regarding generic forms of governance, organization, administration, and locational specificity. These assumptions do not map onto the ways education is governed today in its differentiated aspects of funding, provision or delivery, ownership, and regulation that are undertaken by a range of actors other than

the state. ‘Methodological higher educationism’ entails an unproblematic acceptance of education as both a normative and descriptive term devoid of particular meanings and political, highly contestable, content. Finally, ‘spatial fetishism’ refers to a conception of social space that follows global/local binaries and elides history and agency, viewing spaces rather as the ‘undifferentiated backdrop against which social relations take place’ (Robertson et al. 2012: 19). Robertson et al. suggest that, instead, we should take a ‘processual’ view that moves from the binaries of ‘global’ versus ‘local’ to understand the spatial dimension of education reform in terms of ‘an assemblage of moving/institutionalized relations that not only have horizontal and vertical reach, but whose processes are dynamic’ (Robertson et al. 2012: 20).

Globalization and regionalization

Working Paper 1 called for a closer interrogation of the concept of globalization by treating it not as a structural force exerting itself on ‘the local’ from ‘above’ or ‘outside’, but rather as a ‘meta-narrative or sliding signifier that needs to be picked apart to see how it works at any particular moment, whether it refers to a ‘condition of the world’, ‘discourse’, ‘project’, ‘scale’, ‘reach’ or ‘habitus’ (2012: 21-22). This wide range of possible referents highlights the need for a diversity of methodological tools. The authors also draw our attention to the different ways we might understand regionalism, suggesting it is viewed as ‘both a response to and a dynamic behind globalization’ (2012: 26), and in terms of a ‘generational’ model whereby patterns of regionalism co-exist and interact over time and not just space. They also remind us of the need for empirical work to continue to inform and shape new conceptual categories.

Mapping the higher education sector

Mapping emerged from Working Paper 1 as a central tool for coming to ‘know’ the changing space of higher education as a means of making visible activities and actors, the boundaries between them and the power relations that govern them. In this respect, it is useful to conceptualize higher education as a complex network – or multi-level

assemblage – of local, national, transnational and regional actors, individuals, institutions and organizations. Locating them in time and space is a valuable exercise, but we also need to analyze the relations (particularly power relations) between them.

Robertson et al. (2012) provide two possible models for doing this mapping: a scalar model which supplements the vertical (local to global) axis with a horizontal axis (logics, temporal horizons, key university entry points) in order to illustrate the convergences or contradictions between the two; and a network mapping attentive to the ways in which power can be wielded through networks in the absence of formal state authority. Crucially, mapping must be a reflexive activity, conscious of the power dynamics involved in making visible certain relations, processes and activities (and not others) and of the danger of reproducing hegemonic social relations rather than shining a critical light on them.

'Policy mobility' and sectoral transformation

Taking the Bologna Process as a case study, WP1 set out a critical approach to ‘policy transfer’, relating it to a critical political economy lens often found lacking in the literature. This departs from narrow analyses of ‘effectivity’ and ‘outputs’ that govern the policy transfer discourse by problematizing these concepts and considering the wider implications and unintended consequences of policy mobility. This approach echoes a similar anthropological critique that has sought to reconceptualize policy by drawing attention to its symbolic and ‘agentive’ dimensions (Shore, Wright and Peró 2012). Viewed this way, ‘policy transfer’ in the field of global higher education reform is better understood as a continuous process of translation and assemblage.

The conceptual framework outlined by Robertson et al. in WP1 was based on an understanding of the new ways in which the higher education sector is being shaped by global and regional processes that make it increasingly difficult to address ‘the university’ as a unitary, bounded or autonomous actor. Their framework problematizes received ideas of scale and provides a critical overview of the key

actors, institutions and networks involved in the globalization of higher education and the rise of new regional entities. The problem we now face is how should we study them?

4. Key Methodological Challenges in Theorising University Reform

The task of this working paper is to create new analytical frameworks by combining theory and method. This involves placing at centre stage a multivocal approach, one that can represent what we might call a new theory of practice (or ‘praxis’ in Hannah Arendt’s (1958) sense of the term). That challenge can be summarized in terms of drawing links across several planes and scales:

- **Connecting macro and micro processes:** How might the URGE project connect macro-level political economy perspectives on the processes of globalization, regionalization and Europeanization with micro-level aspects of everyday life? What impacts do wider shifts in the political economy of higher education have upon the day-to-day practices of those who work or study in (or on the margins of) the higher education sector? Or how are different institutions and actors implicated within – and instantiations of – those global processes? The problem here is not so much combining scales as tracing the connections between them; analyzing how the local and the global interact with each other and the extent to which they are mutually constitutive. To understand that process, we need to pay attention to the local and the specific; to the fluid and contingent ways that macro policy agendas and regimes of governance translate into everyday practice: i.e. the complex and diverse ways that globalization becomes localized. We follow anthropology here in aiming for a holistic approach to understanding the construction of subjects and spaces, where language, aesthetic regimes, and phenomenological dispositions

that generate subtle cultural shifts are seen as of equal importance to statistical analysis or large-scale network mapping.

- **Structure versus agency:** Extending the scope of analysis to the practices of individuals, and in particular moments of rupture and contestation, necessitates a methodological response to the long-standing binary within modern social theory that posits structure against agency (Craib 1992; Lee and Newby 1995). Many anthropologists have emphasized the importance of locating ethnography within a globalized world and have stressed that this involves not only documenting the impact of large-scale processes on subjectivities and communities, but doing so in a way that demonstrates the specific and evolving nature of local responses (Moore 1999: 1). In understanding the motivations and intentions (or the lack thereof) that drive higher education reform, it is crucial that our methods are grounded in an understanding of practice that attends to the ‘interface’ between the symbolic meanings of actors and the structure or system that appears to constrain them (Ortner 1984: 18). In Ortner’s influential practice approach to social theory, for instance,

subjective and objective are placed in a powerful and dynamic relationship, in which each side has equal, if temporary, reality, and in which it is precisely the relationship between the two that generates the interesting questions. (Ortner 1984: 18)

In order to understand the ways in which actors across various contexts perceive, engage and live out the (often quite contradictory) processes of higher education reform, it is necessary to attend to this interplay of forces within various social fields (Bourdieu 1978) which are themselves in constant flux, and whose boundaries are increasingly blurred.

- **Uniting Theory and Practice:** One of the key strengths of empirical work such as that undertaken in this Work Package is its potential to disrupt and unsettle prevailing theoretical categories. It is key for methodology to ask how everyday local practices might help us rethink theory, as well as interrogate its own theoretical assumptions. But empirical work can also do crucial work in reinforcing new concepts and incipient theoretical trajectories. It is crucial that the empirical work is situated within, and speaks to, its theoretical context while at the same time seeking to provide an accurate evidence-based analysis of what is really happening within universities.

5. ‘Follow That’ Approaches: Towards a Methodological Framework

Underpinning the URGE project is the question, ‘how are universities engaging with the challenges of the global knowledge economy?’ Drawing on Marcus’s (1995) notion of multi-sited ethnography, we suggest a number of aspects of this that one might usefully ‘follow’ in order to gain insight into how global and local dimensions of higher education reform connect, and the way these elements are assembled and translated in different contexts. This approach entails a methodological concern with tracing what we might call (following Foucault 1989), the ‘genealogies’ of policies, disputes, narratives, metaphors and power relations. In short, uncovering the structures that govern these processes and tracing their trajectories through an analysis that shows how these are outcomes of contingent turns of history, rather than rationally inevitable trends.

Marcus’s multi-sited ethnography sought to reconcile the strengths of ethnographic research with the changing nature of the anthropological field, as sites became spatially fluid and less bounded. It represented an attempt to transcend local/global and lifeworld/system binaries. As Marcus argued, ‘any ethnography of a cultural formation [i.e. lifeworld] in the world system is also an ethnography of the system’

(Marcus 1995: 99). Multi-sited ethnography therefore enables us to ‘reclaim the social’ (Marcus 1999) by following not only cultural meanings relevant to interpretive analysis (or ‘the native point of view’), but social and material relations as well. Multi-sited ethnography was also linked to the emergence of new interdisciplinary arenas of social and cultural enquiry; its ability to map connections and make visible the intersections between hitherto discrete disciplinary objects makes it a methodological foundation for this URGE project.

Marcus outlined a range of objects that one might ‘follow’ to construct a multi-sited ethnography: people, material objects, symbols or metaphors, stories, biographies, and conflicts (1995). The anthropology of policy developed by Shore and Wright (1997) drew upon this approach in proposing to ‘follow the policy’ in the sense of its development, implementation, contestation and movement across what they later termed ‘policy worlds’ (2011). This approach views policies as ‘assemblages’ in which cultural meanings and social relations congeal, sometimes dissolve, and often migrate into new settings, with an agency of their own. Shore and Wright emphasize the imagined dimension of policies in the way that they act as vessels for the movement of particular symbols, tropes or narratives through time and space. But the authors also highlight the way policies create complex networks of actors, institutions and subjects that offer a useful framework for studying the myriad connections between different sites and scales.

An additional concept useful for conducting multi-sited ethnographies that link different scales is what Wright and Reinhold have called ‘studying through’ (2011). This approach holds that anthropologists should not just ‘study up’ (the elite, the powerful, the wealthy) or ‘study down’ (the poor, the marginalized) but rather construct their analysis through a policy, debate or conflict that traverses a number of sites. A ‘studying through’ approach recognizes that no conflict or political transformation is unidirectional, but rather a complex struggle ‘back and forth, up and down and back again’ between multiple actors, scales, and levels of presumed

authority (Wright and Reinhold 2011: 101). Hence, it avoids hierarchical understandings of policy as something implemented from above by policymakers, and obliges us to recognize the actors and agency at work in all settings. Studying through also provides a methodology for constructing a ‘history of the present’ by tracing the events and intersections that resulted in the current state of affairs; a process that, like Foucault’s genealogical approach, highlights the arbitrary and contingent nature of the present.

This Working Paper draws on all of these approaches in outlining five central ‘follow that’ scenarios that we consider particularly useful for studying higher education reform: ‘follow that policy’, ‘follow that dispute’, ‘follow those metaphors, discourses and symbols’, ‘follow those shifting power relations’, and finally ‘follow that history’. These approaches act as a guiding framework for the more specific methods outlined in Section 5. ‘Follow that’ can act as a starting point, we hope, for mapping a research path or constructing a set of sites and objects that avoids conventional assumptions about scale, policy, political change, and the nature of social science research itself.

5.1 ‘Follow that policy’: Tracking assemblages of projects, programmes and politics

Studies of higher education have dovetailed with the anthropology of policy approach from its beginnings (Shore and Wright 1997; 1999). However, an attention to policy transfer – or what we can more accurately term ‘translation’ (Callon 1986) – is perhaps now more essential than ever, as studies on regionalization and globalization of higher education reform reveal (Dale and Robertson 2009). Policy in the higher education sector appears to be particularly mobile, traversing national and local boundaries with ease, as universities’ mission statements and strategic directives appear to take on what Sturm and Turner call an ‘uncanny genericity’ (2012). These isomorphisms, described above, emerge largely from the intersection of finance and education in the increasingly pressing demands of the ‘global knowledge economy’.

Tracking the networks through which policies and policy discourses travel is useful for understanding what drives these reforms, how their meanings may change in different contexts, and the unanticipated effects this may have. ‘Follow that policy’ enables us to pay closer attention to the processes involved in policy translation, highlighting the fact that while certain higher education policies may be ‘global’ or ‘regional’, they are nevertheless always negotiated ‘on the ground’ by individuals and in response to local interests, constraints and political agendas. This in turn helps us to rethink the concept of scale by asking, what exactly is ‘policy transfer’ in the context of university reform? Who is transferring what to whom, how, and with what effects?

The work of Dale and Robertson within the URGE project provides an exemplary illustration of how we can map the shifting contours of higher education as a sector, and the new forms of regionalization involved in these processes (see Robertson 2008; 2010 and Robertson et al. 2012). Another aspect of these trends is captured in Tadaki and Tremewan’s work (2013) on the geopolitics of international university networks, their origins and shifting rationales, and their growing significance in the international relations of states. Such transnational networks include the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU), the Worldwide University Network (WUN) and Universitas 21. With declining public funding per student in developed economies and increasing competition for high rankings in international league tables, universities have been diversifying their revenue streams and shoring up their rankings by enlarging their recruitment of international students and improving their global profiles through international relations strategies. These trends are also responses to government pressures to demonstrate how universities contribute to national growth strategies (especially export dollars) and to reinforce the global competitiveness of national education systems and of their graduates in the international labour market.

Tremewan’s work focuses on whether a transformational space has opened up – whether intentionally or inadvertently – as universities form international networks to leverage their brands and to minimize the investments they need to make in order to

demonstrate global reach. With Marc Tadaki, Tremewan has researched the international network of which he is secretary general, the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, with a view to understanding the shifting geopolitics of higher education (e.g. the emergence of China's top universities and their relationship with the other major research 'powers' such as the US, Japan, Canada and Australia) and the way in which the relations between states impinge on universities (Tadaki and Tremewan 2013). In particular, Tremewan is interested to determine the potential of APRU for maintaining scholarly collaboration even when rival or antagonistic state agendas are in play. In this regard, the history of European universities as recently as during the Cold War or back to the 100 Years War provide a reference point together with the history of the British Royal Society. He has noted that the US higher education strategy by the Association of American Universities during the last Bush Administration was situated within the national defense strategy (AAU, January 2006). Similarly the Demos think-tank, related to the UK's Blair Administration, recommended more open engagement between universities to gain strategic advantage with the emerging Asian research and innovation systems (Leadbetter et al. 2007). Tremewan's research notes the potential of convergence between the instrumental demands of governments for universities to demonstrate social and economic utility in the short term and the more progressive agenda of relating leading scientific research on global challenges (e.g. environment, climate change, water, energy, health, social equity) to local communities. Therefore, international university networks might be seen as knowledge action networks which bring global science (including social science) to local situations and which is, in turn, informed by local community insights and knowledge in order to overcome the many deficits of globally determined generic solutions to local challenges. This, in turn, denotes deeper connectivity and more authentic engagement between universities and a wide range of communities nationally and internationally, an interface which potentially can enrich both and also go beyond the symbolism of elite connectedness.

5.2 ‘Follow that dispute’: The university as a site of contestation

Studying disputes and conflicts has been a well-established ethnographic technique ever since Gluckman’s (1963) pioneering work on the ‘extended case-study method’ in his anthropological studies of tribal law. Disputes are especially useful for ethnographic analysis as they often reveal taken-for-granted understandings and crystallize opposing positions on important issues. In the case of universities, they provide a rare methodological vantage point for capturing shifting policy frames and power relations. Following a conflict is very likely to be a multi-sited activity; in higher education, disputes typically spill over into spheres of policy, legislation, university governance, employment rights, union activities and the national media.

The burgeoning reforms in recent years have precipitated major academic disputes and student protests, some of which – in Chile and Montreal for example – have escalated to the extent of shifting national priorities. Far from being minor, momentary or inevitable difficulties, these disputes are central components of the current state of higher education; they indicate intense dissatisfaction among students and academics, and deep rifts in the social fabric of the university. How do these conflicts articulate competing visions of the student, the academic, the management and the university (Nielsen 2010)? To what extent do they too follow isomorphic trends (should ‘policy transfer’ be accompanied by a study of ‘dispute transfer’)? And what stance should academic researchers take in relation to these conflicts? These issues are explored in the context of the University of Auckland in Shore and Taitz’s analysis of a strike by academics (2012; see also Shore and Davidson 2013) and in Gritt Nielsen’s analysis of a dispute that erupted in Denmark over the treatment of international students from China (Nielsen 2011a).

5.3 ‘Follow those metaphors, discourses and symbols’: Problematising language

As Dorothy Smith argues, ‘a whole set of key concepts for the understanding of society derive their power from appearing to be just what they always were, and

derive their instrumentality from taking on quite different forms' (2006: 628). Policy relies fundamentally upon language: by drawing on the root metaphors and master symbols within a particular culture, it has the power to make certain political decisions seem natural, necessary, and incontestable. At the same time these metaphors, symbols and keywords often have the capacity to take on surprising new meanings as they migrate into new settings.

Marcus suggested 'follow that metaphor' as a means of examining language use (as well as print and visual media), a technique he claimed can create 'new envisionings of social landscapes' by discovering unforeseen associations between concepts (1995: 109). Both the anthropology of policy and the method of 'studying through' take language as a central analytical concern; a common technique for both involves following a particular set of keywords (Williams 1975), metaphors or symbols in order to unravel the ways concepts emerge and come to mobilize a network of associations within a particular cultural setting. Following language enables one to map the movement of policy and to transcend, or interrogate, the problems of scale in unique ways that illustrate how political economy connects with micro-level discourses and practices.

Higher education policy is characterized by a set of recurring keywords that engender certain understandings of the university: terms such as 'hubs', 'hotspots', 'clusters' and 'networks' work by distinguishing the 'postmodern' university from the modern or 'traditional' university (see Robertson et al. 2012). A similar policy trajectory is often contained within terms such as 'triple helix', 'third stream' or university 'third mission' (Shore and McLauchlan 2012). It is not difficult to note within these the 'extensive, and mostly unconscious, system of metaphor that we use automatically and unreflectively to understand complexities and abstractions' (Lakoff 1990). Through their alignments with concepts embedded in economic or scientific discourse, these terms highlight some aspects of university reform while obscuring

others, and their adoption in a diverse range of settings illuminates the inseparability of university reform and contemporaneous social currents.

5.4 ‘Follow those shifting power relations’: New management, new governance, new political subjects

Beyond exploring changing discourses, another way to examine how the meaning and mission of the university is changing is by following shifts in the structures of university governance, management and ownership. These changes are often central to national and regional university reform policies, as bodies once deemed ‘external’ to the university (including private industry and commerce) acquire an ever greater role in university affairs while academics and students are progressively marginalized. Proponents of such reform claim the Humboldtian vision of the university as a community of scholars and students to be anachronistic and out of touch with reality (Wright forthcoming a). Yet as studies by Ørberg (2007) and Shore and Taitz (2012) have shown, definitions of the university are necessarily linked to questions of ‘ownership’: who can lay claim to, speak on behalf of, or represent themselves as the university?

Following shifting power relations entails tracing changing institutional forms. The seemingly stable features of public institutions are increasingly contested as the boundaries between public and private have become increasingly porous. This is also reflected in the shifting make-up of university governing boards or councils and in the shift from boards largely composed of elected representatives from academia and the local community, to boards increasingly dominated by unelected accountants and businessmen. We also need to interrogate the symbolic meanings and understandings of notions like the ‘public’ as these are increasingly inseparable from legal and economic structures that are constructed around them. ‘Following power relations’ is likely also to involve the former three ‘follow that’ scenarios, but not necessarily – its particular emphasis is on the forms of institutional or material ‘hard power’ that

enable some actors to reconfigure these institutions, despite the way this might clash with established cultural or discursive frames.

A different kind of ‘follow those power relations’ approach is suggested by Dirk Michel-Schertges in his work on the impacts of university reform on academic identities and subjectivities. From a more theoretical and philosophical standpoint, he examines academic understandings of their changing work conditions and shows the different strategies that university researchers and teachers use to deal with the ongoing reform processes, regulations and changes in both status, societal recognition and ‘modes of autonomy’ (Kelsey 2008). He focuses particularly on academic identity formation in the context of contemporary national and international higher education reforms, drawing on the theoretical work of philosophers such as Adorno and Lefebvre. Adorno argues for a ‘Theory of semi-Bildung’ (or ‘Halbbildung’) in contrast to that of ‘Bildung’. Whereas ‘Bildung’ means education in its widest sense of both ‘formation’ and ‘self-cultivation’, and aims at maturity, social judgment, reflexivity and political consciousness (Sünker 2006), *semi-Bildung* has resulted in ‘the omnipresence of the alienated mind’ (Adorno 1997: 93-94). Lefebvre’s ‘Everyday Life in the Modern World’ (1971) also provides a useful theoretical framework for linking the fragmentation of higher education with new forms of identity and social praxis. Building on these approaches, Michel-Schertges uses interviews with academics to identify the different self-understandings of academics and analyze patterns of both alienation and resistance (cf. Crozier and Friedberg 1993; Weick and Sutcliffe 2007; Barnett and Di Napoli 2008).

A final illustration of how we might develop the ‘follow that’ approach to analyze university reform, albeit with a far more explicit focus on material resource allocation, is provided by Rebecca Boden and Susan Wright in their study of the patterns of income and expenditure of Danish universities between 2005 and 2009, the crucial period in which the Danish university reforms were implemented. Their report, aptly titled, ‘Follow the Money’ (Boden and Wright 2010) generated interesting and

important findings. The reforms aimed to restore politicians' trust in universities so that they could be relied upon to use increased public funding to generate the research and graduates needed to drive Denmark's knowledge economy. To this end, the elected leadership of universities was replaced by boards largely appointed from leaders of large organizations outside the university world and by a hierarchy of appointed, strategic leaders. Universities' financial management was also changed so that for the first time leaders had an overview of their organization's overall accounts and had methods to steer them. Boden and Wright's (2010) analysis of the reformed sector's first 5 years of published accounts showed that collectively their income had gone up by 42 per cent. But over the same period teaching expenditure, as a proportion of total budgets, fell (from 27% to 23%) and research expenditure as a proportion of total spend only rose from 36% in 2005 to 40% in 2009. How, then, was the increased income being used? First, Danish universities' net worth (all assets minus all liabilities) increased by between 104% and 600% and all but one university had a liquidity so strong that they could pay off their current debts immediately and have cash to spare. In short, they were keeping cash in the bank rather than deploying it to support organizational objectives (McKinsey 2009). Second, universities built up their central administration. Total administrative costs as a proportion of all expenditure rose by nearly 2% between 2005 and 2009. Numbers employed in central administration rose by 27% and on much higher average salaries (Boden and Wright 2010: Tables 5, 15, 16).

By following these monetary payments and their effects, Boden and Wright outlined a useful method for studying the trajectory of change in globalizing universities. Their study also raises important questions about the politics and ethics of university reform and whether increased public funding for higher education institutions is best used to build up financial liquidity and a corporate management system, or whether it should be used for the core purposes of teaching, research and the dissemination of knowledge.

5.5 ‘Follow that history’: Genealogical approaches to understanding the changing conditions of academic existence

What unites all of these approaches is the recognition that the shape of our current social order is arbitrary, contingent, and socially constructed rather than the result of any natural or inevitable trajectory. These ‘follow that’ approaches call into question some of our most fundamental categories and concepts. Social science has often done this through cross-cultural comparison, but another way is by adopting Michel Foucault’s ‘genealogical approach’ (1977).

The genealogical approach, which is derived primarily from Nietzsche’s *The Genealogy of Morals* (1913) aims to understand the conditions of possibility that produce the present by delving into the past and the trajectory of particular rationalities and strategies that have culminated in the current order of things. As Foucault describes it, genealogies enable us to follow ‘the complex course of descent’ so that we can ‘maintain passing events in their proper dispersion’. The goal is

to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us. It is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents (Foucault 1977: 146).

This captures nicely the idea that our present is the outcome of contradictory forces and contingent events.

In many respects ‘studying through’ is similar to Foucault’s genealogical approach, but perhaps more adapted to analyzing the different meanings a policy holds as well as its shifting trajectories. Policy and genealogical approaches are a fruitful pairing, providing insight into the shifting discourses, metaphors and keywords that have governed the higher education sector. But ‘following that history’ also entails

examining the changing conditions of everyday life in academia, and the ways in which research and teaching practices have changed over the past few decades. Delving further into earlier forms of the university also helps us avoid romanticizing the past as some sort of lost ‘golden age’ of collegiality, autonomy and dedication to a higher purpose. As Burchell puts it, genealogy works by ‘revealing to us the (often quite recent) inventedness of our world’ and enabling us

to discern the broken lines of the irregular contours of our goldfish bowl, of our present, taking shape in all their necessarily contingent exteriority (Burchell 1996: 30-31).

While many of the former approaches are implicitly forward-looking, ‘follow that history’ – or genealogy – invites reflection on the imperative question: how did we get here? A further advantage of the genealogical approach, as Judith Butler argues, is that it highlights

the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffuse points of origin (Butler 1990: viii-ix).

The genealogical method is particularly useful for analyzing globalizing universities. The seeming continuous process of higher education reform that has occurred in Denmark, the UK and New Zealand over the past two decades suggests that many of these reform projects have indeed been founded upon ‘errors’, ‘false appraisals’ and ‘faulty calculations’ that have nonetheless proved highly useful as an instrument for extending state control over the sector.

In the next section we offer further illustrations of how these ‘follow that’ approaches can be put to use or combined in order to analyze the complex ways in which universities are engaging with the processes of globalization. In the specific studies of

university reform in Denmark, New Zealand and the UK, URGE team members deploy a variety of different research methods, from ethnographic fieldwork and constructing life histories, to interviews, narrative analysis, network analysis and critical discourse analysis. In mapping the shifting boundaries of the university, some have also drawn on quantitative methods including statistical analyses. In the next section of this working paper we highlight five methods that are particularly salient both to our project and to the ‘follow that’ approach outlined earlier.

6. Methods for Analysing University Reform

6.1 Ethnographic fieldwork: Participant-observation

Ethnographic fieldwork remains the core method favoured by most social and cultural anthropologists and this commitment to empirical, interpersonal and face-to-face research informs much of the work of this URGE project. However, definitions and understandings of what constitutes ‘fieldwork’ or ‘ethnography’ differ considerably between disciplines. While there is an increasing number of sociological textbooks on methods that emphasize ethnographic fieldwork as a key qualitative research method, these portrayals often tend to reduce ethnography to face-to-face interviews or to a standardized template of qualitative techniques. Unlike those disciplines that have a more positivistic orientation, social anthropologists tend to be less concerned with rules and prescriptions. Its practitioners place a premium on long-term engagement and deep immersion in the field and they recognize that fieldwork is a messy, unpredictable business. While pursuing clear issues and questions, it proceeds more by serendipity and happenstance than deliberate planning; so it is important to be flexible and to be able to adapt one’s research focus and questions according to changing events.

Within anthropology, ethnography has traditionally meant observing people in their ‘naturalistic settings’ and trying to understand cultures and societies in their own

terms (or as Malinowski famously put it, ‘from the natives’ point of view’ [1922]). ‘Ethnographic fieldwork’ is often code for an eclectic and promiscuous set of research practices that may include both interpretive and quantitative methods. Yet what unites most anthropologists is a shared commitment to analysis based on subjective encounters and personal involvement; that is, the traditional stance of participant-observation (or ‘participant objectification’ as Bourdieu calls it [2003]).

There is no single way to do ethnographic fieldwork. It typically relies on converting personal encounters and subjective experiences into more generalized knowledge and objectified analyses. It entails more inductive and localized approaches to theory making and has traditionally been wedded to the idea of ‘holism’; to seeing events and processes in their wider social context and to drawing out the connections between parts and the whole.

Anthropological fieldwork has traditionally implied ‘deep immersion’ in the life of a particular group (or ‘deep hanging out’ as Marcus puts it). But that is not always possible, particularly when ‘studying up’ or exploring non-local organizations and processes such as multinational companies, commodity supply chains or transnational migrants. Modern universities increasingly fall into this bracket.

6.2. Institutional ethnography

Institutional ethnography (or IE), in its more restrictive sense, refers to the approach developed by Dorothy Smith. As Stooke defines it,

institutional ethnography is a strategy for empirically investigating the ruling relations from the standpoint of an individual or group of individuals whose actions are caught up in the ruling relations, but who are, themselves, positioned outside them. Institutional ethnography is both a routine way of looking at social life and a highly systematic mode of inquiry (Stooke 2010: 288).

For Smith, whose approach is inspired by both anthropology and feminism, articulating or ‘mapping’ an institution is a way to ‘extend people’s ordinary good knowledge of how things are put together in our everyday lives to dimensions of the social that transcend the local and are all the more powerful and significant in it for that reason’ (Smith 2006: 3). In particular IE explores how everyday activities are co-ordinated and connected into larger scale forms of social organization and ruling relations by texts, which are designed to make different local settings and workers manageable and comparable. Institutional texts include policy documents and ‘standardised procedures, forms, and computer tracking systems used in local branch offices but produced at state or federal levels’ (Weigt 2006: 335). University equivalents would be work plans and audits of performance. Even if they resist the embedded discourses and values in such texts, people have to engage with them (Lund et al. forthcoming). This emphasis on mapping social relations from a particular individual/group standpoint was initially informed by Smith’s attempt to enable women to gain knowledge of the ruling relationships of their everyday worlds. According to Smith (2005: 33), beginning with the location of a particular standpoint is methodologically advantageous because ‘an institutional order doesn’t offer a “natural” focus. It is a complex of relations rather than a definite unitary form’. Hence, beyond whatever political interests the researcher may have, ‘locating a specific institutional standpoint organizes the direction of the sociological gaze and provides a framework of relevance’ (Smith 2005: 33)

In terms of conducting institutional ethnographies, Smith (2005: 35) argues that the ultimate goal is to ‘uncover the social relations implicated in the local organization of the everyday’. This often means that research pathways are only discovered during the research process, that is, as the ethnographer begins to piece together the social relations which form the ‘institution’.

As she notes, the institutional ethnographer initially

may be unable to lay out precisely the parameters of the research, sometimes a source of difficulty with the ethical review processes of universities and with funding sources that require a clear account of who the ‘subjects’ are and what kinds of questions they will be asked. Yet the direction of inquiry is by no means random. Each next step builds from what has been discovered and invades more extended dimensions of the institutional regime. The mapping of social relations expands from and includes the original site so that the larger organization that enters into and shapes it becomes visible (Smith 2005: 35)

In other words, institutional ethnography – like anthropological fieldwork more generally – is a cumulative process that entails intensive personal engagement and intimate knowledge of the social relations that shape any particular field. A good illustration of the use of this kind of method is Susan Wright’s work (forthcoming b) on the introduction of a bibliometric points system to measure academic publications and allocate funding competitively between, and sometimes within, Danish universities. This study uses Smith’s approach, but back to front. It starts by tracing the government’s attempt to develop a form of governance where one indicator acts on three scales at once: to create ‘world class’ universities, to establish competitive relations within the sector, and to make clear to each individual academic ‘what counts’ and how they are expected to adjust their conduct accordingly. It then shows how these ‘ruling relations’ and their often contradictory demands are embedded in institutional circuits, texts and audit technologies. Ethnographies of a life science faculty and a humanities faculty reveal a range of academic responses, from pragmatic accommodation to the new demands to principled resistance. Rarely, some use them to create new career opportunities and to thrive. But the new ways of counting academic work affect the professional sense of self of both pragmatic accommodators and principled resisters, inducing sometimes life-threatening stress. In a range of ways, academics along with other participants in the ‘policy field’ shaped the way the

indicators worked, even getting them withdrawn as a management tool in one faculty, and created forms of governance sometimes strikingly in accord with, and other times distinctly different from, the original top-down vision.

6.3. ‘Anthropology of policy’ as framework and research method

As noted earlier, an ‘anthropology of policy approach’ is particularly useful for analyzing webs of power and the way that actors, institutions and sites connect across scales. Tracking how a policy moves, is translated and inscribed in practice also offers a framework for reconceptualizing the field of higher education so that we see it not as a bounded or contained sector but as a site of interaction and contestation; a ‘contact zone’ (Clifford 1997) as well as a ‘space of flows’ (Castells 1989).

The anthropology of policy is distinguished from much of the political science and policy studies literature in that it rejects the positivistic paradigm that has traditionally dominated these disciplines and their view of policies as instruments of rule wielded by rational political actors (Wedel et al. 2007). It also rejects the linear model of policy development typically used in policy studies. These invariably overlook the power relations that underlie policy mobility and the different and contested meanings a policy holds for its advocates, targets and opponents. An anthropology of policy recognizes the tensions between these ‘native’ perspectives and the anthropologist’s ‘outsider’ viewpoint, so that each might highlight the other’s contingency. Seen in this light, a policy is neither a neutral reflection of a set of political circumstances nor a product of the rational calculations of policymakers. Rather, it is a concept entangled in the webs of meanings and power relations that pervade any social setting, while also acting to reproduce or (less commonly) subvert those settings.

What is therefore distinctive about this approach is that it recognizes policies are ‘actants’ or objects in a network which, although ‘silent and invisible’, nevertheless act or shift action and perform tasks (Akrich and Latour 1999: 259). To many people, policies are merely tools or politically neutral technologies for ‘problem-solving’,

albeit concealed beneath a façade of instrumental rationality and the pragmatic expertise of the policymaker. This is central to what have become known as the techniques of ‘neoliberal governmentality’ (Rose and Miller 1992) whereby the state appears to retreat while new disciplines of self-government, self-reliance, and self-motivation become engrained into individuals through benchmarking, league tables and other mechanisms for measuring individual performance. These processes are particularly evident in the rise of what some have termed ‘audit culture’ (Shore and Wright 1999; Strathern 2000), a concept used to examine the way in which techniques of financial auditing and increasingly pervasive demands for ‘accountability’ are having a transformative effect on the professional identities and subjectivities of academics. Nielsen (2011a) provides a further illustration of this in her work on the multidimensional and often surprising subjectivities of students as actors in policy transfer.

Elizabeth Rata’s (2010, 2011, 2012) work on university brokers, new forms of brokerage and official government discourses of ‘biculturalism’ in New Zealand adds a further dimension to the analysis of policy regimes and the way in which particular policies can often embody contradictory projects and ideological agendas. She uses her analysis of the cultural production of so-called ‘indigenous knowledge’ by Maori academic brokers and her theory of neotribal capitalism (Rata 2000) to critique the ideology of neotraditionalism and to map webs of power and the connections between actors and institutions. She investigates the confluence between the interests of neotribal elites, the bicultural project of the professional new class, and the neoliberal reframing of public resources and services in a number of case studies of university policies.

‘Brokerage’ is the concept that Rata draws on to unite the theory and empirical material. As the mechanism by which agents enter into a transformative relationship with power, her analysis of the networks and practices that indigenous and bicultural academics deploy reveals a complex web of brokerage strategies. The empirical

research involves three case studies into the enabling bicultural policies, their operationalization, including auditing and compliance processes, and the transformative effects on the agents involved. The studies include; the university ethics approval process (Rata 2012), the Maori Tertiary Education Framework (Rata forthcoming), and the production of knowledge in the university for the National Curriculum (Rata 2013). The evidence from these case studies enables us to identify and analyse the effects of bicultural and neotraditionalist ideologies in New Zealand universities within the wider context of the neoliberalization of the modern university.

6.4. Case study and extended case study method

The extended case study method was originally developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by anthropologists Max Gluckman and Jaap van Velsen. Their aim was to counter the decontextualized abstractions of more structural approaches by offering richly detailed ethnographic accounts of the actions and choices of real individuals within specific social settings. In other words, the goal was to go beyond illuminating regularities within systems of social relations by examining the actual (or unique) behavior of individuals when faced with particular situations. For van Velsen, who preferred to call this method ‘situational analysis’, ‘structural analysis does not allow for the fact that individuals are often faced by a choice between alternative norms’ (van Velsen 1967: 131). A major advantage of the extended case method is its ability to illuminate the complex relationship between a social world of ‘norms in conflict’ (van Velsen 1967: 146) and the strategies and choices of individuals.

Gluckman distinguished his extended case study method from more restricted uses of the term ‘case study’ including the ‘apt illustration’ (i.e. a simple action or event used to illustrate a wider normative principle) and the analysis of complex micro-social events that purport to reveal structural characteristics at the macro level. By contrast, his approach sought to integrate these levels by analyzing the interrelation between them. Gluckman and van Velsen also insisted on the importance of extending the case

studies temporally by analyzing a series of specific incidents affecting the same groups or persons over a long period of time. As Gluckman argued:

if we are going to penetrate more deeply into the actual process by which persons and groups live together with a social system, under a culture, we have to employ a series of connected cases occurring within the same area of social life. I believe that this will greatly alter our view of the working of some institutions, and deepen our understanding of the significance of all custom (Gluckman 2006[1961]: 17).

Gluckman achieved this through a series of fine-grained ethnographic studies of judicial processes among the Barotse people of Zimbabwe combined with brilliant analyses of the ‘modes of thought’ of Barotse judges in deciding cases. In emphasizing the interconnections between ‘cases’, Gluckman’s approach is similar to Smiths ‘institutional ethnography’ insofar as both use detailed analyses of social processes and individual strategies and choices to reveal the context of everyday life.

More recently, sociologist Michael Burawoy (1998) has developed the extended case method further by showing how it can be used reflexively to reexamine the relationship between data and theory, and to challenge existing theory through the analysis of anomalous cases that cannot be accounted for by existing theory. According to Burawoy (1991: 279), studying such anomalies ‘leads directly to an analysis of domination and resistance’ which makes the extended case method ‘the most appropriate way of using participant observation to (re)construct theories of advanced capitalism’ (1991: 271).

These themes of ‘domination’ and ‘resistance’ are reflected in the work of all of the contributors to this Working Paper. And like Burawoy, members of the URGE team have also relied extensively on the reflexive use of ethnographic case studies as a way

‘to extract the general from the unique, to move from the “micro” to the “macro,” and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future’ (Burawoy 1998: 5).

6.5. ‘Figures and worlds’

As noted above, Gritt Nielsen’s analysis of how students’ room for participation is changing with recent Danish university reforms provides revealing insights into the new forms of conflict that university reforms are generating and into the way that university managers – and ministers – try to resolve those disputes (Nielsen 2010, 2011a, 2011b). Drawing on Anna Tsing’s notions of ‘figuration’, ‘friction’ and scale-making to theorise these developments (Tsing 2000, 2005, 2011) Nielsen explores how ‘the student’, as a contested figure in a period of reform, was negotiated and enacted in different pedagogical, institutional and political settings. In doing this, she develops a novel anthropological methodology for understanding how policies, subjectivity and particular kinds of social ‘worlds’ or ‘wholes’ are co-produced through situated processes of contestation.

Nielsen’s work begins with the observation that anthropologies of policy often deploy two seemingly opposed, yet nevertheless intimately connected approaches. The first is a Foucauldian/governmentality approach which – despite claims to the contrary – still tends to construct policy as a more or less straightforward execution of political programmes. The second approach is the ethnographic insistence on ‘appropriation’ and ‘engagement’ which, in its critique of ‘implementation’ studies, attempts to assign agency and creativity to the people towards whom a policy is directed. This entails sensitivity towards insider (or ‘emic’) perspectives and the recognition that actors can – and do – influence their own circumstances. While sympathetic towards this ambition, Nielsen argues that the notion of appropriation may work as a retrospective concept that implicitly constructs policy as a ‘thing’ that people react to and thereby tacitly presupposes a stable and essentialized character of political programmes.

As an alternative to these approaches, Nielsen aims to grasp the simultaneity and co-production of ‘figures’ and the ‘wholes’ and ‘worlds’ of which the figures are a ‘part’ through what she terms ‘figuration work’. This approach combines existing work on the anthropology of policy (Shore and Wright 2011, Sutton and Levinson 2001) with anthropological studies of globalization (Tsing 2000, 2005) and work on ‘figuration’ by critical and feminist thinkers including Haraway (1992, 1997) and Braidotti (1994). The point of departure in this ‘figuration work’ approach is its focus on moments of ‘friction’; that is, ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference’ (Tsing 2005: 4). Friction includes moments of contestation, ambivalence or ambiguity and Nielsen argues that such moments work as processes of differentiation through which conflicting student figures emerge and are assembled. She uses this idea to explore how different figures of the student – as ‘co-owner’, as ‘consumer’, or as ‘revolutionary’ – are enacted within and as ‘part’ of what are often conflicting ‘wholes’. Such ‘wholes’ may include ‘programmes/disciplines’, ‘universities’, ‘the student body’, the ‘nation-state’, or ‘the global knowledge economy’. By focusing on these different scales we can see how students’ lives are not easily balanced or reconciled. These ‘worlds’ seem to shift between being ‘integrative wholes’ where the student conveys a sense of belonging and obligations to an (imagined) community, and ‘aggregative wholes’ where the student becomes an ‘autonomous unit’, an individual set apart from others, who, in his/her pursuit of personal goals, contributes only indirectly to the development of larger wholes.

One advantage of this ‘figuration work’ approach, particularly when applied to the study of university reform and globalization, is that it usefully highlights the fractured and contested nature of policy regimes, the complexity of the different scales upon which such regimes operate, and the often contradictory implications this may have for those ‘figures’ (or subjects) who are produced by, or reproduce themselves through, these processes.

6.6 Narrative inquiry and autobiography/autoethnography

The term ‘narrative inquiry’ includes a wide range of disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods, yet all of which entail an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (Trahar 2011). Narrative inquirers often begin from experience as lived and told through stories, or with a research puzzle that relates to aspects of the researcher’s autobiography (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 40; Trahar, 2009).

Like anthropological approaches to culture and symbolism, the focus is typically on meaning: how people use stories to make sense of and interpret the world. In this sense, narratives are understood as much more than simply a set of facts; rather, they are social texts produced by people within specific social, historical and cultural contexts. But from an analytical perspective, they are also expressive and interpretive devices through which people represent themselves and convey the significance of particular events.

As a research method, this necessarily entails a different relationship between researchers and subjects: a more dialogic and reflexive relationship in which the ‘stories’ of the researcher are also intrinsic to the inquiry and are not ‘bracketed off’ from the research process, and one in which relationships with participants are foregrounded (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 733-5). As with ethnographic fieldwork, the research process in narrative inquiry tend to ‘unfold’ in the course of establishing rapport between researcher and subject, and it is not uncommon for the research to begin without any specific research questions. Like the ethnographic method of social anthropology, the research process is as important as the research – and often becomes a story itself.

‘A persuasive narrative inquiry enables its audience to see transparently how interactions between researcher and research participants help to shape and structure research texts’ (Trahar 2013: xi). Consequently, writing itself typically becomes a

crucial part of the process of inquiry. This sometimes includes the use of other literary tropes and devices including letters, dreams, flashback and even fictionalized situations – an approach exemplified in Andrew Sparkes' poignant account of the impact of audit culture on academics in a provincial British university (Sparkes 2007). Other research strategies include collecting stories (visual, written or oral); unstructured narrative interviewing; organizing and observing particular actions, events and 'happenings'; collecting biographies – but allowing subjects to reflect back on the meaning and analysis of those stories. In this respect narrative inquirers also seek to interrogate the way 'talk' is interactively produced and 'performed' as narrative. As a method, this also requires a close reading of contexts, including the influence of the researcher, setting and social circumstances on the production and interpretation of the narratives in question.

However, a common failing with narrative inquiry is to assume that participants' voices 'speak for themselves' and that autobiographical accounts are somehow more 'authentic' and less mediated representations of social reality, which they are clearly not. As Riessman observes, 'stories are social artefacts, telling us as much about society and culture as they do about a person or a group' (Riessman 2008: 105). Reflexivity and dialogue between researcher and researched, text and reader are important for understanding the meanings and significance that stories hold, but equally important is to grasp the wider social and cultural contexts that give structure and form to those meanings.

Sheila Trahar's work provides the best illustration of how narrative inquiry and autobiography/autoethnography can contribute to an understanding of how universities, their staff and students engage with the processes of globalization. The original aim of one of her major research projects in the UK was to 'explore the "greater diversity"...with respect to learning and teaching and its increasing numbers of international students' in higher education (Trahар 2011: 2). Realizing that it was inappropriate to be investigating experiences of 'international students' – defined as

those domiciled outside the EU and travelling to the UK for study purposes – without considering the ways in which all students interacted with each other and with her in the learning environment, narrative inquiry enabled Trahar, through a range of dialogical experiences and ‘events’, to realize the crucial importance of understanding learning and teaching as culturally mediated practices. Such understanding led her to autoethnographic exploration of her own values and beliefs, in particular about learning and teaching, and to recognize how they had informed unintended ethnocentric practices that may have excluded and marginalized some students. Thus, as indicated earlier in this paper, narrative inquiry enabled her – and those who participated in the research – to become more insightful into how globalization impacts the everyday practices of those who work and study in higher education. A major outcome of her practitioner research was the development of ‘ethnorelative’ approaches to teaching, approaches that seek to be inclusive and celebratory of diversity in the higher education environment, recognizing the rich opportunities for the development of cultural capability in all of the ‘players’ – students and academics – whatever their background.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to develop a series of research strategies for translating the conceptual and theoretical framework outlined in Work Package 1 into a viable methodology and set of transposable research methods. This working paper has outlined a number of techniques that, we hope, can provide a foundation for further analysis of the different ways that universities are engaging with the challenges of globalization and Europeanization and the imperatives of a competitive, global knowledge economy. We have argued for more ethnographically informed research to shed light on what is happening within universities as the context in which they operate becomes increasingly more globalized. But it is equally important to ensure that this empirical work remains theoretically informed and does not lose sight of the wider geo-political and economic processes that are reshaping higher education on a

global scale. We believe that the various ‘follow that’ approaches and qualitative research techniques outlined in the paper provide a framework for achieving this balance.

We take an interactive approach to the relationship between theory and empirical study which privileges neither. Rather the relationship itself is pivotal to a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena. However that relationship is complex. There needs to be a link between the empirical account and the theoretical explanation for the relationship to exist. It is important that a strong empirical strand accompanies the theorising in order to ensure that theory serves as a tool of analysis and remains linked to the circumstances of social life. Establishing such a link, especially between local processes which take on different forms in different countries and multi-layered global forces, is what unites the work of those who have contributed to Work Package 2.

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