

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Future trajectories for (Im)possible Imaginaries of Higher Education in India and South Africa

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Research Domain: International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

Abstract:

With each of the preceding papers of this symposium focusing on the areas of interest; this concluding paper will be utilized to discuss the overall findings and limitations of the project, and outline our recommendations and vision for future research. In this way, we hope to share what we have learnt about the study of higher education in these two contexts and about such comparative global South-South approaches to research. We also intend to utilize the talk as an opportunity to open our projects to possible collaborators and interested parties for further engagement.

Paper:

This research project considered the relation between policy-practice in HEIs, from the perspective of the politics of participation experienced by its academic staff in India and SA, with particular attention given to their markers of difference including gender, race, caste/ ethnicity, religion, ability, language, rurality etc. The overall aim was to study the interconnectedness of sustainability and the social justice transformation agenda in each context by examining the interactional dynamics in six universities. Drawing from the insider perspectives of the nature of participation for academics and leaders within HEIs, our study focused on the question of the validity of HE as an institution – that is, its fitness for purpose to drive substantive change in the interests of the most marginalized, (un)privileged and (mis)recognized.

Figure 1 maps the sources for this mixed methods project and an overview of project data generation.

Findings

In our pursuit of a global South deliberation on participation in HE, we found that common to both countries was that ‘sustainability’, as a discourse or as a concept, had not been integrated at inter/national institutional level as signifiers of value, and therefore did not inform either practitioner or intellectual interpretative frames for transformative change within higher education in that period of 2019. Certainly within India, the constitutional commitments also seemed untethered from the purpose of the public university. What emerged seemed to be a vacuum of intellectual leadership within HEIs about that massive international machine of development.

In addition, the politics of participation in both India and South Africa indicated that there were inequalities experienced in interactional dynamics, which to some extents mirrored the unequal

patterns of social exclusion in each country, particularly at leadership level. Indications were that significant change would be needed for democratic participation within institutions if they are to embody 'strong institutions of peace and justice' (SDG17), to drive the SDGs, or if they were to claim that as higher education institutions they provide the conditions for academic freedom for all their staff.

Policy formation was seen as broadly appropriate for conservative goals of demographic change within the student populations. However, policy maker cherry-picked which issues to target, leaving many un-addressed and enabling perverse incentives to be maximized when implemented, particularly for the morphing of hegemonic impositions and violences. On the whole, policy and regulation was not seen nor experienced as appropriate for academic staff nor their academic practice.

Future possibilities

We chose few institutions as 'representative' of dominant types in India, to get a range of baseline data and as historically black institutions in SA. There is value to gaining particular understandings of those institutions which model themselves as aspiring to world class status or aligning with SDGS. This would allow for drilling down into the ways that these external referents shape institutional change and serve the social justice constitutional mandates.

In our mixed methods approach for the study, the intersectional insights gleaned from the qualitative data was more effective for probing the policy-practice gaps and mis-fit than the quantitative data. We anticipate that less conventional methods may be even more generative, allowing us to perhaps map counter-narratives of higher education, to comprehend the existing alternatives to dominant hegemonic discourses and relations. Such methods may better align with our orientation towards research as emancipatory praxis. One possibility is generating counter-stories through arts-based methods. Dominant norms within HE are often visible only to those who differ from them. More insights and rich data should be generated about those with intersecting markers of difference, whether related to caste/ ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or varied ability, to gain insights into their lived experiences of HE.

The study was limited by the lack of participation of first generation, minority and marginalized academics. Therefore, in future projects we hope to increase inclusion of those from the recognised disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups; those who are the objects of affirmative action policies in 'the pipeline'; those known by human rights organisations as marginalized or at risk.

First generation academics working on gender, especially 'gender-marginal persons', are underrepresented groups who have the potential to change HE from within. As participants in, and contributors to, academic practice, they hold the potential to diversify knowledge communities; if critical mass is achieved, to contribute to democratizing social formation (through education) and knowledge formation (through research), legitimation (through the relation of those two areas of practice to engagement with communities). We hope to utilize the symposium platform to invite connections across networks in our diverse contexts, for sure purposes.

It is important to strengthen inter/national collaborations for inter/transdisciplinary research in gender studies and higher education studies through applying the knowledge and learning of already

undertaken collaboration in the present research. Documenting, analyzing narratives of resistance and collusion will contribute to building a pathway for enhancement of the structural transformation to universities inter/nationally.

References:

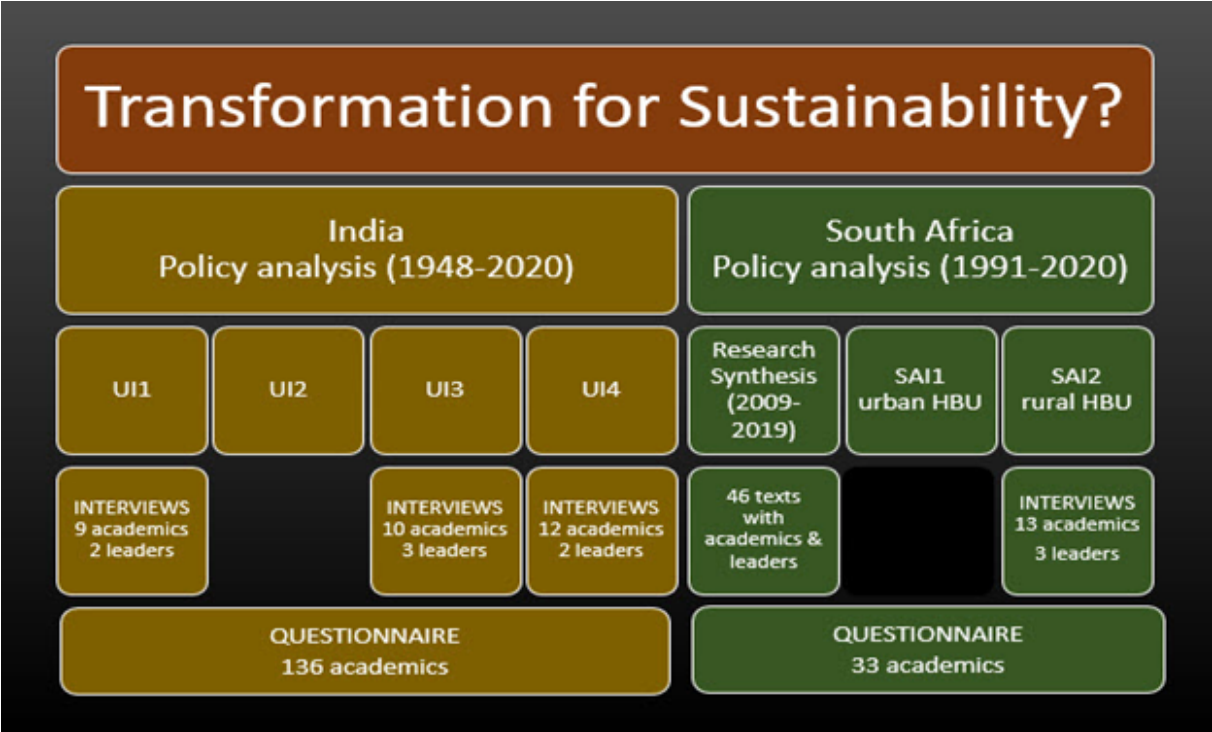


Figure 1: Overview of project data generation

Reference:

Belluigi, D. Z. & Mestre, B. A. 2021. **Authoring author-ity in transition? The ‘Counter // Narratives of Higher Education’ Project.** Video of paper for the conference *Visualising Social Changes: Seen and Unseen* of the International Visual Sociology Association Annual Conference. Available at <https://youtu.be/mnQIBiGM9Uc>