

## Translocal articulations of social justice: Student everyday activism and the re-scaling of 'reality'

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### Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

### Abstract

This paper draws on a wider comparative research project on student activism for social justice in the USA, UK and Dk. Except for the current pro-palestinian encampments, students in Denmark have largely used various forms of *everyday activism* (Mansbridge 2013) to make their universities more inclusive and just. Using the concept of *translocal articulations* (cf. Hall), the paper pays attention to the ways in which student everyday activists articulate and connect notions of *place* with considerations over wider *geo-political power inequalities* and ideas about *socio-spatial positionality*. It analyses three different cases that all revolve around questions of race, ethnicity or nationality and argues that *scaling* – through comparison, measurement, and classification – plays a central, yet ambiguous, role in students' everyday activism and the way they come to position themselves and their institutions as *ethically implicated* in the production of local and global inequalities.

### Full paper

The promotion of social justice within and beyond the university has long been a core aim of student activism across the world. During the past decade, however, a growing number of students (and staff) have put renewed focus on questions of discrimination and exclusion, and protested the marginalization of certain bodies, voices or forms of knowledge in academia. While often targeting specific practices, events, or materials at their own universities – including iconography, the curriculum, invited speakers, university traditions or the use of specific words – their critiques and actions resonate across institutional and national borders.

Focusing on Denmark, this paper explores a central aspect of student activism, namely *everyday activism* (that might or might not result in or be combined with public actions), that is, 'talk and action in everyday life that is not consciously coordinated with the actions of others but is (1) to some degree caused (inspired, encouraged) by a social movement and (2) consciously intended to change others' ideas or behaviour in directions advocated by the movement' (Mansbridge 2013, 1).

Research on activist interconnectivity across different spaces and sites often focuses on the role of networks and the networked facilitation of flows of action repertoires and frames across different sites

(cf. della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Juris and Khashnabish 2013). However, the *everyday* and less explicitly networked character of student activism for social justice in Denmark, and beyond, calls for a different understanding and conceptualisation of the ways in which processes of interconnectivity and translocalisation shape and are shaped by student activism. Accordingly, with Denmark as focal point, the paper suggests using the concept of *translocal articulations* (cf. Hall) to pay attention to the ways in which student everyday activists, as well as their critics, articulate and connect notions of place with considerations over wider geo-political power inequalities and ideas about socio-spatial positionality (cf Leitner et al. 2008).

By analysing three different cases of student everyday activism that all revolve around questions of race, ethnicity or nationality, the paper explores how *scaling* – through comparison, measurement, and classification – plays a central, yet ambiguous, role in the articulation of contexts or realities within which institutional practices are understood and assessed. Student activists and their critics (trans)localise a particular situation or practice in conflicting ways, conjuring interconnectivity, similarities or differences across geographical space. Importantly, students' *everyday* activism here often involves a certain curiosity, tentativeness and humility in enquiries and actions – and an attempt to open dialogue and further investigation. However, by articulating concerns around global inequalities, socio-spatial positionality, intentionality, or representation, students also often build upon and reiterate a (to some extent) pre-given understanding of 'structural inequality' which they work to make visible and actionable. In doing so, they responsabilise themselves and their institutions. Furthermore, they actively engage with core dilemmas intrinsic to the promotion of social justice at the university, including the balancing of essentializing or universalizing readings of inequality, linked to geographical measures and notions of socio-spatial positionality, against explorative engagement, enquiries into unique, local(ised) differences and future paths.

As the public debate in Denmark (and elsewhere) around students' activism is increasingly polarised, a focus on the processes and practices through which social justice is articulated and (trans)localised may potentially serve as a gateway to more nuanced collective deliberations, exploring dilemmas and paradoxes rather than reiterating pre-given polarised positions around freedom (of speech) and social justice.

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