

## Space, time and networks: Key research collaboration and design challenges for critical comparative higher education research (0139)

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### Abstract

A set of key challenges facing higher education researchers considering international comparative research is illuminated by the highly iterative relationship between collaboration, design and execution (REVIEWER NOTE: Identifying reference removed. Here and after 'IRR'; Torres-Olave et al. *forthcoming*). In the context of this Symposium, the authors advance three key focal points highly relevant to our transnational research team as we operationalize our scholarly agenda, in terms of the substantive themes presented in our Symposium. Our points of focus concern: firstly, scholarly collaboration practices; secondly, international research team dynamics and thirdly, recent developments and methodological in comparative research, in terms of process and design (IRR; IRR). The outcome of this paper features a research design and set of related focal outcomes well suited for the challenges articulated within our symposium, in general and critical comparative research on higher education in particular.

**Keywords:** Comparative research; Higher education; Research design and methodology - mixed-methods; Academic practices; Research team dynamics and collaboration

### Proposal Outline

#### Background

Transnational patterns of mobilities, within and across societies, have emerged simultaneously with 40 years of sustained focus on 'the internationalization of higher education' (de Wit 2002; Teichler 2004; Scott 1998). What is easy to miss, though, is that the *established* short-term, conventional and circumscribed mobility valorized in (higher) education *within* systems and institutions bears little resemblance to *emergent* mobilities, broadly speaking (REVIEWER NOTE: Identifying reference removed. Here and after 'IRR'; Tremblay 2004), playing out across generations, entire regions, shaping global socioeconomic realities (Marginson, Murphy & Peters 2009; Standing 2011; Urry 2007). Even easier to miss is a lack of critique focused on educations' persistent inability to understand and impact global social mobility challenges under the banners of access or internationalization. Understanding *what has gone missing* in the uncritical, widespread shift from liberal to neoliberal ideology (Pashby 2014); best explained by international agenda-setting driving the 'modernisation' of higher education, is comparatively obscured in a set of key challenges that are far easier to explain, than impact. This is because of the tension between transnational social dynamics linked to neoliberalism (Cantwell & Kauppinen 2014; Kallio 2009; Marginson 2006; Pusser et al. 2012; Rhoades & Slaughter 2004; Slaughter & Cantwell 2013) and the way in which global challenges manifest amidst misrecognized remnants of liberal ideals, most often advanced as normative, prescriptive hopes resting on assumptions that ceased to exist in country after country in trends that were spotted in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Currie & Newson 1998; Scott 1998). Liberal assumptions and traditions are further obscured by methodological nationalism(s) which render invisible the fact that issues systematically avoided in policy 'debate' are often far more interesting than what those engaged (Beach & Lunneblad 2013; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2012; Lavanchy 2013; IRR; Shahjahan & Kezar 2013). Absent, for example is a critical focus on the stagnant framing of equity, grounded in the potential of inclusion once linked to historical massification trends (Trow 1974), access debates and social mobility that

played out over generations in several countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hoffman et al. *forthcoming* ; Torres-Olave 2012). In its place, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find circumscribed assumptions of mobility routinely conflated, elided and otherwise confused with short-term geographical or 'international' mobility measured in weeks or months, mirroring the short-term thinking endemic to neoliberal managerialism, across several occupational sectors (Standing 2011). Ironically, these emergent trends fuel scholarly precariousness within the single global institution capable of explaining, engaging and impacting the most urgent social challenges across the globe: higher education. These conditions pose several types of significant challenges for scholars in the social sciences and humanities seeking to better understand, explain, engage and impact persistent social challenges.

### **Specific Goal, Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this paper is to articulate and operationalise an approach, broadly speaking, to the challenges spotlighted by the papers in our Symposium. Our goal is present collaboration practices and a comparative research design that allows our team to substantively and theoretically problematize the ways in which transnational academic capitalism (Cantwell & Kauppinen 2014; Kauppinen 2012; Slaughter & Cantwell 2012) is *misrecognized* (Bourdieu 1988) within supra-national, national, institutional and local settings in higher education (Shahjahan & Kezar 2012). In order to accomplish this, we focus on three focal points that underpin the scholarly collaboration and operationalization of a comparative design, building on our recent experiences, studies and incorporating a recent methodological advances relating to time, critical social network analysis and spatial thinking.

- 1) We firstly describe and explain the nature of emergent autonomous scholarly collaboration (Räsänen 2012; IRR) and the way in which our research team has arrived at this point. The goal of presenting this focus on medium and long-term collaboration is to allow a discussion of the practices that promote collegial scholarly efforts aimed at new knowledge in terms of comparative findings.
- 2) We secondly spotlight key findings from recent studies on which we base our approach and intend to build on (IRR; IRR; IRR; Torres-Olave et al. *forthcoming*), with the purpose of refining the modes of inquiry used by our transnational research team.
- 3) Thirdly, based on objectives 1 and 2, we advance specific design elements we believe are crucial in the operationalization of the scholarly goals of our transnational research team. These design elements include both the recent advances made by the authors (Torres-Olave et al. *forthcoming*; IRR) and their colleagues in recent studies and design elements that are by and large untested in international comparative work on higher education (IRR; IRR)

### **Focal Outcomes**

The central focal outcome of our paper is an adaptation of a mixed-methods matrix design recently used by the authors in a high-risk/high-gain international comparative study (IRR). The key difference of the design we present and previous designs is that our new collaboration is aimed squarely at a critical, comparatively viable contrast designed to illuminate the complex relationships between established, persistent patterns of social stratification education has failed to address for decades (Beck 1992; Castellanos & Jones et al. 2003; Howard-Hamilton et al. 2009; IRR) and misrecognized emergent patterns within higher education (Bowden & Doughney 2010; Cantwell & Lee 2010; IRR; Torres-Olave 2013). The design we present is designed for traction, using our participatory (Kemmis 2006; Räsänen 2012) scholarly collaboration and agenda to move forward in an area 'invisible' within nations and regions, but which we believe will be far more clear across nations and regions.

In addition, we will present scholarly outcomes related to our comparative design, yet which are distinct. These focal outcomes, together with our comparative design, comprise the elements we have identified to date relevant to our scholarly interests and we would welcome the opportunity to present these ideas to colleagues for the critique needed to move forward.

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IRR2

IRR1

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