

TRACK 30

ENGLISH VERSION

Universal encounters: coproduction of messy realities in semi-peripheral science and technology systems

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In her work from 2005, Lowenhaupt Tsing writes about friction - encounter between local and global in which new messy reality is produced, depending not only on culture but also on different actors and their negotiation related to so-called universals. Universals are universal aspirations, that is, 'Capitalism, science and politics all depend on global connections. Each spreads through aspirations to fulfil universal dreams and schemes'. Those are for example 'prosperity', 'human rights', 'freedom', 'environmentalism' but also 'love'. However, a specific valence for the universal is being produced is that the universal is what we cannot not want, even if it so often excludes us. That is, as Gayatri Spivak says, the universals offer us a chance to participate in the global stream of humanity. We can't turn universals down, whether we place ourselves inside or outside West, we are stuck with universals created in cultural dialogue. However, universal claims do not make everything everywhere the same, Lowenhaupt Tsing reminds us, global connection with local produces new reality, reality of universal co-produced in friction. Therefore frictions are 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference ... As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power'. Western academic systems are generators of many (capitalist) universals, such as 'research/teaching excellence', 'research/teaching quality', 'impact factor', 'innovation system', 'internationalization', 'academic ranking system', 'public understanding of science', 'technology transfer' etc. Those universals are often imposed upon academic systems on so-called semi-periphery, e.g. post-socialist countries, which are an interesting of co-production of universals because universal claims related to capitalism and progressive norms and values are introduced and are in friction with the post-socialist environment, social institutions in transition, conservative but also progressive values and norms. This friction with complex environment, and many opposing actors, produces messy outcomes. Its outcomes are often affecting the capacity of science to address social vulnerabilities and societal challenges. Actors involved are not just social institutions but also scientific fields and researchers themselves. In this session, we are interested in proposals related to the introduction of 'S&T universals' on micro or macro level of S&T systems, and their outcomes. Contributions can be proposed as case studies, theoretical discussions, or research data analyses of any form, and related to the semi-peripheral countries, although not exclusively, descriptions of messy border realities related to other (e.g. core) countries are also welcome.