

University struggles. Intellectual challenges of and strategies for new beginnings

Workshop

Date: October 4-5, 2022

Venue: Prinsen hotel, Trondheim.

Background and purpose

Universities are vital institutions in the development of modern societies. This is due to their role as nexuses in the making, assessing and circulation of knowledge. Historically, this has above all been performed through the interaction between research and teaching but increasingly, universities engage broadly with the general public as well as industry, public sector and social movements. Expectations are high and growing with respect to universities' ability to provide public goods, not only highly competent people but also new knowledge, synthesised knowledge, innovations, and input to policymaking and public reflexivity. Such expectations have driven the substantial growth in the number of students and the public investments in research.

The growing expectations have also fuelled a comprehensive set of governmental reforms that has transformed the universities and spurred wide-ranging institutional changes, largely in response to neo-liberal ideologies. The transformations and their effects have varied, depending on national contexts and local responses. We may describe the situation as a set of multi-sited and multi-actor university struggles regarding the meaning of universities, how they should be organised, and How teaching, research and outreach should be practiced. What is at stake are academic freedom and the possibilities of exercising good academic citizenship, but also how universities may contribute to solving the grand challenges that societies face today. Thus, university struggles involve faculty and students' critique of and occasional protests against transformations such as budget cuts, increased corporatisation, growing bureaucratisation, and increased precarious employment. Moreover, universities suffer from gender imbalances and other diversity deficiencies, increased work pressure, sexual and other forms of harassment, hyper competition, etc.

Most often, university struggles are described as caused by external developments in policymaking and funding. However, the internal dynamics related to the conduct of collegial relations, the epistemic politics that limit or even may pervert academic debate, disciplinary boundary work, and the exercise of epistemic authority deserve more attention. Both external and internal issues are discussed in the book *Questing Excellence in Academia: A Tale of Two Universities* (Knut H. Sørensen and Sharon Traweek, Routledge 2022, open access from <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429290633>), which forms the backdrop of the workshop. An important feature of the book is the effort to juxtapose university studies and science studies.

The intention of the workshop is to further the analysis offered by *Questing Excellence*, with an emphasis on what universities should be, the varying strategic options for reform, and how to fight for appropriate changes. This means that this workshop presumes that university struggles need to acknowledge diversifying institutional dynamics and the situatedness of change practices.

Programme

Tuesday, October 4th

- 1130 Lunch
- 1230 Welcome and introduction to the workshop

Science studies and the study of universities

- 1245 Sharon Traweek, UCLA: "What does studying universities teach STS?"
Knut H. Sørensen, NTNU: "Universities as nexuses of science-society relations".
Comments by Wiebe Bijker, Maastricht University and Robin Williams, University of Edinburgh.
- 1415 Coffee

Academic struggles

- 1430 Ulla Eriksson-Zetterqvist, University of Gothenburg: "Collegial organising revisited".
- 1520 Helena Pettersson, Umeå University: "Internationalization, career struggles and private life among early career researchers in Sweden. A cultural analysis of cases from the sciences, medicine and arts & humanities".
- 1600 Tereza Østbø Kuldova, Oslo Metropolitan University: "University Governance and the Cynical Academic: A Few Criminological Reflections on Compliance, Defiance and Subjectification".
- 1640 Kyriaki Papageorgiou, NTNU: "The University in the New Atlantis 6.0".
- 1700 End

- 1900 Dinner

Wednesday, October 5th

Gender issues of universities

- 0900 Maria do Mar Pereira, University of Warwick: "Struggling for Excellence: Feminist Dilemmas in Neoliberal Universities".
- 0940 Siri Øyslebø Sørensen, NTNU: "Performative perceptions - breaking gendered patterns through knowledge creation".
- 1000 Coffee
- 1015 Lucy Pius Kyauke, NTNU: "Spaces of gendered dynamics of power and the underlying patterns of social structure in academia".
- 1035 Julie Flikke, NTNU: "Critical University Studies on Norwegian academia – the case of NTNU".
- 1055 Sofia Moretti, NTNU: "Contemporary fairy tales: Narrating women academics through metaphors".
- 1115 Ivana Suboticki, NTNU: Importance of local leadership in improving gender balance in higher education".
- 1135 Lunch

History of science perspectives on universities

- 1230 Kari Tove Elvebakken, University of Bergen: "Imagining innovation. Re-structuring cities, industry and universities".
- 1310 Terje Finstad, NTNU: "Oil affairs. The university in an oil economy".
- 1330 Coffee

Constraints in reshaping university research

- 1345 Tor Halvorsen, University of Bergen: “The Sustainable Development Goals, knowledge production and the global struggle over values”.
- 1425 John Parker, University of Oslo: “Synthesis Centers as Third Places: Collaboration Outside of the University”.
- 1505 Heidrun Åm, NTNU: “RRI as ambiguous tool to reform university research”.
- 1525 Gisle Solbu, NTNU: “Making professors into innovators. Imagining change through mediating actors”.
- 15.45 Final discussion and goodbye.
- 1600 End