

CGHE Annual Conference
24-25 May 2022: Session details



PANEL – Broadening the epistemic agenda: equity and diversity in global circuits of knowledge

24 May 2022, 4.30-5.30pm (UK)

Chair: Alis Oancea

Speakers: Crain Soudien, Xin Xu, Raewyn Connell, Fernanda Beigel

Drawing on philosophical, sociological, political and educational critiques of the patterns of inequity that characterise global conditions and practices for generating, defining, circulating and recognising research knowledge, the four panellists will seek to articulate principles and priorities for broadening the epistemic agenda for higher education research. First, the panel will explore possibilities for cultivating research that is attentive to communities and/or that may disrupt hegemonic practices and structural barriers to epistemically just knowledge creation and sharing. It will then reflect on the role of open networks and of collaborations across visible and invisible borders in sustaining diverse knowledge ecosystems. To do so would require enacting institutional change that supports epistemic shifts towards valuing indigenous and local knowledges, as well as changing incentive structures towards a research agenda that advances an equitable and socially relevant project of Southern open science.

Crain Soudien will explore the conditions for developing what Catherine Odora Hoppers describes as ‘sustainable cross-border’ praxes in the university. The ‘border’ she refers to is that which divides what we know as ‘Western’ forms of knowledge from those which can be described as indigenous knowledge. Prompting her argument is the difficulty of sustaining initiatives which seek to bring together mainstream Western science practices and discourses and other knowledge traditions. Soudien will reference examples of such attempts in the talk and describe the challenges in building and sustaining them. He suggests, drawing from Hoppers, that to build and sustain requires moving away from ‘supply side’ science to science and knowledge practices which are attentive to what communities need. Supply side science subsists in knowledge economies of presumption. ‘Experts’ know what is important for society. Demand side practices seek to work with the issues and problems raised in and by communities. They call for the exploration of modes of enquiry which work with the best of what we know, irrespective of where it comes from. Soudien will draw on Bonnie Honig’s idea of ‘holding cultures’ and Lovisa Bergdahl and Elisabet Langmann’s suggestion of how they might work to explore possibilities for keeping holding cultures alive while holding on to their disruptive potential.

Xin Xu notes that in global research epistemic diversity co-exists with epistemic inequity and injustice. On the one hand, the global knowledge pool can be seen as an open and shared space with diversified languages, cultures, agents, agendas, theories, and paradigms. It consists of knowledge agents from various disciplinary areas, cultural contexts, and personal backgrounds. All can form and foster open networks and collaborations beyond visible and invisible borders. On the other hand, however, the global research system includes not only

knowledge and agents, but also power. Here, power acts not just as a coercive force, but through knowledge in capillary and hegemonic forms – it circulates throughout the research space and defines what counts as legitimate knowledge. Hegemonic power creates an inclusion/exclusion divide in the global knowledge pool, where only certain knowledge is codified to be seen, used, trusted, and valued. In her comments, Xu aims to unpack such a paradoxical situation, drawing on empirical evidence and scholarly discourses. She will consider various manifestations of epistemic hegemony and inequity in global research, including the misuse and limitation of certain bibliometric databases, and discuss ways to move beyond these and towards alternative futures of global research.

Raewyn Connell will focus on imperial knowledge and its others. The basis of the mainstream curriculum in higher education, worldwide, is the research-based knowledge formation, materialized in institutions and workforce. This knowledge formation is not simply ‘Western’, rather it was formed in empire and is now supported by a global economy of knowledge with a geopolitical division of labour. Empire laid the foundation for the exclusion of indigenous knowledges, alternative universalisms, local knowledges, and the southern theory arising from struggles in colonial societies. Many attempts have been made to include these knowledges in higher education, from the 18th century on. But in contemporary conditions higher education has been made more resistant: through corporate management, commodification, league tables and political controls. Epistemic change requires institutional change. To convince people that this is possible it is important to recover the ‘other history’ of universities and research – from al-Azhar to Visva-Bharati and RUIICAY, labour colleges to free universities, natural history to popular sciences.

Fernanda Beigel will discuss the circulation of knowledge beyond the mainstream landscape of science publication, starting with a commentary on the global belief in the robustness of highly developed indexing services such as Scopus or Web of Science (Clarivate) to observe world science and to inform research assessment procedures that rely largely on the impact factor and other bibliometric indicators. These indicators of impact are supposed to represent a universal standard, that of the large mainstream journals, but have produced several distortions and have had noxious effects in boosting the social relevance of science. The hyper-centrality of English in these databases has been extensively criticized because losing multilingualism means diminishing scientific interculturality and local research agendas. However, seen from the perspective of the periphery, English is indeed a dominant reality, but it is not the unique reality, because there are Southern circuits with diverse means for the circulation of knowledge in other languages, formats and journals. A comparative study on the global and regional data-sources existing in Latin America will show this diversity in terms of language, but also the critical tension existing between a commercial publishing industry and the university managed journals that can be accessed in Diamond route. To broaden the scientific landscape is relevant to change incentives for a socially relevant research agenda and advance in an equitable project of Southern open science.

Crain Soudien is the Chief Executive Officer of the Human Sciences Research Council. He is formerly a Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town. He is a joint professor in Education and African Studies. He has published over 180 articles, reviews, reports, and book chapters in the areas of social difference, culture, education policy, comparative education,

educational change, public history and popular culture. He was educated at the University of Cape Town, South Africa and holds a PhD from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Xin Xu is Research Fellow at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, Junior Research Fellow at Kellogg College, and CGHE Research Fellow on Project 3, 'The role of research in higher education and research assessment'.

*Raewyn Connell is Professor Emerita, University of Sydney, and Life Member of the National Tertiary Education Union. She has taught in several countries and is a widely-cited sociological researcher. She is the current recipient of the International Sociological Association's quadrennial Award for Excellence in Research and Practice. Her books include *Ruling Class Ruling Culture, Making the Difference, Gender & Power, Masculinities, and Southern Theory*. Her most recent books are *The Good University* and the co-authored *Knowledge & Global Power*. Her work has been translated into twenty-four languages. Raewyn has been active in the labour movement, and in work for gender equality and for peace. Details at www.raewynconnell.net and Twitter @raewynconnell.*

Fernanda Beigel is a Sociologist and PhD in Political and Social Sciences (2001) by the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo (Mendoza-Argentina). She pursued her postdoctoral studies at the Centre de Sociologie Européenne (EHESS, Paris). Chair of the Advisory Committee for Open Science at UNESCO during 2020 and 2021. Principal Researcher at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET, Argentina), Head Professor at the National University of Cuyo (UNCuyo) and director of the Research Center on the International Circulation of Knowledge. She is the coordinator of the National Committee for Open Science at MINCYT Argentina and advisor of the CLACSO Initiative FOLEC: the Latin American Forum on Research Evaluation. Most relevant scientific awards: Bernardo Houssay Prize (2003), CLACSO Essay Award (2004), Honour Mention to Scientific Value-Argentine National Senate (2017).