

STUDENT POLITICAL AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FOCUS ON THE REPRESENTATION SIDE OF STUDENT POLITICS

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- 1. Theory of student agency in higher education -> focus on student political agency
- 2. Theory of student impact on higher education
- 3. Key concepts in the study of student representation
- 4. SIHEG project

5. Empirical findings on student representation in global comparative perspective

1. THEORY OF STUDENT AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION



CONCEPT OF STUDENT AGENCY IN POLICY

The concept of student agency, as understood in the context of the OECD Learning Compass 2030, is rooted in the principle that students have the ability and the will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. Student agency is thus defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others.



Conceptual learning framework

STUDENT AGENCY
FOR 2030

RESEARCH ON STUDENT AGENCY

- Student agency as a concept *is poorly understood, under-theorized and empirically under-researched* (Stenalt & Lassesen 2021; Marín, de Benito & Darder 2020; Jääskelä et al 2020).
 - Literature on "college effects on students" (Sociology of Higher Education) —> student outcomes as a function of HE structures and processes and student behavior (engagement) in this environment
 - Literature on student capabilities, such as intentionality, forethought and self direction, reflexivity and self-regulation, self-awareness and self-authorship, self-efficacy, self-determination, etc.

Emerging research

"Student Agency and Self-Formation in Higher Education" (Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education), edited by Yusuf Ikbal Oldac (Lingnan University), Soyoung Lee (Oxford University), Lili Yang (University of Hong Kong)

"Student Agency in European University Alliances" (2023-2026) by M. Klemenčič (Harvard University/University of Ljubljana), funded by Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS)

CONCEPTUALIZING STUDENT AGENCY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Student agency refers to students' capabilities to navigate and influence learning and education pathways and environments
 - Multidimensional: different "valuable" capabilities
 - *Inherently dynamic*: double "conversion" of agentic orientations (internal responses, such as motivation) in interplay with structures into "valuable capabilities", and conversion of these into desired outcomes.
 - Socio-structurally and relationally conditioned: by agentic opportunities and resources emerging from HE structures and processes
 - Depending on *the purpose*: differentiate between self-formation agency (toward self-formation) and **student political agency** (towards changes in HE environments, i.e., institutional changes or towards changes in society, i.e., societal changes)

2.THEORY OF STUDENT IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION



IN CONVERSATION WITH LITERATURE

- Politics of higher education
 - Student politics
- Governance and management of higher education
 - Student representation
 - Student governance
 - Student voice; students-as-partners
- College effects on students (->corrected for student agency and student impact)
 - Student engagement
 - Civic/citizenship (higher) education

STUDENT EFFECTS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

- A theory of student impact on HE seeks to explain the overarching mechanisms of (potential for) students' effects on HE through student political agency
- Students enact political agency to **transform situational constraints and/or create opportunities** for (self-formation or further political) agency achievement within a HE
 institution or for societal wellbeing (societal formation) as a precondition for agency
 achievement in other areas of functioning (such as in HE)

STUDENT IMPACT MODEL - 5 PROPOSITIONS

- 1. HE institutions do not only have effects on students but *students directly and purposefully co-shape* social structures, social life, and decisions of HE institutions and withing HE systems more broadly.
- 2. The "high student impact roles", i.e., roles with high potential for students to have effects on HE exist in student representation, voluntary service in the institutional bodies, leadership roles in student groups, on-campus jobs, and through student activism.
- 3. Students influence HE also *indirectly*: through expressions of individual and collective (consumer) preferences and through patterns of individual and collective behavior.
- 4. Student impact *occurs along a continuum*: different roles afford different (potential) degrees for impact, and the same role affords different (potential) degrees for impact at different times.
- 5. Degree of student impact *depends on student political agency* conditioned by agentic orientations and agentic opportunities through student engagement within HE environments.

3. KEY CONCEPTS IN THE STUDY OF STUDENT REPRESENTATION



DEFINING KEY TERMS

- **Student Politics**: students' political activities associated with the organizing of the student body and its influence on HE institutions, HE systems and wider society.
 - the set of organizational structures, action repertoires, and master frames used by students to promote their claim (della Porta et al 2020)
 - representation and activism, political agency through student orgs, campus jobs
- Representation = claim machining through formal representational structures and by (elected student representatives from) formal student representative associations
- Activism = noninstitutionalized forms of claim making (contentious politics); any political activities towards social change

KEY CONCEPTS

- Student representation:
 - two conditions for student representation: 1) existence of representative student association(s); and 2) formalized channels for representation in HE governance
 - within multilevel governance of HE (global, global regional, national/state, institutional/sub-units
 - varies across historical, cultural and socio-political characteristics of HE
 - dynamic ("new policies create new politics", Schattschneider 1935)
- Student representative associations: more "political" or more "service-oriented"
 - Organizational capacities; logic of membership and logic of influence
 - Autonomy and legitimacy of representative student associations
- "Shared governance" in HE: more participatory democratic or more (NPM) corporate arrangements
 - effects of neoliberal reforms on student representation in HE governance
 - Student-society relations

NATIONAL SYSTEMS OF STUDENT REPRESENTATION AND INTEREST INTERMEDIATION

- Neo-corporatist, corporatist, pluralist, statist
- Formalized (and institutionalized), informal
- National student associations: more social-movement like, more interest-group like, hybrid
 - Relationship to political parties

4.SIHEG PROJECT



STUDENT IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION: GLOBAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE (2021-2023)

- An authentic global empirical account of practices on student representation, plus revised and new conceptual frameworks to study student representation in a global comparative perspective
 - 36 chapters: conceptual, 2 regional overviews, 5 on global/regional representation, 24 countries; 285,000 words
- To give voice to highly diverse group of student leaders contributing authentic accounts on student representation
 - In partnership with the Global Student Forum
 - 80+ student leaders trained
 - Out of 77 contributors, 60 student leaders trained through SIHEG project (+16 established or previously published scholars)

































































5.EMPIRICAL
FINDINGS ON STUDENT
REPRESENTATION IN
GLOBAL COMPARATIVE
PERSPECTIVE

YOUR INPUT APPRECIATED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

- Narratives evoked by student representatives on student representation, metaphors for student representatives
- Content analysis of key political issues
- Mapping national systems of student representation
- Mapping involvement in university governance
- Mapping national systems of student intermediation (+ relationships with political parties, trade unions, youth councils)
- Mapping national student associations
- Diversity markers in student representation

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES' NARRATIVES ON STUDENT REPRESENTATION

- Africa: student role in decolonization/democratization movements, holding governments accountable, access to quality higher education
- Europe: students as partners in higher education and full members of academic communities
 - Eastern Europe: right to student representation stipulated in HE acts after democratization
- Latin America: students for Latin American solidarity, fight against neoliberal policies, anti-American imperialism
- South Asia (India, Pakistan): political potency of students and political party politics mixed with student politics
- South-East Asia: student representation within maintaining harmony between self and collective sphere;
 filial piety
- Gulf States (Oman): giving students voice (to deter protests) but no political power
- China: dual system of student representation; one through Communist Party
- US: part of student affairs providing resources to student groups and student services, activism is desired

BY A WAY OF CONCLUSION

- Student representation is a common feature across HE systems and institutions around the world
 - Variety in authority of student representatives in HE governance
 - Variety in organizational types and resources of representative student associations
- State of student representation is reflection of the democratic viability of political regimes and regime transformations
 - Rights/freedoms for participation and contestation (protection of student representatives/activists' freedoms and prevention of student representatives/activists' rights violations)
 - Crucial difference between political participation rather executive appointments
- Changes in student representation/politics is reflection of changing HE politics instigated through changes in HE policies
 - "new policies create new politics" (Schattschneider 1935)

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