



Hegemony in institutional transformation

Theses for discussion
from a work in
progress

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Outline

- Background and introduction to the fellowship
- Previous work on institutional transformation towards inter-and transdisciplinarity
- Main thesis
- An excursion: Antonio Gramsci and the concept of hegemony
- Preliminary theses from a work in progress for discussion

Background

- Topic of the fellowship of the TdAcademy : Transformation of universities towards dynamic and relational inter- and transdisciplinary institutions
- Overall objectives:
 - to understand how universities develop and implement strategies, integrated practices, and organizational models that enable inter- and transdisciplinary research and teaching
 - to develop a perspective that accounts for the broader societal, i.e. political-historical, economic and socio-cultural context conditions that enable or hinder such transformations
- Fellow group: Ass. Prof. Dr. Dena Fam, Dr. Livia Fritz, apl. Prof. Dr. Ulli Vilsmaier, Prof. Dr. Juliana Mercon (associated to the fellow group)

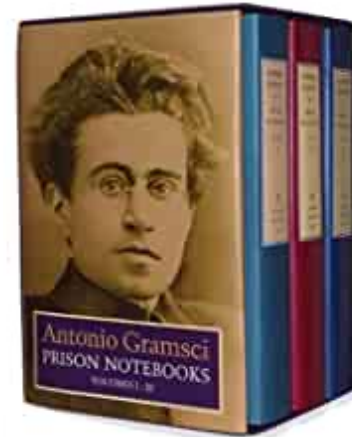


Background

- Empirical research: institutions in diverse settings as case studies for university transformation



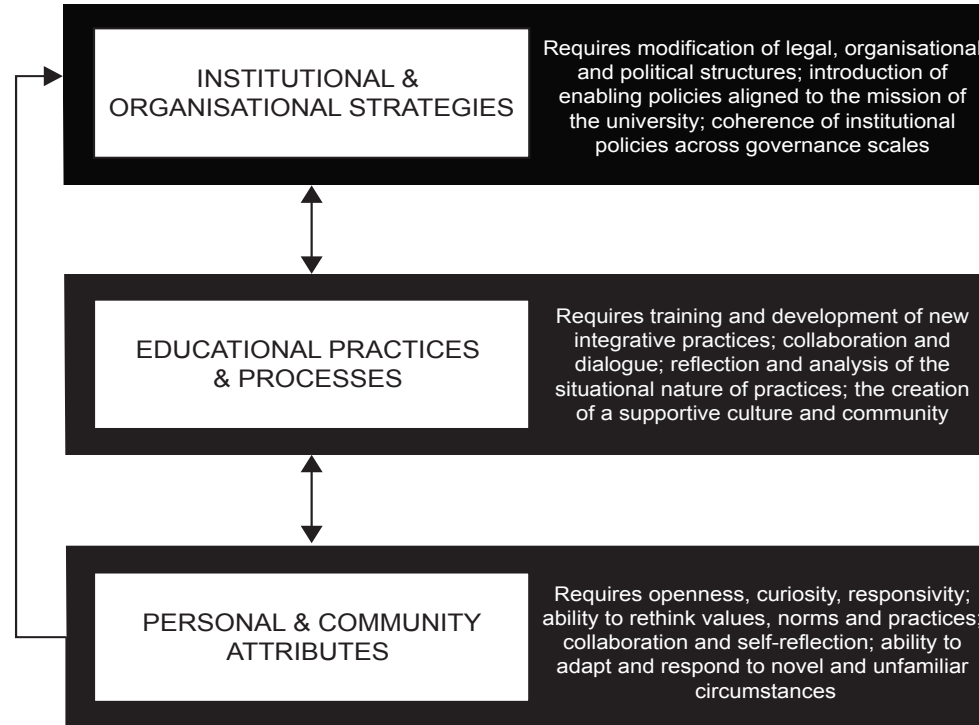
- Conceptual explorations of the notion of hegemony to widen our perspective on institutional transformation



Perspectives on university transformation towards inter- and transdisciplinarity

- Narratives about experiences with university transformation and analysis of organizational units that promote, strengthen, support, (and implement) inter- and transdisciplinarity at universities
- Provide orientation/guidance to promote, strengthen, support and implement inter- and transdisciplinarity at universities for diverse actors
- A whole-institution approach with emphasis on specific features of inter- and transdisciplinarity:
 - *Relational* and *dynamic* institutional configurations (Fam et al. 2018)
 - *Responsive* and *constitutive* character of (inter- and) transdisciplinarity (Vilsmaier & Fam, forthcoming; Vilsmaier 2011)
 - *Additive* and *entangled* conceptualizations of transdisciplinarity (Vilsmaier 2021; Vienni & Vilsmaier 2021)

A perspective on institutional transformation



Barriers in university transformation

“

Undergirding the strict disciplinary organization of knowledge is a social organization hidebound by behavioral norms of astonishing orthodoxy [...] Rather than exploring new paradigms for inquiry, academic culture too often restricts its focus to existing models of academic organization.

(Crow 2011, p.52)

”

Widening the scope

Main Thesis:

There is a need to broaden the perspective on transformation processes of universities towards inter-and transdisciplinarity in order to better account for their entanglement with wider value systems and historical-political, economic and cultural contexts. Antonio Gramsci's work, in particular his concept of hegemony, is promising for doing so due to its analytical and political orientation.



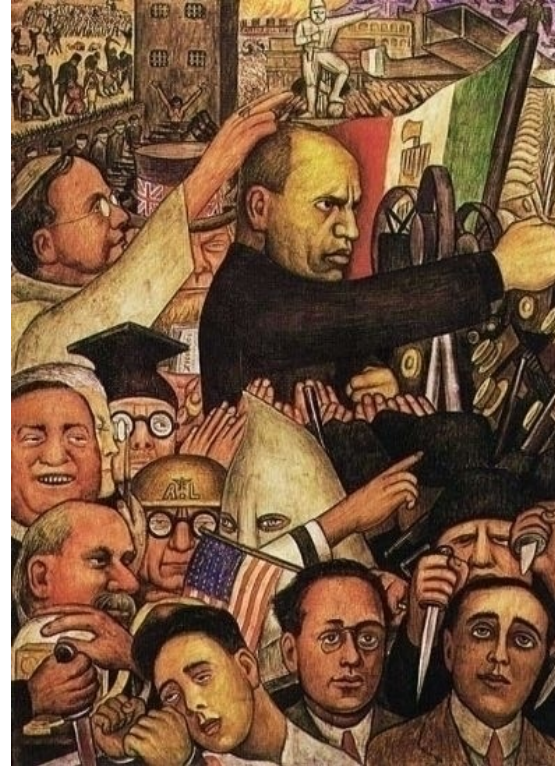
@International Gramsci Society

Antonio Gramsci

- Born 1891 in Sardinia – died 1937 in Rome
- Leading Italian Marxist, activist and political theorist
- Founder and one-time leader of the Communist Party of Italy
- Founder and writer of «The New Order: A Weekly Review of Socialist Culture»
- Italian delegate to the Communist International in Moscow

Source: Hoare and Sperber 2016

Rise of fascism

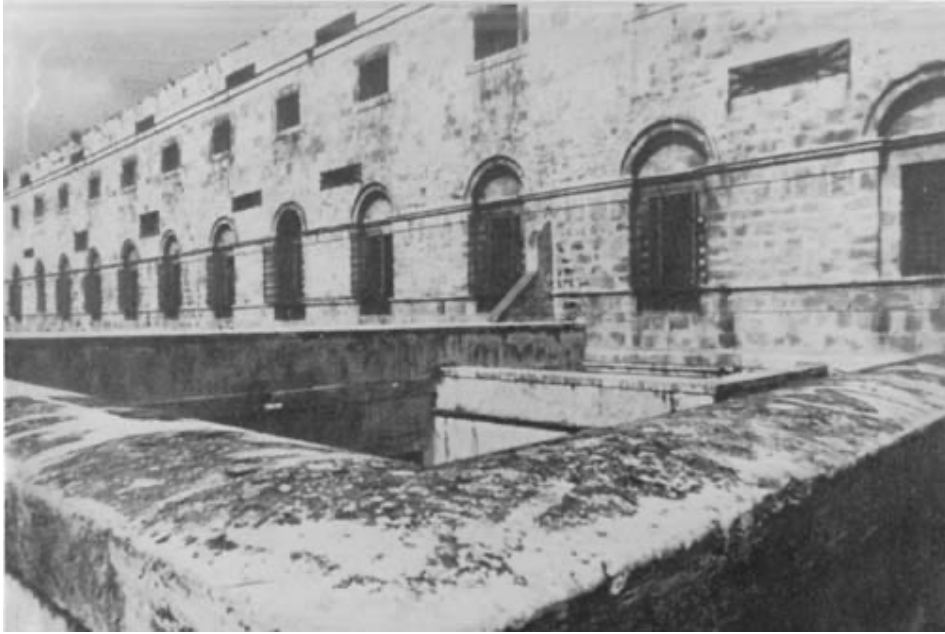


Diego Rivera,
Mussolini

Benito Mussolini, depicted in Time, July 20,
1936, Vol. XXVIII No. 3, Cover Page

Prison Notebooks

@International Gramsci Society



Prison at Turi di Bari, 1928

“

*For twenty years
we must stop this
brain from
functioning.*

*(1928, official prosecutor to
the judge, quoted in Hoare
and Smith 1999)*

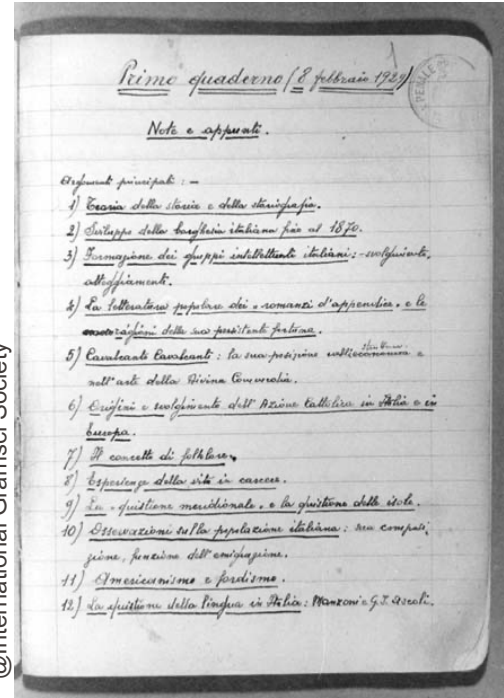
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Prison Notebooks

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Prison at Turi di Bari, 1928



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First Notebook, 1929

What can we learn from Gramsci's work? How can it inform our perspective on institutional transformation?



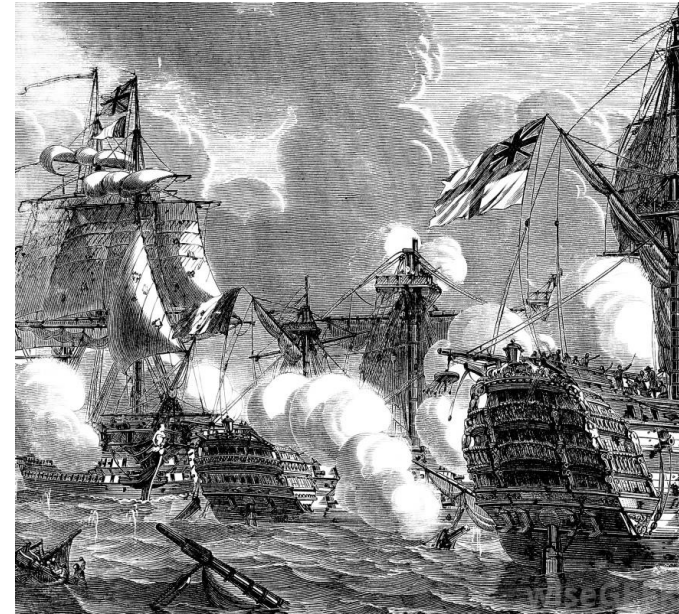
Schoolboys looking at a mural of Antonio Gramsci. Mondadori Portfolio, via Getty Images

Hegemony

Why do the powerless consent to be dominated by those in positions of power?

(Cultural) Hegemony

- *hegemonia* (verb: *hegeisthai*): preponderant influence or authority over others; (verbally:) to lead; (state) control (Merriam-Webster)
- In International Relations “hegemony” still used in a sense close to the term’s meaning in antiquity (Hoare and Sperber 2016)
- End of 19th / beginning of 20th century: Marxist Russian revolutionaries used the term “hegemony” to denote a *class alliance* under the leadership of the proletariat (Hoare and Sperber 2016)



19th century maritime hegemony by the British Empire (@ Erica Guilane-Nachez)

(Cultural) Hegemony

- Gramsci substantially redefines and broadens the notion of hegemony
- Combination and dynamic interaction of **consent and coercion** is the recurrent characteristic in his use of the term
- Hegemonic culture propagates its own values and norms so that they become the “common sense” values
- Maintained through mundane activities related to work, school, family, etc. that secure consent
- Ideology as the privileged terrain and battleground over whose ideas and worldviews become widely accepted and go unquestioned
- (“Traditional”) intellectuals as manufacturers of consent, as “deputies” of dominant group



@Oltre la Linea

Metaphor of centaur
in Machiavelli's “Il
Principe”

(Cultural) Hegemony

“ If the ruling class has lost its consensus, i.e. is no longer “leading” but only “dominant”, exercising coercive force alone, this means precisely that the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe previously, etc. **The crisis [of authority] consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.**

(Gramsci 1930, in Hoare and Smith 1999, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, p. 276.) ”

(Cultural) Hegemony ...

& Counter-Hegemony

- Transformation occurs not through violent revolution but through the rise of “counter-hegemonies” — alternative cultures developed by disenfranchised groups
- To establish counter-hegemony it is necessary to win over the power of defining norms and ideologies in civil society (“war of position”) (Merquior 1986; McLellan 1979)

(Cultural) Hegemony ...

& Counter-Hegemony

“

Hegemonic relations are necessarily educational relations... (Gramsci, quoted in Mayo 1999, p. 40, own translation)

”

“

All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: not all men have in society the function of intellectuals [...] [However] one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist.

(Gramsci, in Hoare and Smith 1999, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, p. 140)

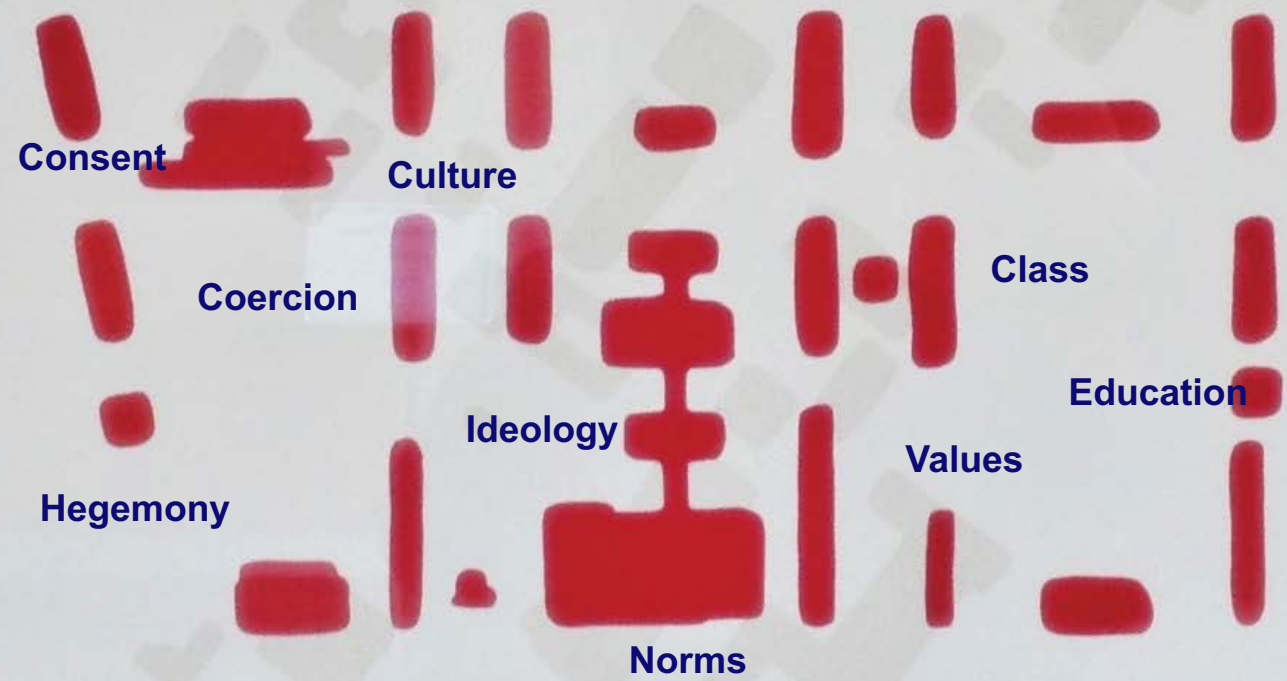
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The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence ... but in active participation in practical life, as a constructor, organiser, “permanent persuader” and not just a simple orator.

(Gramsci, in Hoare and Smith 1999, *Selections from the prison notebooks*, p. 141-2)

”



Theses for discussion

1. Applying the concept of hegemony enables visibility of invisible barriers playing out in university transformation towards inter-and transdisciplinarity, making them utterable and tangible.
2. Disciplinary cultures are a key dimension of hegemony encountered in university transformations.
3. Coercive and consensual mechanisms of hegemony manifest in manifold ways in everyday research and teaching practices, hindering the establishment of new social and epistemic regimes.
4. Some transdisciplinary initiatives carry signs of counter-hegemony.

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Thank you !

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