

# Introduction

It is not possible to look up the word ‘student’ in The Great Danish Encyclopaedia... Maybe this is a token of the fact that today some uncertainty exists about which box to put us into? Are we persons passing through the university on our way to the job market? Customers in the university’s education shop? Or are we a part of the institution which is to drive society forward by gaining new knowledge? One thing is certain: many discussions are undertaken *about* us – but still fewer *with* us.

– P. M. Daugbjerg, ‘Kravet er stadig medbestemmelse’

The university student today is a contested and unsettled figure. In Denmark, as in many other countries, a series of reforms have been introduced over recent decades with the explicit political aim of making universities more competitive in the so-called global knowledge economy. Power relations between state, market and university have been reshuffled, as have relations between university leaders, academic staff and students. With these reforms, diverse and conflicting visions have been brought into play about what a student is and should be. The student is conceptualized in various ways (e.g., co-owner, user, consumer, future knowledge worker and revolutionary), with each conceptualization pointing to different aspects of student life and the student’s position and role within both the university and wider society.

The opening quotation is from a speech given by the student council president of the University of Copenhagen in 2008. As an apparent token of the inclusion and appreciation of a ‘student voice’ at the University of Copenhagen, it has been the custom for decades

to invite a representative of the university's student body to speak at the annual festival in front of the royal family and other dignitaries within society and the university. The student council president, forty years after the famous revolts in 1968, argued for the need for a new *student revolt*. She complained that the 2003 Danish University Act and associated policies had increased marketization and competition between universities, with resulting changes in the conditions and incentives for student involvement. Students today, she argued, are no longer expected – let alone enabled – to participate and get involved in university life and in their own education as in earlier decades.

The marketing of the universities as excellent places ... is an attempt to make the students believe that they do not have to involve themselves. If they are not satisfied they can just choose another article off the shelf. ... Imagine if the universities had not needed to be concerned about dwindling state funding and had dared to be as honest as to say: 'We hope you will study here with us. It is far from perfect, but we hope you will take part in improving it.' Instead, we are palmed off with a customer mentality where our opportunities for complaint are more relevant than influence and co-responsibility. (Daugbjerg 2008)

Whereas in 1968 Danish students fought to bring down what they called 'professorial rule' and to obtain the right to co-determination in regard to their studies, the teaching methods, planning of courses and governance of universities in general, the 2008 student council president argued for a subversion of, in her words, 'ministerial rule'. She felt that the reforms were contrary to the wishes of the majority of the university students and staff. With reforms increasingly moving universities into the realm of the market, she said, students are encouraged to behave like customers or consumers, choosing between courses and programmes as if they were prefabricated commodities. In case of dissatisfaction, students are expected to complain or vote with their feet rather than become involved in creating and developing courses, programmes and general conditions at the university at which they are enrolled. She therefore revived the 1968 slogan of student revolt in Denmark, 'The Demand Is Participation', and hoped a new student revolt would erupt to promote it.

## Shifting Forms of Student Participation

This book is about students' shifting forms of participation in a period of extensive university reform. It focuses on Denmark, but some-

what similar reform processes aiming at making a country competitive in a so-called global knowledge economy can be found in many other places. The 2008 annual festival at the University of Copenhagen referred to above points to some of the central frictions and bones of contention in relation to the role and position of students within the university and wider society. From her position as a student politician, the student council president complained that the students' room for participation had been gradually reduced over the past forty years, increasingly putting the student in the position of a passively receiving customer. In contrast, in his speech at the annual festival, the rector of the University of Copenhagen emphasized that 'the '68 revolt is over' and that today students are a 'natural part of the erudite assembly' at the annual festival and have a strong voice in the decision making at the university (Rektor 2008). Likewise, in her speech the chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of Copenhagen argued for the maintenance of the newly introduced structure of governance that had given leaders more power and, in her view, secured clearer decision-making and communication structures (Chairman of Board of Governors 2008).

After their speeches had been publicized and discussed in the *University Post*, I talked to the student council president, who confirmed that there were strong disagreements about how, when and why students should be able to participate in and influence their course of education and the decision-making processes at the university. These disagreements, she said, did not only exist between students, university leaders and the Ministry of Science, but were also present internally in the student body, where the majority of the students, in her view, did not really involve themselves actively in the continuous development of their programmes, their university and, more generally, in the shaping of wider society.

It is these intertwined processes of university reform and the changes in students' means and modes of participating in their studies, in university governance, and in the shaping of society writ large that this book seeks to grasp. In doing so, the book has a twofold ambition.

First, it sets out to explore how 'the student', perceived as a contested figure in a period of reform, is negotiated and enacted in particular pedagogical, institutional and political settings. Through a combination of historical and ethnographic studies, it focuses on students' changing conditions for and modes of participation in three overlapping and interconnected areas: (1) participation in their own education and learning, (2) participation in the development and governance of their university and (3) participation in the shaping

of national educational policy and, more generally, wider society. These three areas have been carved out through an iterative analytical process, a movement back and forth between analyses of historical documents, reform policies and ethnographic material, all of which pointed to their centrality. As will be demonstrated throughout the book, the analytical focus on students' participation in pedagogical as well as political settings foregrounds particular kinds of temporal and spatial processes through which the student is given figure and form.

The second ambition with this book has been to develop a theoretical and methodological approach for working with issues of reform, policy and processes of change as objects of anthropological enquiry. It takes the point of departure in frictional events – that is, moments of contestation or ambiguity – and argues that such moments work as processes of differentiation through which conflicting student figures emerge and are enacted. Each friction points to central phenomena of the reform process, which are then analyzed and put into a larger picture by engaging and reading them through other parts of the ethnographic material. In short, the book conceives of the anthropological field as a space of differential figure production and explores how the student in a period of university reform is made to figure as part of/participant in different and often conflicting wholes.

Some readers may find that, in order to make the people in this book more 'alive', the book could and should have provided more rich descriptions and evocative anecdotes about individual students and their lives at and outside university. Accordingly, while this book is located squarely within the traditions of anthropology of policy and feminist-inspired anthropology, readers yearning for classic 'thick' ethnography may feel that the book in places borders on political philosophy or sociology. However, the language and focal point in this book are obviously the results of conscious choices. The aim has not been to focus on the 'whole' lives of a group of Danish students as such, but rather to explore and theorize a process of reform in and through which new conditions of possibility are created for students' subject formation. And in order to do this, a sharp focus has been placed on frictional events and the processes of differentiation and figuration they come to articulate.

### **University Reform and Student Protests in an International Perspective**

Over the past decades, many countries around the world have reformed their university systems. In many places, new systems of

governance inspired by the private corporate world have been introduced in order to make ‘efficiency savings’ and to improve the nation’s competitive ‘effectiveness’ in the growing market for knowledge and education. Universities are increasingly marketizing and selling education, and more and more governments have introduced or increased tuition fees for some or all students, often arguing that not only will it make students more demanding, strategic and efficient in their course of study, it will also make universities financially ‘autonomous’ and thereby more competitive. Universities are conceptualized as ‘service providers’, and students are supposed to use their growing freedom of choice between modules, programmes and universities (in Denmark and elsewhere) to make themselves ‘employable’ as well as to increase the ‘quality’ and ‘relevance’ of degree programmes. In this logic, they are to become calculating, strategic and so-called responsible customers and choosers (see, e.g., Nielsen 2012; Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons 2000; Tlili & Wright 2005).

More generally, reform of universities in many countries, introduced in the name of austerity, accountability, competitiveness and efficiency, are often described under the umbrella terms of ‘neoliberalism’ (with regard to the wider economic market logic that permeates the reforms) and ‘new public management’ (with regard to the management reforms) (see, e.g., Davies, Gottsche & Bansel 2006; Davies & Petersen 2005; Denman 2005; Larner & Le Heron 2005; S. L. Robertson 2007; Shore & Wright 1999; Shumar 2004). The term ‘neoliberalism’ has by now been incorporated into everyday language (and indeed often by its opponents pejoratively) to refer to the dominance of a logic of ‘the rule of the market’, the cutting of public expenditure and the privatization and/or (quasi-)marketization of the public sector, in which the ethos and organization of the government bureaucracy has to rely on a competitive market, business logic and the demands of ‘customers’ (see, e.g., Clarke et al. 2007; Harris 2007; Rose 1999).

New public management, in turn, is often seen as one particular expression or technology of neoliberalism (Peters, Marshall & Fitzsimons 2000). Dunleavy and Hood (1994) and Peters, Marshall and Fitzsimons (2000) sum up the shift from ‘old’ public administration to the so-called new public management (NPM) as entailing, among other things: a new focus on explicit standards, transparency and accountability; a move from input controls to quantifiable output measures and performance targets; indirect government through the establishment of new (quasi-market) contract steering of performance and incentives, for example, by introducing a distinction between purchaser and provider; the introduction of accrual accounting

and of smaller corporatized units operating with their own budgets (e.g., turning institutions or departments into ‘autonomous’ agencies); and new funding structures (judged by efficiency and capacity to produce results). These are all elements that have been introduced as part of the Danish university reform processes of recent decades (Wright & Ørberg 2008, 2009).

Alongside these reforms of universities, a lot of countries have been witnessing the rise of new and massive student protests. Many protests have been directed at cutbacks to the education system and the introduction of/rise in students’ tuition fees. But students, like the Danish student council president quoted above, have also protested against the reduction in students’ formal voice within university governance or the introduction of other measures to speed up students’ pace of study and choose more ‘relevant’ study subjects.

In Chile students have been the driving force behind considerable and ongoing protests since 2010. The protesting students demand a new framework for education, including free public education, increased state support for public universities, an end to the idea of profitability in higher education and the abrogation of laws forbidding student participation in university governance. The level of public funding for higher education is low in Chile; the majority of universities are private, public universities have to finance most of their activities through tuition and there is no comprehensive system for student grants or subsidized loans. Likewise, in Quebec in 2012, a great number of students went on strikes and organized massive demonstrations against the rises in tuition fees. Inspired by the French expression ‘carrément dans le rouge’ (squarely in the red) – referring to the red numbers on an indebted person’s bank account – a small red felt square, safety-pinned to participants’ coats, became the symbol of the protests and of the growing debt students face with the increase in tuition fees. The red square has since been used as a symbol in student protests against fee rises or changes in student loan schemes in other countries, including New Zealand in 2012 and the Netherlands 2015.

Addressing a series of different issues related to the financial crisis and perceived flaws of capitalism, in the United States the Occupy Wall Street movement also targeted the issue of student loan debts and demanded student loan relief. And, as offshoots of the Occupy Wall Street movement, protests and student groups with names like Occupy Education, Occupy Student Debt, Strike Debt and the Rolling Jubilee have been directed at budget cuts in higher education and rising national student debt. Similarly, in 2012, the United Kingdom

experienced vast student-led protests against planned austerity measures including the rise of tuition fees and public spending cuts. Some demonstrations led to occupations of government and university buildings and on some occasions, as in Chile, the United States and Quebec, protesters had violent clashes with the police.

On the European continent a great deal of the public protests carried out by students over the past decades have also revolved around the introduction of new market principles, growing standardisation, reduction in students' democratic voice, cutbacks in university funding and the introduction of or increases in tuition fees. Many protesting students have seen these initiatives as related to or even a direct consequence of the so-called Bologna Process. The intention with the Bologna Process – an intergovernmental process that started in 1999 with twenty-nine countries (including Denmark) and in 2013 included forty-seven European countries – has been to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by making quality assurance standards and degree systems more comparable so that students and academics can pursue their education and research more freely at different European universities. In order to increase comparability, transparency and mobility across the education systems in Europe, several technologies have been introduced or emphasized, including the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), a common European degree structure (three-year bachelor's degree, two-year master's degree, three-year Ph.D.), a diploma supplement and competence descriptions for each module, aimed at ensuring more flexibility for students in their choice of study and foreign courses, and at degrees and grades becoming more compatible across the participating countries.<sup>1</sup>

In the international Bologna documents, higher education is seen to have several purposes ranging from securing students' 'employability' and 'personal development' to the 'maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base' and the 'preparation for life as active citizens in a democratic society' (Bologna Working Group 2005: 23; see also Sarauw 2012). Despite this broad understanding of higher education, some critics, including student protesters, have criticized the Bologna process for mainly promoting marketization, neoliberalization and European standardization in which universities are made to compete with each other while identifying Europe as an attractive area for foreign students in which to choose to study. The 2000 Lisbon Strategy<sup>2</sup> set out by the European Council (EC) and the inclusion of higher education in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) has given

an even stronger impetus to this criticism. Whereas GATS promises the further removal of restrictions on market access and on barriers to global competition in higher education (see, e.g., Knight 2002), the aim of the EU's Lisbon Strategy was to make Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world' by 2010 (EC 2000).

Student protests against education reforms on the European continent have been particularly widespread in France, Austria and Germany in the years 2009–10, criticizing what the protesters saw as the introduction of 'neoliberal' education reforms based on an Anglo-Saxon model. In Germany and Austria students protested against the (re-)introduction of fees and the implementation of the bachelor's and master's degrees system in the Bologna Process, which they felt put pressure on them and lowered the quality of their courses of study. They complained that education, as one German student leader said, is becoming 'less about seeking knowledge and more about preparing to fill a need in the economy' (Houlton 2009). In France in 2009, lecturers and administrative staff mobilized and joined forces with the students against increased tuition fees, new governance laws and university leaders' increasing power. Similar points of critique have been raised in Denmark, where, after a period of stagnation in the mid-1980s and 1990s, collective and collaborative extra-parliamentary efforts and campaigns across pupil and student organizations gained more of a footing by the late 1990s. As will be discussed in later chapters, with the passage of the Danish University Act in 2003 and subsequent policies a series of student-led demonstrations, happenings and occupations erupted against cutbacks, various policies to speed up students' pace of study and the reduction of students' democratic voice in governance in favour of so-called strong and strategic leadership. The student council president's speech at the University of Copenhagen's annual festival in 2008 is but one example of some of the critiques raised by Danish students.

### Why Denmark?

In light of the wider tendencies in university reform and the widespread student protests in many countries, what can a study of student participation and university reform in *Denmark* tell us? Why and how is the Danish case interesting? For many protesting students in other countries, the Danish system must seem almost like a dream scenario. All universities in Denmark are public. Education is free

for all domestic students who, if living away from the parental home (which the vast majority does), can receive a monthly study grant, in 2015 equivalent to approximately €790 or US\$865. As of 2013, all domestic students have the right to receive the study grant for five years, and if they start their study no later than two years after finishing upper secondary school, for a maximum of six years. Thereby, they are able to receive state study grants for a three-year bachelor's degree, a two-year master's degree (in Denmark called the candidate degree) plus one extra year if they for some reason get delayed or choose to change course. This gives Danish students a kind of economic freedom and independence that many students in other countries do not have.

The Danish system is also unique and of particular interest because, in the wake of the 1968 revolts, students in Denmark obtained greater formal power in the universities' governing bodies than students in other Western countries. And, compared to students in most other countries, Danish students still have a strong voice in university governance, where they have seats on the boards of governors, in the academic councils and half of the seats on the study boards. However, in a historical perspective, the strong formal voice given to students in the 1970s has gradually diminished, and with the 2003 Danish University Act student politicians felt that their influence had decreased further. The University of Copenhagen student council president's call for a new student revolt, demanding more student participation in decision making, shows how new rationales about education and knowledge have also gained a footing at Danish universities. In the 2003 Danish University Act, previous traditions of workplace democracy and elected leaders were replaced with appointed leaders, growing external influence and ideals of strong strategic leadership. In fact, Denmark has been more extreme than many other European countries in their reforms of the governance system – a tendency that politicians from other countries on certain occasions have referred to as 'the Danish disease' (Wright forthcoming).

The introduction of a new university governance structure took place in parallel with the explicit political aim of making the universities more responsive and accountable to students' wishes and choices. As the former minister of science repeatedly maintained – echoing his colleague in charge of university education throughout the 1980s – the student should be at the centre of the education system (see, e.g., Regeringen 2002a; Sander 2006). New possibilities for students to influence not only their own course of education but also what educational offers are available at the universities seem to be emerg-

ing. Indeed, the notion of the student's *voice* as the main element of student participation and influence seems to be increasingly accompanied by a focus on the student's *choice*. These initiatives have gone hand in hand with new political measures for increasing students' pace of study and making them choose what is described as more 'relevant' subjects (that is, mainly within natural and technical sciences). Tensions, therefore, exist between, on the one hand, what in Denmark is often conceived of as a traditional and Humboldt-inspired ideal of university education where the student is to be(come) an independent and critical thinker who takes responsibility for his/her own creative explorations within a discipline, and, on the other hand, a notion of education as a question of choosing and combining 'relevant' modules (and finishing within the formal time frame) in order to become 'employable'. Likewise, potential tensions exist between, on the one hand, ideals about workplace democracy and vast student participation in university governance and, on the other hand, a stronger focus on efficient complaint procedures and students' opportunity to 'vote with their feet' (through increased freedom of choice).

In one sense, therefore, the university reforms in Denmark can be seen as a particular kind of exemplar of, to use the overly reductive terminology, 'neoliberal' universities in the making. Developed on the basis of a strong welfare state model, the Danish traditions for democracy and student participation in the university system have been heavily discussed as more and more reforms, based on new public management ideals and notions of improving Denmark's competitive edge, have been introduced over the past decades. Accordingly, the Danish case may serve as a prism for the wider international tendencies and debates about the role of universities and the repositioning of students in a global knowledge economy, while at the same time showing the particularities and uniqueness that characterize Danish universities and the reforms they are undergoing. The analyses thereby allow for a refinement of the social and political debates around core issues of the marketization and consumerization of education, the role and form of democracy at university and in wider society, and what kinds of (participating) students and citizens are perceived as (un)desirable by whom, when and why.

### **The Notion of Participation**

In the Middle Ages, when the first European universities were established, the Latin word *universitas* – literally meaning 'whole' or

‘total’ – referred to a community or corporation in which students and teachers organized themselves as a kind of guild in order to be recognized by the authorities and obtain judicial protection, corporative autonomy and the right to teach, examine and award academic degrees (Kristensen 2007: 28; Perkin 2006; Wernick 2006). The student, in other words, was seen as *part* of a certain *whole* of students and teachers, a whole that in some cases was student-led (e.g., Bologna in the late twelfth century) and in other cases teacher-led (e.g., the Parisian university around 1200). Today, with current and recent reforms, it has become relevant to ask not only what kind of whole the university is, and how the student is encouraged and enabled to be a part of it, but also whether new kinds of wholes and communities – imagined or physical – are being produced for the student to be part of and participate in. As the student council president of the University of Copenhagen argued above, there are many ‘boxes’ – or ‘wholes’, if you wish – into which the student can be put, and it is the constant processes of the creation, negotiation and breaking down of conflicting student figures, and the wholes or worlds they are to participate in, that this book attempts to grasp.

In university research and politics, as well as within the wider university population, the notion of student participation is most often taken as denoting the formal provision of student representation on governing bodies (see, e.g., Bergan 2003; Persson 2003). That raises questions in regard to the boards and councils on which students are included, how many seats they have, whether they have formal decision-making power and whether they are included in the election or appointment of leaders. While such questions are indeed important in light of current Danish and international reforms, the narrowing down of the notion of participation to address issues of formal governance runs the risk of ignoring the various other and interconnected ways in which students are enabled, incentivized or alternatively prevented from becoming participants in particular communities and decision-making processes. Empirically, as we shall see, some students, leaders and politicians today restrict the notions of ‘democracy’ and ‘student participation’ to address participatory democracy and a form of life; others link the notions to representative democracy, and yet others argue that ‘democracy’ and ‘student participation’ also include aspects like freedom of choice and complaint procedures.

In this light, it seems pertinent to explore how the room for student participation is changing with contemporary university reforms and what the consequences are for the qualifications and competences

students obtain through their course of education at university. Furthermore, it seems relevant to do so by looking at the different – and interrelated – ways in which students are enabled, and have the desire, to participate in and influence their education and learning, the development of their own programmes of education and, more broadly, that of the university and society writ large. In order to do this, a broader analytical notion of student participation is needed as a starting point, rather than the narrower focus on formal provision that is typically used in higher education research and politics.

To participate means to take *part* in, be a *part* of and/or have a share or interest in something. Participation is a *relational* concept, and to describe a person as a participant necessarily implies an understanding of *what* the person is participating in. Importantly, this *what* of the participation can relate to a *process* or an *activity*, as well as to a sense of *community* or *whole* of which one is *part*. Participation, therefore, may both be a *means* to gain influence and an *end* in itself in that participation may work to integrate people into a larger whole (see, e.g., Gaventa 2004; Jupp Kina 2012; Nelson & Wright 1995).

In fact, the English word ‘participation’ translates into two different Danish words – *medbestemmelse* (participation in decision making/co-determination) and the broader term *deltagelse* (participation) – which in different ways connote ‘influence’ and ‘integration’. The word *deltagelse* has connotations that often but not always suggest ‘co-determination’. For example, when students are, as will be shown later, described as ‘participants’ in a race for knowledge, they may enjoy growing decision-making power over their own course of education in terms of freedom of choice between modules across universities and countries; however, ‘participation’ here does not necessarily include student participation in class or leave any room for decision making about the very conditions and institutional structures established to support this imagined race. Likewise, students can be allowed to *deltage* (participate) in a meeting without being granted any (formal or de facto) *medbestemmelse* (participation in decision making/co-determination).<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the very act of participating in a meeting or lecture potentially gives the student a sense of inclusion and belonging that is not necessarily conveyed through other kinds of participation and influence, such as freedom of choice or complaint procedures. The issue of students’ *medbestemmelse* in institutional decision-making processes was already raised in the nineteenth century and has been a key student political issue in Denmark since the 1960s, when students revolted

and explicitly fought for *medbestemmelse* and workplace democracy (see chapter 3).

Whereas the role of students' participation on boards and councils has been continuously questioned over past decades, less discussion or critique has surrounded current political and pedagogical slogans about putting 'the student at the centre'; that is, focusing more on the students' qualifications and needs and encouraging them to participate actively in class and in the shaping of their education. One could ask if these 'student participatory' ideals, like the notion of 'participation' in the developing world in the 1990s, to some extent have become an unquestionable orthodoxy and as such 'tyrannical' (see Cooke & Kothari 2001). Indeed, some of the participatory challenges that development workers in the global south have struggled with – and which have been extensively discussed in the anthropological literature (see, e.g., Cooke & Kothari 2001; Hickey & Mohan 2004a) – are also present in terms of student participation. Robert Chambers (1994: 2), for example, has argued that in the developing world 'participation' has been used, generally speaking, in three ways: as a *cosmetic label*, to make whatever is proposed appear good; as a *co-opting practice*, where local labour is mobilized to participate in someone else's project; and as an *empowering process*, where local people are enabled to define and design their own projects, and to manage them according to their own decisions. Likewise, at Danish universities, student participation is not merely a question of *empowerment*. As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, student participation as a *cosmetic label* (both in class and in university governance) and as a *co-opting practice* (where students are encouraged by, for example, teachers to fight against reform initiatives the teachers disagree with but do not feel in a position to fight) are also present in university life today and have been in earlier times.

When used as an analytical term, Victoria Jupp Kina (2012: 321) has argued that in literature from the northern sphere the notion of 'participation' is in a 'conceptual muddle' in that it 'can refer to anything from a physical presence in a specific space to autonomous decision-making'. She therefore advocates the introduction of other analytical terms to differentiate between various forms of participation. Drawing on research in Brazil, she points to 'protagonism' as one such term and argues that participation here is seen as a means for developing the more fundamentally empowering protagonism. In discussing children and youth participation, Hart (1992) goes even further and proposes a ladder of participation with eight steps ranging from non-participation ('manipulation', 'decoration' and 'token-

ism’) to different degrees of participation (ranging from ‘assigned but informed’ participation to ‘child-initiated, shared decisions with adults’). Such a static and stage-oriented categorization, however, does not only fail to grasp the processual nature of participation, as Jupp Kina points out (2012: 333); it also idealizes one form of participation and thereby runs the risk of becoming ‘tyrannical’ (Cooke & Kothari 2001).

While the present study concurs that ‘participation’ is a multifaceted word, in this study it is exactly this elasticity that allows an exploration of how various forms of participation at different moments are brought into play – how they interconnect, overlap, interfere with and even defer to one another. Empirically, the notion of student participation is constantly negotiated and, as will be shown throughout the book, has been used in contradictory and shifting ways over time, in that different worlds and wholes are conjured up for students to be part of/take part in. Instead of starting with one a priori and static categorization and valorization of lower and higher ‘degrees of participation’, throughout the book I explore and theorize how various elements or dimensions of what some actors (but not necessarily all) perceive as democracy and students’ participation interconnect and stand out as central to the way students are enabled to shape their studies, their university and larger society.

Therefore, analytically, the notion of ‘participation’ is here used as an umbrella term to cover the fluid dimensions of ‘participation’ as a means and as an end in itself; a question of influence as well as integration. As will be elaborated shortly, I use the term ‘line of participation’ to describe the main aspects and tendencies in different and prominent forms of student participation across time and place. I point to four central lines of participation – aggregative, integrative, transformative and preserving – and a key argument is that different lines not only promote different forms of student influence and sense of belonging; they also involve different kinds of learning opportunities.

## Figuration Work

In accordance with this focus on a broader notion of student participation – as a question of students being part of some larger whole (e.g., a physical or imagined community, amorphous and transient or long-lasting and seemingly more uniform and stable) and/or taking part/participating in particular pedagogical or political processes

– the book puts forward and develops a particular approach that will be termed ‘figuration work’. With this approach, as noted, the anthropological field is conceived of as a space of (frictional) figure production. It takes as the point of departure frictional events, that is, moments of contestation or ambiguity, and argues that such moments work as processes of differentiation through which students are constantly figured and re-figured. Figuration work, here, can be seen as a way of conceiving of and doing fieldwork as well as a strategy for analysis. A frictional event is used as a starting point for further enquiry – in fieldwork and analysis – in that the core aspects of the friction are analyzed through engaging with related parts of the ethnographic material. The aim is to point to more general features of a process of transformation. In this sense, figuration work as a particular form of fieldwork has a lot in common with extended case method approaches (see, e.g., Gluckman 1940; Evens & Handelman 2006; Burawoy 1998). However, if the extended case method, as developed by Gluckman, aims to grasp the change of social relations by ‘extending’ a conflict situation by exploring ‘a series of specific incidents affecting the same persons or groups through a long period of time’ (Gluckman, quoted in Handelman 2006: 99), this book ‘extends’ a frictional event by exploring the trajectories and shaping of the lines of participation that go into and are actualized in the friction. It, so to speak, stays with the friction, the awkwardness, the trouble.

Throughout, the book will show how a figure never exists in isolation; it is always enacted as *part of* something larger than itself, and it will be shown how, co-produced with different student figures, are also the ‘worlds’ they are perceived to be participating in – as ‘parts’ of often conflicting ‘wholes’ like ‘the programme/discipline’, ‘the university’, ‘a common student body’, ‘the nation-state’ and ‘the global knowledge economy’. Thereby, and in drawing on work within the area of anthropological globalization studies (Tsing 2006), anthropology of policy (Shore and Wright 1997, 2011; Sutton and Levinson 2001) and the work on ‘figures/figuration’ by feminist thinkers (e.g., Haraway 1991a, 1992, 1997; Strathern 2002, 2004; Tsing 2010), the book offers a specific way of conceptualizing large-scale processes of transformation and studying the relations between students’ various modes of participation and the ways the purpose of universities is being redefined.

A more detailed methodological discussion will be presented in the next chapter. In the following, I explore the key conceptual and methodological moves related to my use of ‘figure’ and ‘figuration’.

### *Figures ...*

My initial curiosity about the shifting room for students' participation, the very reason why this book came about, was primarily initiated by the passing of the Danish University Act in 2003. Consequently, the question of how to conceptualize and study reform and policy processes has been central. While greatly inspired by both of them, the book – as will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1 – takes a critical stance towards two seemingly opposed, but nevertheless intimately connected, approaches that are often deployed in anthropologies of policy. The first is the Foucauldian governmentality approach, which – despite claims to the contrary – tends to view policy as a more or less straightforward execution of political programmes. The second is the anthropological insistence on 'appropriation', which in its critique of 'implementation' studies attempts to assign agency and creativity to the people towards whom a policy is directed. While sympathizing with this latter ambition, the book argues that the notion of appropriation tends to work as a retrospective concept in that it implicitly presents policy as a 'thing' for someone to react to and thereby (tacitly) presupposes a given character of political programmes. Furthermore, the notion is unfortunate if taken to connote (as often suggested in dictionaries) an act of forceful, almost colonising, acquisition of something (here the policy) without the permission of the original owner. This does not resonate well with the understanding of policy, presented in this book, as a messy and multi-dimensional process with no single original ownership. And it may work to downplay potential feelings of disempowerment among people engaged in a policy process. As an alternative, and because the focus here is on students' shifting forms of participation rather than one policy process per se, the book develops a particular kind of methodology and fieldwork approach that focuses on the continuous and negotiated enactment of figures and figurations: how the student is given form and made to appear – that is, to *figure* – in different ways in and through different policy-related events.

The term 'figure' stems from the Latin *ingere* (to mould, to fashion) and thus denotes the creation of a certain shape or form. A figure is often conceived as something *imagined*, something *physical* (tangible and concrete, e.g., a statue) or something *abstract* (as in a geometrical drawing). However, rather than attempting to discern what is 'real' from what is 'ideal' in any absolute way, it seems to me of greater interest to explore which figures take form and give people their grips for engagement, as well as when, how and with what con-

sequences. We all live our lives with images and figures – conceptual, ideal and material – about the proper and desirable world, and the benefits of the notion of ‘figure’ as used here is precisely that: at one and the same time, it may connote something ‘real’, tangible and representative (figurative), as well as something ‘ideal’ or emblematic (figural). In this study, inspired by Donna Haraway and other feminist thinkers (Braidotti 1994; Haraway 1992, 1997; Strathern 2002, 2004; Tsing 2010), the figure is seen as transcending this classical division of imagined versus real, physical versus abstract. I thus take the notion as moving beyond the long-debated distinctions between discourse-materiality and reality-representation in that the ‘figure’ conveys both (see Haraway 1997: 8ff.). Or, to borrow a phrase from Haraway, the ‘imaginary and the real figure each other in concrete fact, and so I take the actual and the figural seriously as constitutive of lived material-semiotic worlds’ (1997: 2).

From an anthropological perspective, as shown by Barker, Harms and Lindquist (2013, 2014), the notion of ‘figure’ may seem similar to notions like ‘social type’, ‘ideal type’ or even ‘character’. Like these authors, I see such notions as related to the extent that they are concerned with the connection between the practices, desires and self-understanding of particular persons and the more general organization or transformation of a society. In this sense, figures – like social types – come to communicate something bigger than themselves, as Barker, Harms and Lindquist put it (2013: 159–60). They can convey particular tendencies or ‘structures of feeling’ in time. However, notions like ‘social type’ or ‘ideal type’ have typically involved a different (non-ethnographic, more literary or deductive) engagement with empirical material than will be promoted here with the notion of ‘figure/figuration’. For example, the Weberian ‘ideal types’ (e.g., goal-rationality, value-rationality, emotional-rationality, traditional) are sociological abstractions that emphasize particular elements believed to be common to most cases of a given phenomenon. It is a way to classify and understand actions within a series of (pre-defined) categories, and ideal types are therefore often used as a tool for comparing particular phenomena across time and place.

A different use of ‘social types’, as discussed by Barker, Harms and Lindquist (2013), can be found with authors like F. Engels, G. Simmel and W. Benjamin, who all made use of ‘social types’ to present and critique developments of their time. Engels gives short accounts of particular impoverished individuals and uses these to criticize the social inequality established with the Industrial Revolution. Here, as Barker, Harms and Lindquist put it (2013: 161), individuals become

‘metonyms of the new class of proletarian urban poor’ – they are seen as products of large-scale societal transformations. Georg Simmel ([1908] 1950), in turn, saw ‘the stranger’ as a general sociological form that could be traced back in time – appearing in different versions, with different functions and roles. Urban life and the capitalist economy, Simmel argued, elicited a new metropolitan type with a ‘blasé outlook’. In a similar vein, and as a means for understanding the social transformations of his time, Walter Benjamin identified ‘the flâneur’: ‘the nineteenth century bourgeois man who meandered through the city, first as a consumer of – and later, a reporter on, the curious sights of the new commodity culture’ (Barker, Harms & Lindquist 2013: 162). Benjamin explored the continuous change and metamorphoses of social types like ‘the flâneur’ and the flâneur’s later incarnation, ‘the sandwichman’, and used these as a window onto more general changes in urban commodified society.

None of these authors, however, engaged in in-depth ethnographic explorations and, to different degrees, tended to see their ‘social types’ as products or instantiations of particular transformations of their time. They did not convey much of a sense of the ways in which people who seemed to embody these ‘types’ experienced, contested or influenced the social developments. While maintaining that figures indeed point to something bigger than themselves, the present study does not see them as mere products of a new social structure or order. Rather, they are, as Barker, Harms and Lindquist say, ‘both producing and produced by the ... ground against which they stand out’ (2013: 164). They are both models of and models for societal development – and they may (dis-/re-)appear across time and place in different versions. Furthermore, the figures explored in this book are not seen as ‘mere abstractions’ – they are indeed *also* real persons. However, figures are always both more and less than any individual. They are, as discussed above, both concrete and abstract, both real and imaginary, always involving, as Haraway puts it, ‘at least some kind of displacement that can trouble identifications and certainties’ (1997: 11). Therefore, I agree with Barker, Harms and Lindquist when they argue:

It is not a question of finding figures that are somehow representative of a social group or place, but rather of understanding particular figures as evocative nodes that reveal relationships and forms of mediation between individual lives and wider social processes. A figure is both real and symbolic, individual and social, an agent imbricated in social structures and processes. (2013: 166)

Whereas Benjamin and Simmel identified one figure as somehow emblematic or iconic of particular social organizations of their time, this book is more concerned with how in the period of extensive reform different and conflicting figures are enacted, assembled and conjured up in and through the actions and words of different people. How do different figurations relate to each other? On what 'grounds' are they likely to stand out? Are some figures more prominent than others? When? Where? How? And how have different figures played a role over time? In a sense, the book can be said to extend the discursive focus on 'key words' and 'mobilising metaphors', employed as a central method in parts of the anthropological policy literature (see, e.g., Shore & Wright 1997: 18–19), to a focus on the emergence and entanglement of 'key figures': how a figure connects to and/or eclipses other figures, how it gains its power through the mobilization of particular people and elements, and how figures are articulated and assembled. Here, the notion of 'figuration' plays a central role.

### *... and Figurations*

Whereas the notion of the student as a 'figure' tends to direct our attention to the diverse names attributed to the student (e.g., customer, co-owner, revolutionary, etc.), in this study the notion of 'figuration' entails an unfolding of the compositional elements of the figure; that is, an exploration of the various temporal and transient assemblages of, for example, political technologies, pedagogical practices and personal desires that come together to work, and that at particular historical moments are given a common denominator or 'figure'. The word 'figure' works as both a noun and a verb and, in this book, the notion is meant to convey a process of figuration that constantly vibrates between emergence/process (verb) and freeze-frame/closure (noun), and between being one and being many. Rather than seeing the figure as a once and for all statue carved in stone, it should be understood in a more processual way, as a process of *figuration* – that is, of incessantly assembling, articulating or interlinking diverse elements into a whole in and through which students *figure* in particular ways. Importantly, the components of the figuration come to co-define each other; they are – to use Strathern's vocabulary – a kind of *prosthetic cut/extensions* to and of each other (2004: 36ff.), and in that sense they gain, as a figuration, new capacities for acting. Put differently – and in resonance with what Strathern has called a 'postplural

perception of the world' (ibid.: xvi) – a figure is both more and less than itself. It is, so to speak, internally fragmented and externally a unit (ibid.: 25, 36), both one and many (ibid.: 67), singular and plural, a whole and a part.

Consequently, I take 'figuration' to convey some of the same attributes as the notion of 'assemblage', which over the past decade has been used in a growing body of philosophical, sociological and anthropological literature (see, e.g., Deleuze & Parnet 2006; Latour 2005; Marcus & Saka 2006; Ong & Collier 2005; Rabinow 2003; Sassen 2006). 'Assemblage' literally means a collection of elements. However, in Deleuze-inspired research it is used to address the *process* of arranging, organizing or relating a contingent ensemble of practices and things, while cutting connections with others (cf. R. Cooper 1998; Wise 2005). Similarly, when I use the notion of figuration, I put emphasis on contingent and transient connectivity, on how various elements (spoken words, technologies, pedagogical and political practices and traditions, etc.) are connected and thereby promote particular conditions and spaces for thinking and acting. In addressing the *process* of relating and connecting a contingent ensemble of practices, things, words and so forth, I also find inspiration in the notion of 'articulation', as used by Stuart Hall (see Choy 2005; Grossberg 1996).

'Articulation' has a double meaning of *both* referring to the act of uttering, expressing/being articulate about something – this is indeed relevant in a study like this, where educational rationales, policies and protests are often uttered, orally or in writing – *and*, in Hall's words, to 'the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions' (Hall, quoted in Grossberg 1996: 53). Whereas the Deleuze-inspired assemblage thinking often seems to emphasize transformation and potentiality (see, e.g., Braidotti 1994), Hall draws on Laclau's analyses of politics and takes an explicit interest in ideological dominance and social power relations. He focuses on the conditionalities of articulation processes – on how, when and why certain elements are connected (or not), and on particular ideological elements that 'do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects' (Hall, quoted in Grossberg 1996: 53). Importantly, Hall emphasizes that historically there can be what he calls 'lines of tendency' or 'lines of tendential force' (ibid.: 53–54) in the kinds of articulations that occur in particular places. That is, even though articulations and connections between different practices and elements are contingent and non-necessary, over time and in particular places some articulations may be more prominent and long-lasting than others.

In my use of ‘figuration’, I share Hall’s interest in the political (and pedagogical) dimension of subject formation and in the power relations that shape particular conditions for the processes of articulation. In contrast to ‘order’, ‘structure’ or ‘logic’, the notion of ‘line’, introduced by Hall, connotes a dynamic movement in the clustering or dominance of particular forms of figuration. As we shall see, it is possible to detect a certain resonance across time and place in the ways students desire and are encouraged/allowed to participate. Inspired by Hall, these resonating participatory practices and rationales across time and/or place will be termed tendential ‘lines of participation’.

### *Figuration as Generative World Making*

Lastly, in line with Haraway and others, this book’s use of the notions ‘figures’ and ‘figurations’ also involves commitment to engage critically with contemporary processes of transformation. Above, it was discussed how certain figures may be understood as providing unique insights into larger societal transformations. Haraway, however, takes the notion of figures/figuration in a slightly different but equally critical direction, in that she uses it to criticize and subvert dominant norms and distinctions. In dissolving dominant dichotomies and confusing the borders between, among others, nature and culture and man and woman, her cyborg figure, for example, is meant to open up new spaces for acting and thinking. Haraway writes: ‘Figuration is about resetting the stage for possible pasts and futures. Figuration is the mode of theory when the “normal” rhetorics of systematic critical analysis seem only to repeat and sustain our entrapment in the stories of the established disorders’ (1992: 86). In this vein, Haraway calls for a kind of feminist politics that could embrace ‘partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves’ (Haraway 1991a: 157). Accordingly, Haraway stresses that figures should not be seen as literal and self-identical; they have a tropic quality, she argues, in that they, as noted above, involve ‘at least some kind of displacement that can trouble identifications and certainties’ (Haraway 1997: 11).

This book shares the ambition put forward by Haraway and Braidotti of not just engaging in negative critique (aiming at deconstructing existing and dominant dichotomies, revealing them as [socially] constructed, historically contingent and claiming that things might be different), but rather exploring and pointing to, as Braidotti puts it, an ‘affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a mul-

tuple and constant process of transformation' (1994: 111). However, whereas Haraway, Braidotti and others (e.g., Castañeda 2002) use the notion of figuration as a way of pointing to alternative visions of subjectivity – exceeding modern dualisms and moving towards notions of 'situatedness' and 'becoming' – this book follows a more ethnographic path.<sup>4</sup> It explores how people, at the intersection with the anthropologist, also and often in quite subtle ways engage in critical, generative and subversive figuration work. It shows how in moments of friction, the world may be (momentarily) dichotomized and oppositional figures are produced, but also how people, in and through figuration work, constantly break down, re-work and re-assemble these (dichotomous) figures.

Figuration work, as used here, is therefore tightly connected to world making – to the ways in which the people we as researchers engage with, and *as* we engage with them, enact, conjure up, claim and become part(icipants) of/in various worlds. As Haraway says, figurations can be 'condensed maps of contestable worlds' (1997: 11), and in using 'the computer' as an example of a tropic figure, she states that 'the computer' is 'a *part-for-whole* figure, for a *world* of actors and actants, and not a Thing Acting Alone' (ibid.: 126, emphases added). The notion of figure/figuration, therefore, can be understood semiotically as a way of describing how what gives form and shape to agency – things, persons, words – are figured and assembled as part of particular worlds.<sup>5</sup>

In this vein, and inspired by Tsing (2010) and Haraway (1997), I see 'worlds' as tentative arrangements of 'parts' and 'wholes' that are never stable or isolated but always *entangled*. To be entangled, as proposed by Karen Barad, is 'not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence' (2007: ix). Importantly, therefore, figures do not just contain worlds; they *shape* worlds, and in doing so, the enactment and conjuring up of certain figures and figurations entail the potential for re-forming the world(s). In showing the relations between parts and wholes and, in Strathern's terms, the 'oscillation' between different, yet comparable, worlds or value systems (2002: 92–93), the book emphasizes the transformative potential of not only the researcher's constructions of figures (which is Haraway's strategy) but also of people's everyday practices and analyses in which figures are constantly (re-)enacted. Thus, the empowering and political dimension of the notion of 'figuration' is also localized in the quite mundane activities of, among others, students and teachers. In this way, the book could also be read as an attempt to put together

feminist theories of figuration for the use of social anthropologists, showing how figuration happens in particular ethnographic settings, and thereby opening up new spaces for (political and participatory) subjectivity – as well as for policy making.

## Empirical Foundations

The frictional events, which in this book are used as the point of departure for analyzing conflicting student figurations (former and current, and their interconnections), can take the form of anything from a conflict situation in class, demonstrations on the street, debate in the newspapers to the negotiations a single interlocutor may have with him- or herself in an interview with me. Accordingly, the empirical foundation for the book has been generated through a combination of participant observation, interviews, analyses of policy documents and historical and archival enquiries into the shifting participatory roles of the student.

A condition in this study has been my own embeddedness in and familiarity with the area of study. As a former student, present researcher and university teacher, I have personal experiences, satisfactions and dissatisfactions with the university that I bring with me to this study. Even though I chose not to study my own university (due to the potential difficulties with matters of authority, trust and confidentiality that could emerge from studying my own students, colleagues and leaders – see Alvesson [2003] for a discussion of ‘self-ethnography’), I have an embedded and embodied naturalness, as well as taken-for-granted assumptions, regarding the workings of a Danish university. This knowledge, I have found, has been both an advantage and a disadvantage. The ‘foreshadowed problems’ (Malinowski, quoted in Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 21) with which I started the enquiry were already thoroughly empirically grounded and provided me with a broad and embodied understanding of the issues at stake. However, as no approach can ever be exhaustive or omniscient, this knowledge has undoubtedly made me blind to other issues that a researcher from a different country or university tradition would have found equally interesting to pursue. I have attempted to confront the challenge in any study to keep questioning the problems and issues that can emerge as relevant at any time throughout the research process, no matter how well one thinks one knows the field. The challenge, Hastrup (1992) has suggested, can be seen as a question of becoming *professionally* astonished. This professional as-

tonishment is to a high degree, of course, generated through one's engagement with other researchers' writings. Furthermore, I also found that a comparative sensitivity across both *time* and *space* was a productive way to promote a focused and iterative process of questioning the empirical material of the study. Therefore, my approach has consisted of three interconnected fieldwork activities.

First, I have gone into depth with policy papers and historical accounts of negotiations over student participation. Because this study aims to explore a process of institutional change, the reading of university policies and laws as well as international agreements ratified or agreed to by Denmark (e.g., the Bologna Process) have been essential empirical material. I have treated this material and the debates about it in the newspapers as *articulations* (in Stuart Hall's sense) through which students are made to figure in particular ways by introducing, encouraging or restricting certain kinds of participatory conduct on their part. In addition to exploring these contemporary political figurations, which are discussed mainly in chapter 2, I also decided to go back in history to explore the changing room for student participation over time. An important reason for this was that history could give me a different way of questioning the familiarity and naturalness of the 'here' and 'now'. Whereas my study lacked the more traditional 'exotic' travel in space to provoke a curiosity of the researcher, I found that, as Wolf argued (1982: 3–4), travelling in time could help create a productive curiosity about the diverse ways of figuring the student today. The empirical foundation for this historical part of the study – like the contemporary aspect based on interviews and participant observation – has taken its point of departure in different 'frictional events' over time through which the student's modes of participation have changed and have been up for debate. The discussion of the historical development of students' participation in their own teaching and learning, in university governance and in the shaping of wider society, is the focus of chapter 3.

Second, I have done fieldwork at three Danish universities, which entailed auditing and observing three third-year courses within natural science programmes, interviewing students, tutors and leaders, participation in various social events and attending meetings of different governing boards. The part of the enquiry that builds on ethnographic participant observation and interviews took place mainly in 2005, 2006 and 2008. My ambition with this study has not been to write ethnographies of one or several Danish universities as different 'organization cultures'. However, certain kinds of conduct and lines of participation are indeed (made) more likely at some universities

and departments than at others due to, for example, different pedagogic principles and institutional traditions of student participation. The comparative differences between institutions are thereby valuable parts of the process of being professionally astonished. Taken-for-granted issues of student participation at one university may be challenged at another and thus allow for and encourage further exploration. This is why I chose to conduct ethnographic participant observation at three different Danish universities. I used the exploration of traditions and events at one institution to engage with and question traditions and events at another.

The selection of three universities for in-depth explorations of students' participatory conduct was informed by institutional differences between universities. The three universities include one '*traditional*' university with faculties covering the traditional broad areas of the humanities and the social and natural sciences (University of Copenhagen), one '*mono-faculty*' and '*profession-oriented*' university (the former Danish Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, today a part of the University of Copenhagen) and one '*reform*' university established in the wake of the democratization processes of the late 1960s, which made new notions of student participation central (Roskilde University). At all three universities, I participated in meetings of different governing bodies, especially the study councils, whenever issues of relevance to this study were on the agenda.

My selection of three particular programmes for following classes and exploring diverse kinds of student participation was based on where relevant reform processes had been introduced. I chose to follow courses and participate in social and formal events in three different programmes and departments that had been recently reformed, were in a process of being reformed or were in some way challenged by the strategies, ideas or thoughts about reform of either the university leadership or wider national and international tendencies within education politics. The courses I followed were all in *third-year natural science programmes*. The reason for choosing third-year programmes was twofold. First, these students have at least two years' experience of being at university and are therefore able to compare and reflect upon new governmental or educational initiatives. Furthermore, in their third year students are on the brink of choosing more specialized candidate programmes, meaning that they have greater freedom of choice and are now expected to be increasingly independent, critical and creative in terms of their own learning processes. The reason for choosing to attend courses offered by natural science programmes was threefold. First, some reforms had been in-

troduced to these programmes shortly before I began my study. Second, the mono-faculty university mainly consisted of natural science programmes. Third, a similarity across programmes would mean that some students would have experiences of earlier studies or ‘optional modules’ within one of the other universities. In their reflections about their studies, the students often compared their own or friends’ experiences at other universities. Having been at all three universities, I could not only engage more thoroughly with the students’ own accounts, but also obtain comparative knowledge of a given practice or tradition by relating teaching traditions, forms of student participation or study environments across institutions.

The third aspect of this study consisted of doing fieldwork with national and institutional student organizations and networks. This involved participation in meetings concerning university reform, participation in various happenings and public student protests against reform initiatives and explorations into the media debate on the same issue. An important aspect of my fieldwork has also been to follow public and institutional negotiations over particular proposed laws or policies. Here I followed the work of the National Union of Students, some of the student councils (the main student organization in Danish universities) and student networks in their activities, protests and lobbying for particular issues. I explored the internal dynamics of the student body in terms of different and conflicting modes of participation, positions in the politics of education and ideals about what a student is and should be. I therefore participated in different social and political events, at public demonstrations or happenings, and at seminars, hearings or meetings concerning the role and conditions of Danish universities. For example, I followed the work of the so-called 3% Network – an independent student network that protested against proposed welfare reforms in 2005 – and a conference, called ‘Reboot ’68’, on the revolutionary potential of the current student generation. These two initiatives and the work and strategies of the National Union of Students and the student councils are the focal points of chapter 6.

### **The Litany of Class, Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

Whereas in other countries, the classic litany of class, gender and race/ethnicity would be obvious markers of distinction – along the lines of which students would figure differently and as part(icipant)s of different wholes – in this study, class, gender or race/ethnicity did

not stand out as remarkably significant. In terms of the issue of gendered participation, I found no particular patterns in the way male and female students tended to participate (or not) in class, in university governance, in extra-parliamentary student political activities and so forth. Furthermore, in university governance and student political networks as well as in the natural science courses I followed at the three different universities, there were a relatively equal number of male and female students. So while one of the frictions I explore in chapter 4 could have opened up for a more in-depth discussion of gender differences at Danish universities, for the above-mentioned reasons I chose not to go down that lane in earnest. Other researchers (Hasse 2002; Højgaard & Søndergaard 2002; Søndergaard 2006) have worked extensively on the role of gender at Danish universities, so readers interested in this topic can find in-depth analyses there.

Similarly, race/ethnicity did not stand out as a significant aspect in the figuration processes. To many foreigners, familiar with universities in other countries, the student population at a Danish university might seem relatively homogeneous in terms of students' ethnic, linguistic and/or national background. At the three study programmes where I attended classes, I met only one student who had a different ethnic background than Danish/Scandinavian (he came to Denmark from the Middle East with his parents when he was three years old) and one student who came from Iceland (which was a part of first Norway and then Denmark until 1918) and therefore spoke Danish with a bit of an accent. Likewise, I only met a few students with a different ethnic background than Danish who were involved in the student union or as student activists. The small number of ethnic minority students did not make 'ethnicity' stand out as a key component of differentiation and figuration. However, by exploring an event where a group of international students from China complained to the minister of science about low-quality education (chapter 5), I do touch upon how different educational backgrounds and traditions play an important role for the way students (can) think of themselves as part of the university.

In terms of the issue of 'class', the difference between rich and poor in Denmark is much smaller than in countries like the United Kingdom or the United States. While the difference between rich and poor has grown over the past decades, the state study grants and loan schemes make it financially possible for students with various backgrounds to attend all Danish universities without having to be too concerned about their financial situation or about ending with a huge debt. However, as Jens Peter Thomsen (2008) has shown, the socio-

economic background of students still plays a significant role in terms of their chances and likelihood for studying at a university in that young people with parents who themselves are academics statistically have a greater chance of studying at a further education institution than youngsters with low-skilled parents – especially at study programmes where you have to have a high average mark to enter.

Marianne Gullestad's studies of the role of egalitarianism in the Scandinavian countries (see, e.g., Gullestad 1989, 1991) can shed an interesting light over the lack of apparent significance of gender, ethnicity or class to the participatory figurations that I have explored in this book. Gullestad argues that the Scandinavian countries (and especially their development of strong welfare states) have been characterized by a particular emphasis on 'equality as sameness', which involves 'ways of under-communicating difference during social encounters' and not necessarily 'actual same-ness' (1989: 85). I do not claim that a stronger focus on gender, ethnicity or class throughout my study could not have revealed particular participatory patterns, power relations or inequalities. What I am saying is that gender, ethnicity or class did not figure in any significant way – or at least, following Gullestad, these differences were under-communicated – in the main frictions concerning students' participation that I encountered during my fieldwork. Focusing on one or more of these categories, therefore, would seem like an arbitrary and a priori methodological choice rather than something that stood out and offered itself to me as a relevant focal point.

## Organization of the Book

The book is divided into three parts. Part I, called 'Trajectories and Mappings', introduces the theoretical and methodological trajectories I have followed and developed in this study in order to approach the reform processes as objects of anthropological enquiry. It thereby works as a 'mapping' for the coming explorations in this book, in that 'mapping', as suggested by Tim Ingold (2000a: 232), is taken to mean 'the retelling of journeys made' and a 'rehearsal for journeys to be made'.

In the first chapter, I elaborate on the central methodological choices made in the book, and I unfold the key notions of friction, event and tendential lines of participation. I also discuss how the book combines synchronic and diachronic explorations of Danish university reform and the shifting forms of student participation.

In chapter 2, by analyzing central contemporary university policies and political negotiations, I explore contemporary Danish university reform and the central rationales of participation promoted by different groups of people engaged in education politics. In particular, I point to the existence of two central and conflicting lines of participation. One tendential line I relate to the Humboldtian notion of students as part of universities as well as to the Danish notion of ‘co-citizenship’, which highlights democracy as a form of living rather than as a question of procedures and representation. This line, therefore, emphasizes particular kinds of *integrative participation*. The other and more recent line of participation puts emphasis on students’ participation in a knowledge race. Here participation becomes instrumental and strategic, and the wholes in which the students are to participate (e.g., the university, the knowledge economy) are best described as *aggregated*, rather than integrated, wholes. I show how within these different lines of participation, the student is positioned in very different ways as a participant in and thereby co-producer of his/her own education and learning; the development and governance of the university; and the shaping of national educational policy and the wider society.

These general explorations of contemporary university reform are then put into a historical perspective in chapter 3. Here, I explore how students’ participation in national and institutional politics as well as in pedagogical processes of teaching and learning has changed and developed during the past two centuries and if particular lines of participation have been prominent in this period. It is shown how the student figure has embodied different and often competing visions of students’ participation in the three main areas. Furthermore, even though all three participatory dimensions have been at work at all times, they each seem to have been the main object of friction and negotiation at different historical times. In short, in Denmark change in student participation in ‘society’ was followed by new forms of student participation in university governance, which was ultimately reflected in stronger student participation in teaching and their own learning at university. This linear account is then supplemented with a different reading that conveys a sort of circuitousness in the way that particular lines of participation emerge, are eclipsed and re-appear throughout the period. I point to the entanglement of what one could call a *transformative* (or *subversive*) line of participation and a *preserving* line of participation, which over the course of centuries past have been actualized in different ways at different points. Similarly, there have been continuous frictions between students who

believe in more activist-oriented approaches to obtain influence and students who advocate parliamentary approaches.

Part II of the book, 'Events and Figurations', consists of three chapters that analyze the ethnographic material generated through interviews and participant observation. Each chapter uses a particular frictional event as its point of departure and, from this friction, explores the ways different and conflicting figures of the student are generated, negotiated, dismantled. The student figures that are generated in and through the events are thus (re-)assembled and (re-)articulated in various ways as the event is unfolded, related to and read through other parts of the ethnographic material. A common theme in the three chapters is how the notion of being an 'active' student (and citizen) is contested and understood differently by various actors. With different emphasis and weight, the chapters address the three interconnected and overlapping participatory areas. The frictional events that are used as points of departure in the three chapters conjure up, articulate and connect the areas in unique ways. However, or thereby, each chapter also sheds a particular light on one of the participatory areas.

One way of reading these three chapters, therefore, is to see them as a move from frictions in the class room (chapter 4), to friction over appropriate student participation in university governance (chapter 5) and, lastly (chapter 6), frictions in national student politics and activism, and the ways students attempt to influence national (university) politics and promote changes in larger society. Or put differently, one could see the chapters as explorations of *pedagogical*, *institutional*, and *political* aspects of students' participation and how these are put in play and intertwine in various ways. Even though all three participatory areas are present in all events and discussed in all the chapters, chapter 4 puts special focus on students' participation in their own education and learning; chapter 5 raises the issue of students' voices and appropriate participation in the running and development of their university; and chapter 6 highlights contestations between different factions of politically active students about the best ways to obtain influence on national university politics and to participate in the shaping of larger society. Since chapters 4, 5 and 6 provide the main analytical bulk of this book, I will outline them in some detail here.

In chapter 4 I explore how students as *learners* are offered and/or claim a particular space for participation in their teaching and learning and how this space may be changing as demands for efficiency, flexibility and student-centred education converge in new ways. The

participatory space explored here is first and foremost related to the question of students being/becoming a part of a discipline/academic community and whether this should be as a ‘pipette holder’ in the professors’ project (i.e., a kind of co-opting participation, as Chambers [1994] calls it) or as a student who more independently could develop and explore particular academic trajectories. Taking the point of departure in a reform with which a new block structure, shorter modules and more ‘activating’ teaching and examining methods were introduced, the chapter shows how students are incentivized to become a particular kind of ‘incessantly active and efficient student’ with strong time management skills. Inspired by Henri Lefebvre, I argue that students’ participation come to figure in two potentially conflicting temporalities: ‘subject-oriented time’ (that is, where the study rhythm and time are felt as intrinsic to the student *subject*’s engagement with the *subject* area of study) and ‘standardized policy time’ (that is, the prescribed time frame and pace of study), and I show how a good many students experience ‘arrhythmia’ or temporal discordance between them. In combination with new accountability technologies between teacher and student, which tend to put weight on students’ ‘satisfaction’, the time pressure seems to work to support the production of a particular kind of student-learner figure: the ‘acquisitive learner’ who is mainly oriented towards what is *necessary* to pass examinations, rather than incentivized to conduct independent critical exploration of a subject area as an ‘inquisitive learner’.

Chapter 5 takes its point of departure in an incident in which a group of fee-paying Chinese students identified themselves as ‘customers’ with a right to reject ‘low-quality products’ and complained to the Danish Ministry of Science about the quality of their international programme. The Chinese students were enrolled at a Danish university, Roskilde University (RUC<sup>6</sup>), that upholds a strong ideal of student participation and encourages the students to be ‘co-owners’ rather than ‘customers’. I show how conflicting notions of ‘ownership’ can be seen as a key element in the conflicting student figurations conjured up in the frictional event. Ownership, I argue, may connote both a ‘part-whole’ relationship of belonging and a severable ‘subject-object’ relationship of belongings. Whereas the former addresses a constitutive, non-instrumental and non-severable relationship that revolves around appropriateness and communal identity, the latter revolves around a person’s mastery of a thing that can be separated – legally, physically, emotionally – from the one who owns it. The participation of the RUC ‘co-owner’ *ideally* revolves

around collective identities, and it is as a democratically active co-owner and co-citizen, and not (solely) as an ‘employable’ individual, that the student is to be integrated into and take part in the different wholes of the so-called ‘house’, the university and larger society. In contrast to this understanding of the co-owner, the Chinese students described not only themselves but *all* students as ‘customers’ with a right to high-quality ‘products’. In this respect they fit well with the increasingly important political notion of education as a *personal investment and property*. However, the ethnographic exploration of the frictional event shows that figures are by no means uniform or self-identical – rather, the co-owner and customer co-define each other. In relation to their more ‘passive’ fellow Chinese students, the complaining Chinese students could be seen as conveying a sense of ‘active ownership’ over their education. But, compared to the ideal of the ‘co-owner’ student, their participatory conduct was more customer-like than embodying co-ownership.

Chapter 6 analyzes how, through different forms of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities, politically active students attempt to influence national educational policies and promote changes in both the university and wider society. A central question is how approaches that I call parliamentary versus activist, and student-as-such versus student-as-citizen, work in different ways to produce particular student figures and how these figures are capable of ‘collecting up’ one or many people by embodying particular visions or interests. A key question here is to what extent ‘the student body’ can be seen as a ‘whole’, and if so, whether students taking part in this whole can be characterized by integrative participation and/or aggregative participation. More generally, the chapter points to a growing tendency among students towards flexible, ad hoc and single-issue participation. This tendency, however, may work both in relation to the student organizations’ aim of producing one student *body* with one *voice*, and in relation to some of the more loosely structured student networks’ hope of bringing the protests of different people momentarily into networked agreement, but without restricting their initiatives and creativity by focusing on one finite ideology, identity or voice.

Part III, the last part of the book, is called ‘Conclusions and Directions’. Chapter 7 sums up my main findings, and I show how the various frictions and negotiations of the student figure explored throughout the book convey a continuous oscillation between what I call ‘aggregative participation’ and ‘integrative participation’ as well as ‘preserving participation’ and ‘transformative participation’. Ac-

cordingly, I argue that students' shifting modes of participation during the current processes of university reform in Denmark are best understood as a question of *entangled* figuration, which means that ostensibly oppositional figurations are co-produced and are fundamentally dependent on each other in order to take shape. The 'customer', for example, is not stable and uniform but takes shape through its entangled relations to other figures (in Denmark, primarily the 'co-owner').

This means that, contrary to the way 'social types' are often used in the literature, any one 'figure' cannot, in and by itself, be seen as an index of contemporary transformations at university and within larger society. Rather, a series of entangled figurations, with different temporal and spatial amplitudes, could be said to characterize contemporary processes of Danish university reform. In this vein, in chapter 8, I argue that making policy makers, university leaders, teachers and students more attentive to the entangled character of contemporary student figurations could open up for an 'affirmation of the positivity of difference' (Braidotti 1994: 111) that, in allowing for a different elasticity and diversity in students' participation, in turn would open up new and important learning spaces. Participation, I emphasize, should be acknowledged as a process that not only involves the idea of making a difference, but indeed also involves learning. I argue that understanding student participation as a question of 'multi-scaled citizenship' – that is, where students could and should (be allowed to) participate in multiple political and pedagogical spaces with multiple temporalities – could not only encourage students independently to explore, engage with and reflect upon different forms of participation, but also provide them with a more comprehensive understanding of the world(s) they are part of.

## Notes

All Danish quotes have been translated into English by the author.

1. The 1997 Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the so-called Lisbon Recognition Convention) was formulated by the Council of Europe and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] and is now ratified by most European countries. It has played an important role in facilitating greater academic mobility and making joint solutions in order to promote the recognition of qualifications in higher

education (see [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/LRC\\_en.asp](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/Recognition/LRC_en.asp) And <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/Bologna/>. Accessed March 25<sup>th</sup> 2015).

2. The 2000 Lisbon Strategy (sometimes also referred to as the Lisbon Process or Agenda) is not to be confused with the 1997 Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Lisbon Strategy was launched by the European Council, an institution of the European Union, in order to create a so-called knowledge-driven economy and make the European Union the most competitive economy in the world by 2010. In contrast, The Lisbon Recognition Convention is a central part of the Bologna Process which as noted above aims at creating the European Higher Education Area by making academic degree standards and quality assurance standards more comparable and compatible throughout Europe. The Lisbon Recognition Convention was formulated by the Council of Europe, an international organisation, founded in 1949 to promote co-operation between European countries. The Council of Europe is an independent body, it cannot make binding laws and is not controlled by the European Union.
3. The negotiations on a 2006 law regarding the Danish Folkeskole (primary and lower secondary school) provide a good example of how *medbestemmelse* (co-determination) and *deltagelse* (participation) are sometimes argued to differ. In the new law, the word *medbestemmelse* (co-determination, used in the previous law's objects clause: 'preparing pupils for co-determination, co-responsibility, rights and duties in a society with freedom and democracy') was changed to *deltagelse* (participation). An opposition politician criticized the shift in wording because, she said, 'participation [*deltagelse*] is not the same as co-determination [*medbestemmelse*] – participation is the pre-condition for responsible co-determination. The signal sent is that it is on trial: "You are allowed to participate, but we are the ones who make the decisions"' (Vestager 2006).
4. One point of criticism of, for example, Haraway's and Braidotti's work on figuration has been that the figure/figuration concept remains abstract and that it is neither related to concrete processes, that is, how particular figurations emerge and are negotiated in empirical locations, nor made explicit in relation to how/if the figurations have practical political applicability (see, e.g., Adrian 2006: 97; Pelletier 2004).
5. Bruno Latour (2005: 53) also uses 'figuration' in a semiotic way to describe the form and shape of agency. Instead of talking of 'worlds', however, he states that the thing that acts is given figuration through its inscription in a particular story or account. Likewise, the notion of 'figured worlds', as introduced by Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998), links to a narrative and literary approach. They define figured worlds as culturally and collectively imagined 'as if' realms that are peopled by particular figures and characters: 'By "figured world", then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to

- certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others' (Holland et al.: 52). They see a 'figured world' as a backdrop for interpretation (ibid.: 54) and the context of meaning (ibid.: 60); that is, a frame within which people 'figure' who they are. They thus argue that people's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these 'as if' worlds.
6. The university was originally, in 1972, called Roskilde University Centre, abbreviated RUC, to signal the intention of offering medium-cycle as well as long-cycle higher education. With RUC's Strategy Plan for 2020, of April 2008, the name was changed to Roskilde University, leaving out the term 'centre' in order to signal, as it says in the plan, that 'Roskilde University is a poly-faculty university with education to the highest scientific level'. The abbreviation RUC was, however, kept, and since the English translation of the university name has always been Roskilde University, I refer to the university as either RUC or Roskilde University.