



# Situating particularism in times of universalism

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Universalism represents the victory of the societal, the collective and the normative through the stressing of the systematic and the recognition of the necessity of imposing rules, laws and norms so that all individuals receive equal treatment. In contrast, particularism is identified with what is new, unique and incomparable and is a poor fit for broader rules and norms. Overall, as all-encompassing concept, universalism is seen as having a stronger hold in the global arena than particularism, which is read as partial, paradigmatic and place-based, and therefore as contrary to global integration and globalisation.

Very often, the two concepts are presented as a dichotomy and/or as a dilemma, and are thus treated as distinct aspects which compete with one another or remain antagonistic with regard to wider socioeconomic and cultural trends in a globalized setting. For sociologists, 'universalistic' and 'particularistic' measures variables or standards are often juxtaposed in research hypotheses and interpretations which seek to reflect upon changes in social attitudes, values and understandings in times of major external shocks (such as crises and/or the pandemic). Furthermore, a mixture of particularistic and universalistic measures/variables is applied to allow for interpretations that detect the emergence or continuation of certain pathways in the social, economic, cultural and political

spheres. Admittedly, there is corroboration for both concepts/conditions, which remain crucial for sociological analysis and theorisation in various thematic areas.

As I understand it, the articulation of universalistic and particularistic components remains a challenging task, especially for social scientists who would like to maintain their integrity and do justice to all the empirical evidence they have at their disposal. For example, in the domain of migration, the recent discussion regarding the role of migrants' aspirations and capabilities, along with the drivers and causes of migration flows, includes both the wider normative and system-oriented understanding of migrant behaviour and the place-, gender-, family- or status-specific characteristics that enable (or construct) migrants' aspirations and capabilities. The interaction between particularistic and individual elements and wider universal 'templates' of aspirations and capabilities states anew that social action and human agency is not an individualistic/voluntaristic exercise, but is rather based on the ongoing design of people's movements.

All in all, based on the analysis and interpretation of social processes and outcomes, it is becoming increasingly clear that, in a global arena, the routes leading to universalism are counterbalanced by particularisms, regionalisms and specificities.

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