Abstracts

Stefan Beher

Love – an exchange relationship?

In modern society, intimate relationships are generally seen as irrational and selfless; nevertheless, they are often described in terms of exchange in social sciences. According to theories of differentiation and exchange, this article is trying to assess the plausibility of exchange metaphors for the explanation of intimate relationships in the face of contradictions in the empirical research with exchange assumptions (I). For this reason, exchange concepts (II) are confronted with the modern semantic of love (III), with martial and long-term relationships (IV) and with the early phase of beginning relationships (V). Many inconsistencies between the principle of exchange and the modern conception of love are found, but also some possibilities to explain long-term relationships and even more the first contacts made to indicate a relationship in the light of exchange theory. Especially this last constellation is able to kindle love on the basis of uncertain reciprocity.

Anna-Katharina Hornidge

Discourses of Knowledge: Normative, Factual, Hegemonic

In the past thirty to forty years, the notion of 'knowledge', perceived as crucial driver for the economic development of nation-states and as key element for successful measures of international development cooperation, has been increasingly shaping global academic debates, national-level policy-making and development discourses worldwide (Stehr 1994, 2001). This paper critically assesses two differing, but overlapping discourses of knowledge, captured under notions of 'knowledge society' and the poverty alleviation-oriented 'knowledge for development', as communicative and discursive constructions of reality and redraws normative, factual and hegemonic characteristics of both discourses. Conceptually the paper builds on approaches of communicative and discursive constructivism. In particular, the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse developed by Reiner Keller (2011 a, 2011 b, 2005, 2003), Hubert Knoblauch's thoughts on communicative and instrumental action (1995, 2001) as well as Jo Reichertz' concept of 'communication power' (2010) guide the analysis. Drawing upon + a social constructivist and knowledge sociological (and additional to a post structural) perspective, the assessment of two global discourses of knowledge with local institutional, organizational and social consequences confirms the necessity to evaluate discourses and the discourse-inspired and discourse strengthening, communicative action of collective, powerful and less powerful actors concerning the construction of knowledge and power relations.

Peter Preisendörfer

Environmental Justice: From Socio-Spatial Inequality to Injustice Claims of Local Environmental Hazards

Environmental justice is a relatively new topic of environmental politics and environmental sociology. It mainly deals with the observation that underprivileged social groups more often

live in areas of low environmental quality. In a first step, the article gives a short sketch of the U.S. environmental justice movement and of the international research about socio-spatial differences in the exposure to local environmental problems. In a second step, the justice concept within the debate about environmental justice is critically reviewed. It will be shown that socially unequal environmental conditions cannot necessarily be qualified as injustice. Additional factors must be at work that inequality turns into injustice, i.e., that unequal environmental conditions lead to justice claims. The article develops a set of hypotheses about such factors. These hypotheses seem to be important for research about social inequality and social stratification in general.

Felix Wolter and Jürgen Schiener

En Route to "University Pisa"? On the Measurement of Sociological Competencies

In contrast to the general schooling system, standardized competence assessment in higher education is still underdeveloped. Interestingly, this also holds for the subject sociology where the competence for empirical methods and the consciousness for the necessity of valid indicators are supposed to be high. Furthermore, the developments regarding the "Bologna-process" and the current discussion in Germany about the so called CHE ranking suggest that there is a considerable demand for valid measurement instruments permitting to assess the acquisition of competencies by university students. In the present paper, we evaluate the feasibility of defining and measuring "sociological competencies". Alongside with general considerations, we present results and insights from a pilot study in which the competencies of 540 sociology students were measured in the style of the PISA studies. Sociological competencies are conceptualized as subject-specific cognitive performance dispositions, partitioned into sub-dimensions, operationalized by test items and scaled drawing on methods of item response theory (IRT). The findings demonstrate not only the general feasibility of comparable projects, but also show good scale characteristics of the competence indicator as presented here. Selected empirical analyses point to a high external validity of the indicator. Altogether, our results show that the idea of a standardized competence assessment in sociology should be pursued and further developed in the future.

Fabian Adelt, Johannes Weyer and Robin D. Fink

Governance of complex systems – results of a simulation study

Social sciences have discussed the issue of governance of complex systems for a long time. The following paper tackles the issue „governance of complex systems" by means of experimental sociology, in order to empirically investigate the performance of different modes of governance. The simulation framework developed is based on Esser's model of sociological explanation as well as on Kroneberg's model of frame selection. The performance of governance has been measured by means of three macro and two micro indicators. Surprisingly, central control mostly performs better than decentralized coordination. However, results do not only depend on the mode of governance, but there is a relation between performance and the composition of actor populations, which has yet not been investigated sufficiently.