

Abstracts

Axel Philipps

The problem of the meaning and the diverse forms of pictures in sociology. The relevance of material and media-specific formation aspects in reconstructive picture interpretation

In the field of German sociology, a number of reconstructive procedures for picture interpretation have been established. These methods primarily focus on photographs. Hereby, though, the socially produced diversity as well as differences in material and alternative media-specific formation have only been partially taken into account. Thus, the paper introduces a concept of pictures as crafted forms and shows how to systematically incorporate material and media-specific formation aspects in reconstructive picture interpretation. Empirically, advertisement and prehistoric hand stencils will be discussed.

Angela Graf

Scientific Elites in Germany – Social Structure and Careers

The term ‘elite’ has recently become a key concept in debates on politics of higher education. However, discourses on scientific elites do not yet seem to give sufficient information about the definition of the term itself and moreover leave out to discuss how the scientific elite has been built so far. Reaching scientific elite positions has been usually explained with meritocratically-oriented practices in the realm of science, even though elite studies already show that the social background similarly influences the chance of obtaining an elite position in general. Based on biographical data, this paper will give an overview of the social structure and career progressions of the German scientific elite between 1945 and 2013. Drawing on Bourdieu’s studies on the scientific field, two groups have been differentiated inside the scientific elite: On the one hand, there is the so-called prestige elite that characterizes those scientists that are assigned to have the highest reputation due to their scientific achievements. On the other hand, there is the power elite that subsumes the most powerful actors in the highest official positions in the scientific field. In this context, empirical results show that the social background is of great importance in order to attain such elite positions in science. As it has been examined, the majority of the scientific elite has grown up in highly privileged families. Yet, there are distinctive differences between the two elite fractions. In both cases, the social background plays a different role. Coming from a socio-economically better-situated family seems to be of great advantage for becoming part of the power elite. With regard to the prestige elite it seems to be more beneficial to have a family background with a close relation to science. Moreover, on the one hand career patterns differ between the two groups and on the other, the career paths of the elite members show strong connection with their social backgrounds. With regard to the current structural reforms the results gain importance.

Jochen Hirschle and Tuuli-Marja Kleiner

Traditional and commodified modes of social participation

In this study, we explore the role of material, symbolic and infrastructural intermediaries in the process of initiation and reproduction of informal social relations. Analyses are conducted using representative survey data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (1984-2012). We differentiate between three types of social intermediaries (SI): traditional, semi-traditional and commodified SIs. Results of the analyses indicate, first, that SIs are essential means in the process of realizing social ties. The impact of SI-usage on sociability, informal helping behavior and social network size is found to be positive and statistically significant. Second, we find usage rates of commodified SIs to increase over time (in the younger birth cohorts) and usage of traditional SIs to decline. Third, results show that waxing overall usage rates of SIs over time lead to an intensification of sociability within the younger birth cohorts.

Michael Grüttner, Andreas Moczall and Joachim Wolff

Benefit sanctions in the “activation” paradigm of the German labor market regime and social exclusion: A quantitative analysis

The German Social Code II (SGB II) defines obligations like job search requirements for recipients of the welfare benefit. Punitive benefit sanctions can be imposed against welfare recipients who do not comply with these rules. This should provide an incentive for welfare recipients to take actions to reduce their welfare dependence and to cooperate with their job center. While their benefits are reduced by a sanction welfare recipients' incomes are lower than the socio-cultural subsistence minimum provided that they cannot compensate the income loss that results from the sanction. Benefit sanctions should help to speed up the integration of welfare recipients into the labor market as a means of social inclusion. Nevertheless, they might also be a possible trigger towards social exclusion. We present first quantitative evidence on the effects of a benefit sanction concerning the perception of social exclusion among sanctioned individuals by drawing theoretically from a model of precarity and resources. We analyze a data set that combines survey data from the “Panel Labour Market and Social Security” (PASS) with administrative data from the German Federal Employment Agency. While descriptive statistics and OLS regressions show a positive association between being sanctioned and the perception of social exclusion, the association disappears in longitudinal analyses using fixed effects. These findings suggest that imposing sanctions does not trigger social exclusion, instead, persons already feeling excluded are at higher risk of being sanctioned. Moreover, the regular threat of sanctions might induce an ex-ante effect on the perception of social exclusion.

Jenni Brichzin

Practice in Parliaments. The central democratic institution in light of current research

Deciphering the logic of political practice: how does it work in central democratic institutions, the parliaments? Sociology as well as Political Science have hitherto approached this question rather selectively. Thanks mainly to legislative studies, we have gained broad knowledge con-

sidering the first constituent of practice, namely the setting of situations. Thus, we are able to enumerate and conceptualize the complex challenges professionalized parliamentary actors have to deal with, especially with regard to the overflow of contents, scarcity of time and excess of normativity. In contrast, parliamentary activity as the second constituent of practice remains elusive: Parliamentary actors are in general one-sidedly conceptualized as representatives, which is why their way of actively coping with situated challenges is obscured or even problematized. It is Policy Science that brings the importance of processing political contents into focus. Policy Science depicts the crucial role of political actors. But it was not until the most recent developments in ethnographic parliamentary studies that the complex content formation performance of parliamentary actors was grasped on a more general scale. By suspending classic and strongly normative concepts of democratic theory, this area of research contributes to a better understanding of parliamentary processes.