

I-02: Experience, conventions and the common good

Ort/Lieu/Location: tbd

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Plenary-Abstract

The French approach of convention theory (CT) focuses on actors, which have to coordinate in situations to realize a common goal. The basic assumption of convention theory is that actors rely on conventions as shared frames on how to interpret, how to value, and how to evaluate objects, actions, persons in situations. At the core of conventionalists' thinking is the insight that actors aim to realize a common good, when they are entangled in coordinating situations – e.g. in education, social policies or urban life. Standards, norms and values are embedded in situational settings and actors are not regarded with a specific and durable rationality. Instead actor's rationalities are considered as incomplete and their completion depends on the dominant conventions in situations, and the situational equipment with cognitive forms and objects. From a conventionalist perspective there is a plurality of coexisting conventions which actors mobilize, for example, in education, social policy and, more broadly, urban settings. This is the reason why critique and strategies of justifications are always lurking in situations of conflicts and coordination. Governing education and social welfare or urban forms of cohabitation brings to the fore tensions between different forms of rationalities, conventions and experiences. Convention theory can be conceived as a new pragmatist institutional approach which is nowadays applied in different fields of social research. The plenary session will open up with insights into different conventionalist research strands in the field of education and social policies and will end up with a main contribution from Laurent Thévenot joining the question of convention and of the common City. The plenary session will be an opportunity to interrogate convention theory's ability to tackle the various fields – especially education, social welfare, urban mobilizations – where the making of the common plays out in the tensed imbrication of a plurality of conventions, rationalities and spatial settings. It will be the occasion to discuss different collective intentionalities aiming to realize a collective goal and achieving a common good – and more fundamentally a “commonality in the plural” (Thévenot).

I-02.1: Welcome address

Vincent Kaufmann (EPFL Lausanne)

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I-02.2: Introduction to the plenary session

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Abstract

The short introduction will sketch the development and diversity of CT and pragmatic sociology in Switzerland. Switzerland can be regarded as an interface between the French social sciences (the original domain of convention theory) and the German speaking sociologies. It will also be the occasion to reflect on the recent pragmatic turn of urban studies as a telling example of the way convention theory allow to rethink descriptive and critical questions. The following presentations will be introduced.

I-02.3: Common Good and Self-Interest in Education

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Abstract

On the one hand education contributes to social cohesion of the civil society. It belongs to the public sphere and has to justify its aims, structures and results. However, education is based on a plurality of values supposed to be established for the well-being and benefit of everybody and the society. Depending on the type of educational setting – school, high school, vocational education and training, higher education, lifelong learning – actors bring different common goods into action. Processes of governing education (policy maker, administration), teaching and allocating children (profession) or choosing educational pathways (parents, individuals) are oriented towards a variety of worth and lead to disputes on the aims of education, fair educational opportunities or quality of school. On the other hand, education is an individual project, prerequisite for social mobility and well-being of the person, and in consequence moulded by self-interest. In an expansion of the model of conflicting orders of worth that helps to differentiate ways of voicing concerns in the public sphere ("compound communities") Thévenot developed other regimes of engagement that describes modes of coordination of the individual with its environment ("compound personalities"). These regimes enable the individual to tune and to construct his/her personality, trajectory and the conduct of life. In situations of constraints individuals must refer capably to the different orders of worth and call for the conditions that enable and ensure the respective regime of engagement. The paper aims at demonstrating along some empirical examples the explanatory power of the theoretical framework of CT for understanding negotiations and different engagements, critiques and tensions in the process of coordination of education as a common good and as an individual project.

I-02.4: The challenges of aiming towards the common good in social policies

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Abstract

The contribution emphasizes the significant added value of a combination of the convention theory (CT) and the capability approach (CA) for the analysis of contemporary social policies. In this field, at least three levels interact, i.e. the one of policy-design (parliamentary arenas and senior public administration), the one of implementation (street-level bureaucrats) and finally that of beneficiaries. At each level, different normativities or rationalities are endorsed. The paper argues that an analytical framework combining the epistemological and normative foundations of the CT and the CA is particularly adjusted to capture the complexities of the normative debates in the field of social policies. In particular, it can unveil the hidden normativity of managerial governance and evidence-based practices (e.g. indicators, effectiveness measures and outcome variables) that is too often taken for granted and, as such, subtracted from public deliberation. As a matter of fact, social policies are not value free-descriptions, but rely on normative choices on how to interpret and value situations. As such they are inspired by specific conventions that may collide with the values or conventions of street-level bureaucrats and beneficiaries. Thus, the implementation of social policies requires an elaborate "art of composition" (Thévenot) between these various conventions and rationalities. We claim that the economy of conventions offers useful concepts, such as "economies of worth" or "pragmatic regimes

of engagement”, that when combined with CA notions like “positional objectivity” or “informational basis of judgment in justice” allow a more fine-tuned understanding of the cognitive and normative challenges of contemporary social policies.

I-02.5: Critically differing in a Common City

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Abstract

While the city gave birth to detached polis and public, it is still built as a space of places which human beings are personally attached to by familiarly dwelling and inhabiting them. Instead of staying within the reductive public/private opposition, we have to explore ways human being engage with their urban environment at various scales, working their way from close familiarity up to commonalities in the plural. Based on transcultural empirical research – in Europe, Russia and America – which argues for extended comparative categories, the contribution will develop an analytical framework to cope with arts of human cohabitation and urban composition. This contribution will present newer developments in EC and French pragmatic sociology. Also it will be the longest in the plenary session and its core contribution.

I-02.6: Crossed discussions

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