

The Governance of Public Epistemologies

Proposal for the First Berlin Forum on Innovation in Governance
(Thursday 20 - Friday 21 May 2010, Technische Universität Berlin)

Holger Straßheim
Humboldt Universität Berlin
Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

holger.strassheim@sowi.hu-berlin.de

Current research shows that the modes of political expertise and knowledge production across countries are subject to multiple transformations (Weingart and Lentsch 2009). On the one hand, one can observe the scientization of public policy and the increasing relevance of evidence-based instruments like benchmarking, monitoring and peer reviews. On the other hand, science is being politicized by counter expertise and civil society pressure. Knowledge entrepreneurs and contract research organizations take advantage of commercial strategies and, as a result, further intensify the competition between experts. While some authors maintain that science still functions as the societal force of rationalization, others predict the emergence of a more interactive and transgressive mode of public knowledge production.

By turning to the concept of *knowledge orders* (Jasanoff 2005; Weingart 2003), we move away from a priori assumptions about the authority or legitimacy of science in society. Instead, the question is posed how knowledge becomes to be perceived as reliable and how in a given society knowledge claims are used as a basis for making collective choices. Knowledge orders are governance arrangements between science, politics and economics. They establish a certain public epistemology which influences the production, circulation and objectification of publicly relevant knowledge and the institutionalization of specific practices and procedures. Comparative studies have shown that countries like the US, Germany or Great Britain vary significantly in terms of expert styles, public accountability, forms of objectivity, participation in public knowledge production and science-policy interaction.

The main assumption of this paper is that knowledge orders also affect the emergence, stabilisation and expansion of new forms of governance. Especially Alfred Schutz (1976 [1959]) and John Dewey (1939) have argued that the social production and distribution of

knowledge is tightly coupled to processes of valuation and interest formation. Following this line of thought, knowledge orders constitute a specific order of worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). They at least partly determine by which practices or procedures a newness, novelty or invention is being identified as publicly relevant, remarkable, worth to be preserved, valuable and thus innovative.

The paper has two goals. Firstly, the concept of knowledge orders as orders of worth will be outlined. Secondly, the paper will point out what the currently observable transformations of these public epistemologies could mean for the formation of innovations in governance.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On Justification. Economies of Worth*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Dewey, J. (1939). *Theory of Value*. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press.

Jasanoff, S. (2005). *Designs on Nature: Science and Democracy in Europe and the United States*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press.

Schütz, A. (1976 [1959]). The Well-Informed Citizen. An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge. In A. Schütz (Ed.), *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theorie* (pp. 120-134). Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.

Weingart, P. (2003). *Wissenschaftssoziologie*. Bielefeld: transcript.

Weingart, P., & Lentsch, J. (2009). *Scientific Advice to Policy Making: International Comparison*. Opladen/Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich.