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Human action, tacit knowledge and embodied skills

Skillful performance in sports requires the ability to master uncertain situations by means of body techniques often under time constraints. It appears obvious that this kind of competence does not only owe to time-consuming planning processes and knowledge-based rationalizations governed by the conscious mind, but also involves the 'intelligence' of an experienced body. Yet, many hegemonic approaches to human action or movement provided in the field of sport sciences focus almost exclusively on those underlying mental processes. Especially in the last couple of years, however, these theories have come under criticism for their intellectualistic stance and reductionist understanding of human action and being. Against the background of this critique, several frameworks have been formulated, claiming that the faculty to react to uncertain situations in a quick and flexible manner constitutively depends on incorporated knowledge and subjective sensations, which are largely tacit and hence difficult to objectify.

In the course of a paradigm shift labeled 'practice turn'¹, in the field of social sciences as well, concepts of tacit knowledge and embodied skills have started to enjoy an increasing popularity with regard to the explanation of dexterous practice. Sociological practice theories maintain that versed action is not only to be attributed to cognitive processes, but draws on incorporated dispositions, too, which had been acquired in collective practices during socialization. Under certain conditions, these dispositions function as a 'practical sense'², an intuitive feeling and tacit knowledge for what is to be done, allowing for an immediate, i.e. pre-reflective understanding and flexible coping with a situation. According to the premises of practice theory, this sort of intelligence is not stored in an individual's mind as a subjective possession, but is rather to be regarded as a relational and situational phenomenon emerging in between different (human and non-human) 'actants'³.

So far, attempts to establish interdisciplinary linkages between the different approaches from sports and social sciences have been rare. Thus, I intend to correlate them in order not only to identify parallels but also to uncover blind spots and shortcomings in the particular concepts and to correct them mutually. It is my prior concern to integrate insights from social practice theory into concepts of motor control and vice versa in order to achieve a more adequate understanding of human activity, which accounts for both sports and everyday situations.

¹ Schatzki, T., Knorr Cetina, K., v.Savigny, E. (eds.) (2001): *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. London, New York.

² Bourdieu, P. (1987): *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*. Frankfurt/M., p. 122.

³ Latour, B. (1996): *On Actor-Network-Theory. A few clarifications*. In: *Soziale Welt*, 47, pp. 369-381.