

The Agony of Choice. The Social Conditions and Consequences of Rational Decision-Making

International Workshop at the Carl von Ossietzky - University of Oldenburg,
May 22nd to May 23rd 2014

The economization of the social and the social impact of neoliberalism are current research topics in the social sciences. The transfer of the economic core concept of the free market to areas not commonly associated with economy (e.g. the health sector, education etc.), its performative effects and the responsabilization of individuals are hotly debated issues. Despite general criticism of the homo oeconomicus as an unrealistic model, the effects of rational decision-making as the free market-model's core premise is not in the focus of social-science analysis. This workshop aims at shifting this accentuation. It concentrates on the emergence of decision-making as a social demand and the transformation of citizens into decision-makers.

Statistical decision theory, including game theory, systems analysis and others, has fundamentally changed the understanding of rationality and decision. In postwar times the concept of the decision-maker became a function or a mechanism applicable not only to individuals, but also to groups and machines. Michael Callon proposed the thesis, that Economics produces the conditions for its models to become real. *Expanding Callon's thesis of performative Economics, we assume that the concept of the decision-maker has not only changed theory, but reality, too* – with profound consequences for individuals addressed as decision-makers as well as for social structures.

In various areas of life – be it buying of shampoo, in the doctor's office, in the delivery room, in church parishes or at the job center – people are treated as decision-makers who are supposed to make informed and rational choices. Oftentimes, this new governance technology of mobilizing decision-making is welcomed as a gain of individual freedom and autonomy. *We, in contrast, want to critically examine the social consequences of this transformation of citizens into decision-makers; this implies analyzing the stipulated and disseminated notion of rationality and decision, new techniques of subjectivation and of social control as well as their powerful commingling with the social quest for individual autonomy and freedom.* Thus, we assume that examining the emergence of decision-making as a social demand is a fruitful perspective in which many contemporary social phenomena, from patient autonomy in medicine to the responsabilization of individuals can be analyzed and understood in a new light.

THURSDAY, MAY 22nd (12:00-20:00) *Place: Senatssitzungssaal, A 14 1-111*

11:30 Coffee and tea

12:00-12:20 Welcome (Silja Samerski and Anna Henkel)

12:20-14:20 Conceptualizing and Addressing People as Decision-makers

Sebastian Haus (Marburg):

Autonomous Self-regulation in Risk-situations. The German HIV/AIDS-Discourse and the Concept of the Decision-maker in the 1980s

Melanie Messer, Jacob Reilley (Bielefeld):

Patients as Decision-makers: Quality Competition between Hospitals and the Dissemination of Rationality

Silja Samerski (Oldenburg):

Programmed Autonomy. The Call for informed Decision-making.

Discussion

14:20-14:50 Coffee break

14:50-16:00 Practices of Rational Decision-making

Janna Vogl (Erfurt):

NGOs in a South Indian City: Choices and Hierarchies

Arthur Bueno (Frankfurt):

Passions of the Homo Oeconomicus: Rationality and Emotions in Everyday Economic Action

Discussion

16:00-17:10 Social Consequences of Rational Decision-making

Uwe Schimank (Bremen):

Coping as Sub-incrementalist Decision-making. The Middle Classes' Agony of Today

Anna Henkel (Oldenburg):

Decision-making and Responsibilization

Discussion

18:00: Key-note lecture: Sonja M. Amadae (Cambridge, MA) *Place: A 14, Hörsaal 3*

Inventing the Neoliberal Subject: Nuclear Deterrence, Game Theory, and Neoliberal Political Economy

FRIDAY, MAY 23rd (9:30-17:00) Place: Senatssitzungssaal, A 14 1-111

9:30-11:30 Reshaping Rationality: Historical Perspectives

Philip Hoffmann-Rehnitz (Münster)

„I can calculate the movement of the stars, but not the madness of men“ (I. Newton). „Speculation“, „Crisis“ and the Borderlines of Rationality in the economic Discourse of (late) Modernity – the Example of the “South Sea Bubble”

Sajay Samuel (State College, PA):

Tenseless Choices

Barbara Duden (Hannover):

Doing and Omission under the Conditions of Uncertainty. The Example of historically conveyed Perceptions of pregnant Women

Discussion

11:30-13:30 Performative Economics. (How) Does Economics Construct Reality?

Jan Sparsam (Jena):

What does it mean to say that Economics performs (formal) Rationality? A Critique of Callon's Understanding of Economization

Ivan Boldyrev and Ekaterina Svetlova (Berlin/Karlsruhe)

Some Challenges for Performativity Analysis: An Example of Risk Communication in Investment Advisor Services

Juliane Böhme (Berlin):

Framing in Laboratory Experiments. Production and Understanding

Discussion

13:30 -14:30 Lunch break

14:30 – 16:30: Sociological Perspectives on (rational) Decision-makers

Jonas Barth (Oldenburg):

Economical Subjectification, Agent based Criticism and the Possibility of social Change

Dieter Bögenhold (Klagenfurt):

Bounded Rationality and Decision-making: Thoughts from a sociological Perspective

Michael Florian (Hamburg):

The Paradoxes of Choice: Trust and Rationality in the Making of Entrepreneurs

Discussion

16:30-16:50 Conclusions (Anna Henkel and Silja Samerski)