

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

International Workshop at the University of Oldenburg,

May 22nd to May 23rd 2014

Call for papers

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.

We look for contributions from sociology, economy, history, political sciences and other areas that analyze the historical and epistemological a priori of (rational) decision-making, the diffusion of its premises, concepts and techniques in different social arenas as well as its social consequences.

Information on the workshop:

The workshop is a collaboration of the Research Training Group “Self-Making. Practices of Subjectivation” and the Research Group “Sociological Theory”, both at the University of Oldenburg.

Place: University of Oldenburg

Time: Thur, May 22nd 12 pm to Fri, May 23rd 5 pm (2014)

Keynote speaker: S. M. Amadae (Program on STS, Harvard University)

Conference language: English, but we do not principally exclude German contributions.

We cannot refund travel and accommodation.

We welcome abstracts of max. two pages until Feb. 15th.

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