

Abstracts

Shalini Randeria

Legal plurality and overlapping sovereignties: Globalisation and the cunning state of India.

The article addresses the issues of legal plurality, overlapping sovereignties, the consequent fragmentation of state action and the increasing unaccountability of international financial and trade organizations, transnational corporations as well as of states and NGOs which characterize the new architecture of global governance. It will be argued that the widely prevalent diagnosis of the growing irrelevance of the state and the erosion of its sovereignty overlooks the prevailing importance of the state as its laws and policies play a key role in transposing neo-liberal agendas to the national and local levels. The article introduces the idea of the cunning state in an attempt to shift the focus of study from a consideration of state (in)capacity measured against a Western ideal to a delineation of state strategies. It is argued that whereas weak states lack the capacity to protect the interests of vulnerable citizens, cunning states show strength or weakness depending on the domestic interests at stake. The paper focuses on the dynamic of legal politics against impoverishment and dispossession caused by the new global designs of intellectual property protection, biodiversity conservation and privatisation of the commons in India. The case studies point to the emergence of intertwined structures of rule, overlapping sovereignties and complex processes of legal transnationalisation that have reconfigured the relations between law, state, and territoriality. They also reveal pragmatic issue-based alliances between civil society and the state. Finally, they point to the need to ground the study of globalisation in a fine-grained ethnography, linking the micro- to the macro-level and to explore the specificity of various trajectories of legal plurality and its transnationalisation in specific contexts and cases.

Jörg Rösset

Omnivores in the Cinema? Distinction through cultural variety in Germany

Describing cultural change in postindustrial societies, sociologists refer more and more to Richard A. Peterson concept of the ›Cultural Omnivore‹. Drawing on ›Cultural Omnivore‹ Peterson argues that the exclusive orientation towards high-brow culture has lost its social function. This is most apparent e.g. in the educational system or on the labor market. It is replaced by a preference for cultural variety. Next to elements of high culture popular culture becomes visible. The essay outlines three different interpretations of this phenomenon. In a next step a possible translation of Peterson's concept into a German context is critically discussed. For that purpose a self-conducted survey on cinemagoers is presented. Although there are theoretical reasons to expect evidence for the ›omnivore thesis‹, the actual results show only weak signs which would allow for its applicability in the German context.

Thomas Gautschi und Dominik Hangartner

Size Does Matter. Body Height, Human Capital, and Income

Econometrical efforts to predict employees' wages earned on the labor market are normally based on a Mincer wage function. Following from that, human capital, such as education and job experience, are assumed to positively influence productivity and the employee's wage. Apparently, labor markets do not only pay its employees according to their human capital, but also additionally pay a wage premium for a non-productive (ity effective) characteristic, namely a person's body height. Analyses using the Swiss Health Survey 2002 (Swiss Federal Statistics Office) show that the »return to body height« for male Swiss employees is about 6‰ and approximately 5‰ for female Swiss employees. Similar results referring to the influence of body height on income have been demonstrated for the United States of America, and to a certain degree for Germany too. Attempts to explain this – at least from the point of view of human capital theory – irrationality of the labor market emphasize that body height is a signal of power, respect, and perseverance and is therefore paid accordingly. Even though there is lack of empirical evidence for a causal relation between body height and personal drive (i.e., perseverance and respect), the Swiss labor market nevertheless seems to assume such a correlation.

Martin Schmeiser

Sociological Approaches to the Analysis of Professions, Professionalization, and Professional Action

In the last decades, a vibrant and ramified field called »sociology of professions« has been established in Europe as well as in the US. It led to a growing variety of publications which appear thematically only loosely coupled. The lack of systematization becomes especially acute in teaching the field. Although German speaking scholars of sociology of professions have tried to systematize the discipline, these efforts have turned out not particularly helpful for teaching purposes. These attempts fall short of developing a genuine terminology, specific research questions and designs. In effect, »sociology of professions« became present as a sheer duplicate of general sociological theories. The article aims at systematizing perspectives genuine to the sociology of professions. It is argued that three main perspectives can be identified: The trait model, the structural perspective, and a power-oriented approach.