

Standing group Sociology of International Relations (AK SiB)  
Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft

**Call for Papers**

**Micro-moves in International Institutions**

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- Venue: University of Potsdam, DFG Research Training *Group Wicked  
Problems, Contested Administrations*
- Date: February 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> 2017
- Deadlines: Abstracts November 21<sup>th</sup> 2016; papers January 31<sup>st</sup> 2017

A recent interest in micro-phenomena in international politics, particularly in institutionalized settings, can be observed, be it studies of experiments following a rationalist logic, be it the turn toward narratives and practices which examine more closely how macro-politics get enacted, appropriated, and modified in micro-practices (Chakravarty 2013; Kertzer 2016; Solomon and Steele 2016). This workshop aims to contribute to the debate by investigating theoretical, methodological, and empirical questions of studying 'micro-moves' in international institutions. One goal of the workshop is identifying methodological and theoretical paths toward generalizing from micro-observations.

**International Institutions in Perspective**

The world seen from the perspective of International Relations scholars is a world of states which can be understood by turning to theories with a decided focus on macro phenomena. Anarchy, hegemony and the balance-of-power structure the way states act, including their strategies and practices in fora of international institutions and organisations. Based on assumptions that see international organisations as derivatives of states' interests, IR scholars have mostly dealt with the (lacking) output of international organisations, but much less with their social role in international society. Since the diagnosis by Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986) that IR dealt too little with the epistemological challenges of studying regimes

in their informal, social or habitualised practices while focusing only on the formalised structures of international organisations, IR has indeed taken a turn to what are commonly called ‘sociological approaches’. Yet, it overall remains wedded to macro-theories.

With the introduction to the neo-institutionalist idea of organisations as world cultural models (Meyer et al. 1997) and the normative institutionalist idea of ‘logics of appropriateness’ and ‘logic of arguing’ (March and Olsen 1989, Risse 2000), IR allowed for engaging with organisations and institutions in their internal operations, but often turning to sociological accounts of international institutions also comes with different conceptual baggage that pre-structures analyses in a way that seems similar to relying on the grand theories of IR.

More recently, work on international organisations has produced such perspectives as principal-agent approaches (Siebenhüner 2008), notions of an empowered bureaucracy (Barnett and Finnemore 2004) or the identification of hypocrisy traps (Weaver 2006) – which reflect different theoretical premises, ranging from methodological individualism to Weberian forms of authority. However, most of the afore-mentioned analyses are still more concerned with the consequences of these processes for the performance of international organisations than their social reproduction. Or to put it differently, even in their scrupulous empirical analyses of intra-organisational practices many scholars adhere to the powerful paradigms of IR, e.g. the dominant role of states or motive-based action, and do not challenge prevalent ontological assumptions nor opt for inductive reasoning.

By putting theoretical concepts of sociology into empirical research, scholars of international organisations have developed more sophisticated understandings of intra- and inter-organisational processes (see some contributions in Conceição-Heldt, Koch, and Liese 2015). We observe an emerging and indeed exciting body of literature that follows actors into their field of expertise witnessing United Nations conferences (Campbell et al 2014), the trajectory of conventions (Holzscheiter 2010), diplomats at various sites (Neumann 2013), knowledge production in inter- and transnational organizations (Esguerra 2014, Bueger 2015) or engages with the various linguistic representations of international institutionalised arenas (Groth 2012; Freistein 2013, 2015). Furthermore, the various latest “turns”, such as the linguistic, pictorial, ethnographic or practice turn, have mostly favoured perspective shifts toward micro-observations (as “micro-moves”), but have largely remained separated in their discussion in IR. The common questions that arise from these turns, however, go beyond theoretical debates, but also concern the research practices and methodological instruments we engage with. One of the main challenges thus emerges in the lack of methodological instruments suited to bridge the gap between observing micro-practices and accounting for them in generalisations beyond established theories. Or, in other words, the task of (re)-coupling the micro-observations of institutional practices or knowledge production to the largely macro-focused debates in IR remains.

### **Themes for Papers**

The workshop conveners invite exercises of researching micro-practices in and of international institutions to foster a dialogue on the methodological issue of doing research and making generalizations. We attempt to bring into conversation sociological and political science traditions of examining micro-situations. Thus, we invite paper proposals which

focus on micro-practices in the larger context of different international institutions either from a theoretical, methodological, or empirical perspective. This may include, but is not limited to the following contributions which engage in

- **theoretical innovation** by explicating the theoretical link of the relationship of micro-observations and macro-theories in international institutions.
- **methodological reflections** which investigate the methodological challenges of doing micro-oriented research.
- **empirical exercises** of researching micro-practices in and of international institutions.

### Practicalities

**Abstracts & Papers:** Please send your paper proposal to [esguerra@uni-potsdam.de](mailto:esguerra@uni-potsdam.de) by **November 21<sup>th</sup>**. We will review the abstracts and get back to you by **November 28<sup>th</sup>**. We welcome either full papers or concept notes of 10 pages by **January 31<sup>st</sup> 2017**.

**Venue & Funding:** The workshop will take place at the DFG Research Training Group *Wicked Problems, Contested Administrations* at the University of Potsdam on February 9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup>. We currently aim at securing some travel stipends for those who have no funding. Please indicate when sending your abstract if you would need a travel stipend.

## Literature

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