



Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg · Rempartstraße 15 · 79085 Freiburg



CALL FOR PAPERS

« Selective affinities, friendship and obligations in the investigations in sociology and political science: fieldwork in a comparative perspective in Europe »

Freiburg im Breisgau, 28-30 April 2010

Organization committee: Gaëlle Dequirez (University of Lille), Dr. Jeanne Hersant (University of Freiburg) and Dr. Cécile Vigour (University of Bordeaux).

In recent years, the conventional methodology and topics of mainstream research in political science have been questioned by various developments. Indeed, at the end of the 20th century, it became clear that the study of traditional subjects in political science (such as voting and political parties), as well as the use of statistical methods alone, allowed for neither an accurate analysis of the phenomena studied nor a comprehension of politics in all its complexity (Levy & Zwicky 1980, Fillieule 1997). In reference to the School of Chicago (for instance Becker 2001), several authors, especially in France and in the United States, have in the last ten years advocated a widening application of ethnographic methods towards the study of political phenomena, by including new political objects of research (*Qualitative Sociology* 2006, Buffat 2007)¹.

We will address the question of what influence these developments have on the contemporary political research in Europe. The times of quantitative methods being considered a precaution against “charlatans, deceptions and crazy people” (Kriesi 1980: 383) appear to be over. Nevertheless the ethnographic approach is regarded as non scientific by some mainstream political scientists and often remains “at the bottom of investigation methods” (Beaud 1996 : 229, see also Nullmeier and al. 2003). Beyond these considerations, this workshop aims to

¹ Let us also mention the Perestroika movement, since 2000, which called on methodological pluralism and challenged the hegemonic positivistic paradigm in American political science, based on causal modelling, mathematical methodology and rational choice theory (Monroe, 2005, Schram & Caterino, 2006).

foster dialogue between varied methodological approaches; we will consider ethnography as well as situated case-study methods that, we think, can help deepen our understanding of political phenomena.

Qualitative investigations are based on interpersonal relationships in the frame of an ongoing interaction. The complicity between the researcher and his respondents as well as the immersion in fieldwork create the conditions of field data collection and interpretation (Bourdieu 1993, Hirschauer & Amman 1997). The content and the setting of such relations often lead the researcher to deviate from the initial protocol of investigation. What impact does this have on the definition of the research subject and on the chosen theoretical point of view?

The aim of this workshop is hence to move the focus from the methodological domain to the epistemological one, by considering that the investigation/investigative relationship is not only a means for empirical validation but also a means for data production and interpretation. Above all, it is a principle of research subject construction.

We will address the effects of the closeness between the researcher and the participants – friendship (Silver 1989, Novello 2009), acquaintance network, ties of subordination – on the production and publicity of scholarly knowledge and discourses. Indeed, the investigation relationship has to be analysed just like other social ties: this can allow the researcher to stress crucial political dimensions or to emphasize the relevance of the data. We will first question what is being negotiated in the investigation relationship – exchange of information or favours, support, remuneration (Bruneteaux 2007). In this respect, works on friendship, notability or exchange relations in politics can be useful (Eisenstadt & Roniger 1984, Briquet 2004, Hersant & Toumarkine 2005), since they have highlighted political dimensions of relationships thought by actors as not necessarily political ones. Our purpose is to identify and analyse bonds of obligation and ties of moral, affective or intellectual affinity with “friends”, “peers” or “patrons” - without reifying these categories. Second, we ask to what extent these links guide the choice of a topic, and thus the formulation of research subjects: for instance by leading the researcher to explore new directions, or to inscribe one’s analysis in (or to break with) a pre-established intellectual frame. We will also address the influence on the way the research is publicized.

It is well known for instance that the researcher’s position (social position or intellectual posture, insider or outsider) *vis-à-vis* the group or organization studied has some effects on the choice of the subject, and possibly also on the approach chosen. The connections between research subject and political activism have been analyzed in France concerning the over-representation of the studies on leftist political parties (Fretel 2005). This could also explain the attraction of European political science to “civil society organizations” which allegedly remedy

the “democratic deficit” of the EU². Bonds of obligation, institutional power relations or intellectual affinity might also be explored as regards the field of European studies, especially if one considers the sociological and reflexive turns it has experienced in the last few years (Favell & Guiraudon 2009, Saurugger 2009, Vauchez 2008).

Without passing judgement on these commitments or selective affinities, our goal is to examine the sociological conditions of knowledge production as far as political phenomena are concerned, and therefore the conditions of production of related cognitive frames. We encourage presentations which emphasize investigation experiences based on steady interactions with the interviewees (in a formal or informal way). Presentations should recount the process of definition of the research subject/object, or the identification of political dynamics. The workshop will be held at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität in Freiburg; English will be the official language, although exchanges in French and German might take place in the course of the debates. Original contributions are welcome with the view of eventual publication. Proposals should be sent by email to Jeanne Hersant (jeanne.hersant@grk-freundschaft.uni-freiburg.de) and Gaëlle Dequirez (gdequirez@hotmail.com) by January 10, 2010.

Selection of proposals: 10 February 2010

Deadline for sending final drafts: 10 April 2010

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² Among the recently published works, see for instance Kissling & al. 2008.

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