

A parliament of sociologies: Soziologie der Parlamente? Conference, Forum Internationale Wissenschaft (FIW) Bonn, 10-11 June 2016

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Endre Dányi | Veranstaltungsbericht | 18.07.2016

A parliament of sociologies

Soziologie der Parlamente? conference, Forum Internationale Wissenschaft (FIW) Bonn, 10–11 June 2016

Parliamentary democracy in the post-Cold War era seems to be characterised by a curious paradox: The more accessible its business becomes to the public, the more people are convinced that real politics must be happening *elsewhere*. Over the past two or three decades, social sciences have come up with various responses to this paradox: Some scholars have moved towards more and more abstract theoretical concepts associated with democratic politics, whereas others have taken to more and more detailed empirical analyses of what ‘elsewhere’ means. That is, they have studied seemingly apolitical places such as laboratories, hospitals, and financial markets, in order to show how politics is being done through scientific, medical, and economic means. The two-day conference entitled “Soziologie der Parlamente?” can be seen as an attempt to challenge this division of labour by insisting on the importance of parliaments – not as abstract political institutions, but as particular arrangements of a variety of political practices.¹

Throughout the conference, several participants have pointed out that the convenors – Jenni Brichzin (Würzburg), Damien Krichewsky (Bonn), Leopold Ringel (Bonn), and Jan Schank (Frankfurt am Main), supported by the ‘Political Sociology’ and ‘Legal Sociology’ sections of the DGS as well as the FIW – might be preaching to the choir. After all, a sociology of parliaments already exists, and its history reaches back several decades. HELMAR SCHÖNE (Schwäbisch Gmünd), author of *Alltag im Parlament* (2010), for instance, referred to John C. Wahlke’s *The legislative system* (1962) and Richard F. Fenno’s *Home Style* (1978) as some of the foundational texts.² JENS BORCHERT (Frankfurt am Main) named the *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, established in 1976, as one of the shared points of reference in the field.

In this sense, many contributions at the conference seemed to confirm this claim of continuity: presentations focusing on the rate of new members in newly elected parliaments (ELENA SEMENOVA, Berlin), the relationship between parliaments and ‘the people’ (LARS VOGEL, Jena), the internal discipline of party fractions (MICHAEL EDINGER, Jena), the work of lobby groups (FLORIAN SPOHR, Bochum), and the activities of the German parliamentary ethics committee (GORDIAN EZAZI, Duisburg-Essen), to name just a

few, mobilised an impressive spectrum of material – both empirical data and academic literature – that could be collectively referred to as the sociology of parliaments.

At the same time, there are good reasons to believe that there is something new bubbling under the surface. Let me point out four themes that in my view nicely indicate how a sociological analysis of parliamentary practices – informed by Science and Technology Studies (STS), governmentality studies, and French and American pragmatism – may contribute to the rethinking of democratic politics. The first is concerned with a widely-held conviction among political scientists that sociological inquiries are primarily ‘micro-studies’ of political phenomena. ULF BOHMANN (Jena) and HENNING LAUX’s (Chemnitz) study of synchronisation as the temporal coordination of parliamentary practices clearly showed, however, that the ways in which ‘micro’ and ‘macro’ levels are being negotiated and put in relation with each other should be our main concern. Such an approach is interesting not only because it allows sociologists of parliaments to add new dimensions (e.g. temporality) to already existing research topics, but also because it creates new questions for the field (e.g. what does it mean to say democratic politics takes time?).

The second theme is well-known from STS and Foucauldian governmentality studies: I am alluding to the recognition that the technical and material infrastructure of politics matters. STEFAN LAUBE (Frankfurt am Main) presented a study of the invisible literary and archival work which a parliamentary fraction had put into their goal of understanding and adapting their political positions during the last European Parliamentary election campaign. Thus, he demonstrated how political work is being improved but also further complicated by the widespread use of digital technologies. Just as increased attention to actual political practices casts doubt on the micro/macro divide, increased attention to technical tools also encourages scholars to look into the relationship between ‘the technical’ and ‘the political’. Politicians can no longer afford to concentrate only on the latter, nor can sociologists of parliaments.

This already hints at the third theme: There is a shift in focus from representation to performativity. Both popular and academic literature usually refers to politicians as representatives, meaning those who represent the will of the people. The stronger the correspondence, the better the politician, we might expect. STEFFEN AMLING and ALEX GEIMER’s (Hamburg) as well as MARION REISER’s (Lüneburg) presentations suggest otherwise. In their readings, being a good politician is associated more strongly with authentic performances rather than with faithful representations of voters’ interests. Unpacking the concept of authenticity with regard to parliamentary politics seems to be an

exciting way of re-engaging with the paradox of democracy mentioned in the beginning of this text.

The fourth theme was not directly addressed at the conference, but it is linked to a curious disconnect between the conference presentations and the guided tour through the former administrative district of Bonn that was offered at the end of the first day of the conference. As RUDOLF STICHWEH (Bonn) had already pointed out in his keynote lecture, the history of modern parliaments is neither very long nor linear. There are hardly any more powerful illustrations of this double claim than the buildings that once housed the parliament and the MPs offices of the Bonn Republic. After the Bundestag had moved to Berlin in 1999, the so-called Bundeshaus and other buildings have been turned into congress venues or United Nations offices. As our guided tour showed, there is an endless amount of funny and surprising stories about politics between the end of the Second World War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, including one about a parliament building, modelled after the Paulskirche, that had already been built in Frankfurt am Main when politicians changed their mind and Bonn was made capital of the Federal Republic after all. The parliament-that-never-was is currently part of the headquarters of the Hessischer Rundfunk. Curiously, none of these stories appear in academic analyses which tend to address democracy as a timeless, universal model of governance. What would a sociology of parliaments look like if we included storytelling as a mode of analysis? If we tried to conceptualise good political work in terms of performance rather than representation? If we paid more attention to the technical and material infrastructures of parliamentary politics? If we increased our awareness of political practices that evade the micro/macro divide? In providing a kind of parliament for advocating quite different sociologies, this conference has brought these questions to the surface, which is a great achievement. I only hope there will be an opportunity to collectively address them in the not-too-distant future.

Konferenzübersicht:

Keynote

Rudolf Stichweh (Bonn), Parlamente in der Genese der Demokratie. Zu einer vergleichenden historischen Soziologie

Panel 1

Stefan Laube (Frankfurt am Main), Die politische Position und ihre vielfältigen Versionen

im mediatisierten Politikbetrieb“

Ulf Bohmann (Jena) / Henning Laux (Chemnitz), [Das synchronisierte Parlament](#)

Helmar Schöne (Schwäbisch Gmünd), [Soziologie der Parlamente – der Beitrag der \(Alltags-\)Soziologie zur Erforschung von Vertretungskörperschaften](#)

Panel 2a: Parlamente im Wandel

Elena Semenova (Berlin), [Continuity and Change in Parliaments: A Comparative Analysis of Legislative Turnover in Western and Eastern Europe](#)

Adrian Itschert (Luzern), [Die \(historische\) Emergenz des Kongresses der Vereinigten Staaten](#)

Philipp Rückheim (Bonn), [Staatspolitik und Öffentlichkeit: Politische Inklusion und Responsivität in der Legislative des Vereinigten Königreichs](#)

Panel 2b: Parlamente und Medien

Damir Babic / Björn Klein (Düsseldorf), [Parlamente in der Vertrauenskrise. Mediennutzung als Determinante im europäischen Vergleich](#)

Julia Schwanholz / Andreas Busch (Göttingen), [Parlamente 2.0? Die digitale Medienausstattung nationaler Parlamente in der EU](#)

Peter Gladnitz / Olaf Jandura / Cordula Nitsch (Düsseldorf), [Parlamentsberichterstattung auf neuen Wegen: Das Vermittlungspotential von Politikserien im Vergleich zu journalistischen Informationsangeboten](#)

Panel 3a: Die parlamentarische Binnenstruktur

Sebastian Bukow (Düsseldorf), [Die Binnenorganisation subnationaler Parlamente im Vergleich](#)

Manuel Rivera / Claudia Saalbach (Potsdam), [Das „System MdB\(-Büro\)“: Wie reflexiv kann es sein?](#)

Michael Edinger (Jena), [Geschlossenheit von Fraktionen jenseits der Abstimmungsdisziplin](#)

Panel 3b: Abgeordnete, Führung und Öffentlichkeit

Lars Vogel (Jena), [Angewandte Soziologie der Parlamente: zur \(mikro\)soziologischen Fundierung der Distanz zwischen Politik und Bevölkerung](#)

Karsten Mause (Münster), [Die ‚politische Klasse‘ zwischen Selbst- und Fremdwahrnehmung](#)

Annika Ostendorf (Bonn), [Parlamentarische Führung. Chancen der Übertragung politischer Führungskonzepte auf Positionen und Prozesse innerhalb von Parlamenten](#)

Panel 4a: Parlamente im politischen System

Uwe Kranenpohl (Nürnberg), [Parlamentarischer Gesetzgeber und Verfassungsgericht](#)

Florian Spohr (Bochum), [Interessenvermittlung in den öffentlichen Anhörungen des Deutschen Bundestages](#)

Gordian Ezazi (Duisburg-Essen), [Fragen zur ‚Ethisierung‘ parlamentarischer Entscheidungsprozesse. Das Beispiel des Deutschen Ethikrates](#)

Panel 4b: Die Plenardebatte im Fokus

Sophie Schäfer (Frankfurt am Main), [Die Plenardebatte als Kampf: ‚Manöver‘ der Worte](#)

Raphael Heiberger / Christian Koss (Bremen), [Eine Computerlinguistische Analyse über Themen, Verläufe und Ähnlichkeiten der Plenardiskussionen im Bundestag seit 1990](#)

Panel 5

Steffen Amling / Alexander Geimer (Hamburg), [Authentizitätsnormen in der professionellen Politik und ihr Einfluss auf die berufliche Handlungspraxis von Mitgliedern des Bundestags. Ergebnisse einer qualitativen Studie](#)

Marion Reiser (Lüneburg), [Abgehoben und entkoppelt? ParlamentarierInnen zwischen öffentlicher Kritik und Professionalisierungslogik](#)

Abschlussvortrag

Jens Borchert (Frankfurt am Main), „...ein gewisses Minimum von innerer Zustimmung...“: Zur Soziologie der Parlamente und zu den Konjunkturen ihrer Erforschung

Endnoten

1. The full programme and the abstracts are available on the [conference's website](#).
2. See John C. Wahlke, The legislative system. Explorations in legislative behavior, New York 1962; Richard F. Fenno, Home style. House members in their districts, Boston, MA, 1978.

Endre Dányi

Dr. Endre Dányi is currently postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Sociology at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main. Strongly inspired by Science and Technology Studies (STS), his main interest is in places and material practices associated with democratic politics. For his PhD, Endre has looked at the mundane workings of a national parliament. In his habilitation project, he is studying various instances where a parliamentary logic of democratic politics breaks down or reaches its limits.

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<https://www.sozopolis.de/a-parliament-of-sociologies.html>