

Knowledge. What Knowledge?

Debates between truths, theories and beliefs in economic reasoning

Winter conference

Institute for Comprehensive Analysis of the Economy (ICAE) at the Johannes Kepler University of Linz, Joint with the **Centre of Economic and Sociological Studies (CESS)** at Hamburg University

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Knowledge has become a central societal category, which can be demonstrated in the prominence of terms like “knowledge society” (Stehr 1994, 2001) or “information society” (Wersig 1996). Moreover the importance of knowledge is even increasing in uncertain times like in the current financial and economic crisis. Analyses concerning this topic are brought forward on different levels: types of knowledge (scientific and everyday knowledge), media of knowledge (conventional and new media), characteristics of knowledge (immateriality, copyability, infinity), knowledge carriers (personal and representative knowledge), expression of knowledge (implicit and explicit knowledge), knowledge negation (wanted not-wanted ignorance – Willke 2002, Wehling 2001) etc. In the economic science the ongoing financial and economic crisis offered the possibility of a turning point in 2008, which could have served as a “window of opportunity” (Rothschild 2010) for a fundamental reorientation of (financial) economics. Nevertheless after a short period – Krugman described this as a “Keynesian Moment” – it became obvious that the monolithic formation of economics remained quite stable (Epstein/Carrick-Hagenbarth 2010). On the other hand in the crisis in public economic discourse was often framed as an “extraordinary event” (Pühringer and Hirte 2013).

The core problem of the category knowledge is its referentiality. Knowledge in general can be seen as accepted (Gottschalk-Mazouz 2005) because in the end knowledge is always the fulfillment of demands for knowledge, whether as implicit knowledge (knowledge as conviction) or as explicit knowledge (“information as a process of institutional praxes” - Hubig 1997). In scientific context this referentiality was and still is discussed as adequacy (accordance of theory and facts) and in this context the question of provability and refutability (Popper 1969; Kuhn 1976; Lakatos/Musgrave 1974) of knowledge arises. In contrast to this debate in recent years constructivist and performative approaches were developed in order to frame the generation of knowledge itself as a process of creation of facts, e.g. the boom in discourse research (Keller 2008) or performativity theory (Bachmann-Medick 2006): Knowledge expressed in written or spoken form is action (Austin 1979) and forms facts. On the basis of the development and hegemony of particular economic schools of

thought it is possible to analyze the reciprocal impact of implicit and explicit knowledge as well as the specific importance of individual actors in the process of formation of knowledge.

Given such developments the question is what is understood by knowledge in modern societies with its strong focus on knowledge: Theories? Beliefs? Truths? How certain is knowledge? What is societal knowledge? At the same time the role of actors in the communication of knowledge gains importance: Who determines, what we know? What is the role of media? What is the dynamic of discourses?

We encourage in particular empirical and theoretical contributions dedicated to the heterogeneous functions of (economic) knowledge in society.

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