

Workshop Global Inequality

Berlin, 8 to 10 June 2012

Minutes

8 June

Outline of the theoretical framework and methodology by Boike Rehbein and Jessé Souza. A written version of the presentation was distributed to all participants.

The presentation was followed by a critique from the floor in an open discussion. The main points raised were:

- The researcher's position has to be reflected, including the reproduction of the symbolic universe and symbolic violence by the research itself
- It is necessary for the research programme to come up with a theory of social change. Research possibly focuses too much on reproduction and structures rather than change
- The categories of development and modernity have to be challenged
- The formation of new elites should be an important component of research
- The roles of the state, of state-related processes, of policies and of social movements have to be included in the theoretical framework
- The roles of culture, language and violence need to be spelled out with more clarity
- The contestation of values needs to be a core issue
- The research programme offers the possibility of an engagement between continents against hegemonic language. This political aspect should be taken into account

9 June

The first half of the day was devoted to presentations of preliminary results of several projects associated with the research programme.

1. Laos: The concept of sociocultures was explained: Contemporary Lao social structure can only be understood against the background of its historical development. Three sociocultures (baan-muang, socialism, capitalism) structure contemporary milieus that in turn have to be understood in their relation to and against each other. These relations are

symbolically codified and reproduced. The presentation depicted the space of Lao milieus on the basis of more than 50 habitus hermeneutical interviews and several focus groups.

2. India: One project on India focuses on the (subjectively experienced) being-in-the-world including mood and interpretation, especially of Dalits. The meaning of a particular being-in-the-world is concealed and has to be accessed in a process of understanding. However, Dalits themselves interpret this understanding as an intrusion and epistemic violence itself. They have to be included in the process of understanding.
3. Iran: Contemporary social structure of Iran can only be understood against the background of their history, especially against relevant breaks. There were four important breaks in the twentieth century brought about by different social movements. Against this background, three sociocultures can be distinguished (arbitrary rule, Islam, market) which form the backdrop for five major milieus (Islamized, post-Islamized, traditional middle class, working class, rural population). There has not been an opportunity for a civil society to emerge.
4. Brazil: After a short presentation on completed research on the underclass and the new lower middle class, a demographic research project was presented that did not take place in the framework of the research programme. The project enquired into the relation of motherhood and mobility and found that in recent years later motherhood led to a higher level of education and mobility.
5. Germany: Ongoing research on Germany is based on the tradition of German social structure research (from Marx and Weber to Beck and Vester). The project found it most useful to use Michael Vester's concept of milieu and the analysis of German social structure as a social space of milieus following Bourdieu's "Distinction". As Vester's empirical research ended in the 1990s, the project chose the milieus distinguished by the marketing research institute Sinus as a starting point to divide the German population into milieus and to select interview partners accordingly. More than 50 habitus hermeneutical interviews have been conducted on this basis.
6. Burkina Faso: A summary of preliminary research on Burkina Faso was distributed to participants.

The second half of the day was devoted to a critique of the presentations as well as the entire research programme from the perspective of those who had not participated in the research programme so far. The main points were:

- The definition of inequality should not only focus on chances but should include functionings.
- It should be enquired into the socially acceptable degree of inequality
- Not enough attention has been given to globalization
- The project could focus more on language (in the sense of Wittgenstein's language games)
- The research programme should be called programme. It should include a general framework and theoretical work. It should be developed jointly. Another level are the individual projects that should apply the general framework but can pursue their particular interests and foci.
- There should be no division between theoretical and empirical work because any theory in the social sciences should refer to a specific reality. For this reason, time and place of the research need to be clearly defined and acknowledged.
- An important issue is how to operationalize the concepts.
- Political economy should be given more relevance.
- The programme should acknowledge the limits of the group's capabilities.
- It should focus on some core issues.
- The framework is too wide and too open. It should be based on a certain narrative explaining the social relevance of the research programme.
- The project should focus more on social structures rather than inequality.
- Foucault is important.
- The relation between gender and social inequality should be explored.

At the end of the day, issues for further research were discussed. In Brazil, research will now focus on the middle and upper classes.

A research team in Chile could be set up doing research on the reaction of economic elites to emerging middle class. This research could be conducted together with the Brazilian team.

The Indian team is being set up. Individual researchers who have conducted preliminary research and Indian PhD students will join the Indian team.

A Thai team and a Mekong subregion network will be constituted. Individual researchers who have worked on Thailand will join the Thai team.

Bologna will explore possibilities of working on the political economy of inequality and of joining the statistics team. These possibilities will be discussed in November.

10 June

Following the evening of 9 June, organizational issues were discussed. There was a consensus that the rules of the game are global and therefore the horizon of the programme has to be global.

Elites and the field of power have to be researched at some point.

The research programme could contribute to global agenda setting by putting inequality and symbolic violence on the map.

In order to facilitate communication, a clear calendar including one or two meetings per year and smaller regional project meetings has to be designed.

A website will be opened that is accessible only to programme members. Core texts by programme members and important secondary literature will be put on the website.

Four levels of the programme will be distinguished: framework (programme), regional networks, research projects, statistics.

In order to seek funding, a proposal based on the theoretical and methodological framework will be written. This can serve to identify possible sources of funding and to write funding proposals. There may be BRIC funding for the Latin American and the Indian networks and there may be Mekong funding for Southeast Asia. In Germany, BMBF and DFG will be approached. The EU programmes will be studied as well.