Taking social practices as the primary source for an analysis of ‘the social’ (Reckwitz 2003), praxeological theories produce accounts that, in order to explain certain social phenomena, neither take structures nor the individual into focus, but try to grasp the mental, physical as well as the material dimension of social practices (Schatzki 1996). A practice understood as the smallest analytical entity is produced through and at the same time is producing implicit orders of knowledge manifested in material bodies and artifacts (Reckwitz 2010). In so doing practice theories oppose a number of theoretical paradigms such as individualist concepts, structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, poststructuralism etc. (Schatzki 2001: 1-2).

However, while praxeological approaches as those developed by Andreas Reckwitz and Theodore Schatzki aim to explain and describe social orders and the social constitution of the individual (Schatzki 2008), they miss to elucidate the dynamics why certain practices become accepted and prevailing (in certain contexts) and thus neglect the sphere of power and hegemony.

This is where Gramsci comes into play. From a Gramscian theoretical and analytical perspective of hegemony, whose wide reception is not least based on its ability to explain (modern) socioeconomic and political constellations and contradictions, everyday practices and common sense are the site for the stable reproduction of hegemonies (vgl. Opratko 2012). Hegemony is understood as the ability of the dominant group to assert their interests as the common interest and achieve consent by the ruled. With this concept Antonio Gramsci, whose ‘philosophy of practice’ is a further development of Marx’ theories (Demirovic 2012: 137), tried to explain those elements of practice that contribute to the capacity of a certain class to lead as well as organize and legitimize their dominance (Langemeyer: 74). In a postgramscian understanding, as in Laclau and Mouffe’s contribution (1985), hegemony is to be understood as those orders of knowledge claiming universality and comprehended as quasi-natural social reality. Subjects and identities constitute themselves within these hegemonic orders.

Following these two approaches prevailing hegemonies could be identified at the level of integrative practice understood as more complex ‘nexuses of doings and sayings’ “found in and constitutive of particular domains of social life” (Schatzki 1996: 98). At this juncture Schatzki pinpoints three orders of knowledge that such practices involve (1) understandings of, for instance, what to do, (2) explicit rules, principles, precepts and instructions, and (3) teleoaffective structures including hierarchies of ends, task, projects, beliefs, emotions, moods etc. (ibid.).

Based on these theories, I will pursue two main objectives. First, I will explore how the concept of hegemony can serve as a means within practice theories taking into account the sphere of power when analyzing practices. At the same time I will examine how a praxeological approach can enrich perspectives of hegemony when analyzing social, political and economic phenomena. Second, such a discourse certainly requires addressing the structure-agency debate (cf. Hay 2002). In this regard I will not participate in the dispute if structural or agential factors serve to explain a certain phenomenon, but instead suggest to discuss, where to locate what is widely called ‘structures’ and how to illuminate structuring factors. In praxeological terms this would mean that researchers trying to identify structures such as hegemonies need to focus on the three levels of knowledge suggested
by Schatzki, while taking into account its materiality meaning its incorporation into physical bodies as well as artifacts. This, of course, also challenges definitions of structures as contexts or “settings within which social, political and economic events occur and acquire meaning” (ibid.: 94). In its place it entails to refocus on the practice level when trying to understand social, events, orders or developments, which come into being through practices.

The main assumption leading this theoretical work is that the linkage of hegemony and practice theories and understandings can serve to explain why certain practices are and become hegemonic and how they in turn contribute to specific social, political and economic phenomena.

REFERENCES


