

1. Heinrich-Neisser-Lecture

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Keynote

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I On Practice Theories

- A. Social ontology: individualism vs the rest (wholism, systems theory, structuralism, interactionism, process theory, practice theory)

→ practice theory is closer to action than are other nonindividualisms.

- B. The central concept of practice theory is practices: organized activities.
- C. Regularity vs. normative manifold conceptions of practices
- D. Uncertain boundaries: actions / praxis / practice-based
- E. Diversity of conceptions of practice
 - 1. Bourdieu, Giddens, Reckwitz, Shove, Kemmis, Gherardi, me
 - 2. Practices and materiality
- F. Sociality
 - 1. Practices, or rather, bundles are social in character.
 - 2. Idea of bundles connecting to compose or fill out larger phenomena: fields, complexes, texture, constellations.
 - 3. Idea of a (total) plenum of practices (bundles)
 - 4. Connections among bundles: (1) shared organization, chains of action, material connections etc. and (2) dependence, coordination, competition, coevolution
 - 5. Social phenomena are constellations of, aspects of, or rooted in the plenum of practices.
- G. Practices as a basic reality
 - 1. Form a scaffolding or background for other dimensions of human life
 - 2. Some phenomena of human life are not slices or features of practices as such but occur at least partly dependent on practices: power, dissemination of knowledge and ideas, experience and perception, learning, individuals, but also brain wiring, muscular system, emotions.

3. Other phenomena are features or slices of practices: interactions and other social phenomena (such as eating, domestic energy use, teaching, cycling, temporality of consumption).

→ practice theory might not give complete accounts of these phenomena either

H. Heidegger and Wittgenstein: basis of activity cannot be put into words

II The Disciplinary Scope of Practice Theory

Disciplines in which PT approaches are active: sociology, organization studies, education, geography, anthropology (ethnography), political science, history, design studies, management, environmental studies.

III Limits of and Issues for Practice Theories

A. Practice theories are not TOEs, Bourdieu notwithstanding.

→ Rather, the plenum of bundles is a fundamental reality

B. Regarding phenomena for which this basic reality forms a scaffolding or background, practice theories must work with other theories or approaches that are compatible with the fundamentality of practices. This also applies to understanding interactions and actions.

→ Idea of theoretical alliances

C. Issue: Are all actions elements of practices?

D. Issue: How are practices demarcated?

E. Issue: What do practice theories add to existing explanations of social change and to existing ideas about intervening in social life to effect change? New forms of explanation? New points of intervention? New conceptions of the tasks of explanation and intervention?

F. Claim that practice theories apply best to small or local phenomena.

G. What can practice theories contribute to the analysis of individual people or to the analysis of the personal or idiosyncratic?

IV Contribution of Practice Theories to Sustainability

A. Three existing paradigms: individualism (e.g., rational choice theories, behavioral economics), structural-institutionalism, and revolutionary change

B. Approaching sustainability with practice theory

1. Focus on practices (i.e., practice-material bundles), complexes of practices, and the dynamics of practices and complexes thereof.
2. Understanding/intervening in social change is understanding/intervening in practices and practice complexes, and sustainability = sustainable practices and complexes
3. Two overall issues: which practices and complexes are sustainable, and how can extant practices and complexes be moved toward them.

→ for both tasks, need accounts of practice complexes (including relations among practices) and their dynamics.

→ there is controversy among PTs on relative roles of actions and of processes pertaining to practices and practice complexes as such.

C. Intervening for change toward sustainability

1. The fact that practices hang together makes change difficult. This *Zusammenhang* also reveals an inertial quality to complexes and that all change is coevolutionary and path dependent.
2. Fostering desirable change requires attending to components of practices and to relations among practices and finding ways of affecting these.

→ task: bring about changes to combinations of ends and projects, rules, what people say and do, judgments of normativity, emotional energies, meanings, embodied practical knowledges, material arrangements, chains of action, dependencies and coordination among practices, coevolutionary relations, connections among material arrangements and technologies (e.g., communication and transport infrastructures), chains of action.

→ change requires multiple focuses and distributed measures.

3. Same measures, different tasks.
4. Theoretical alliances for change: practice theory + behavioral economics
5. Parallel with social-technical transitions literature (A. Rip, F. Geels).

D. Relation to Individualism

1. There is agreement that people's actions need to change.
2. But whereas individualism believes that actions per se need to change, practice theory believes that it is practices and *therewith* actions that must change. And whereas individualism aims to change actions, practice theory aims to change practice complexes and thus more than just the actions that help compose them.
3. Shaping recruitment to/defection from practices vs. changing behavior.