

Pervasive Powers

Corporate Authority in the Shaping of Public Policy

<https://pervasivepowers.sciencesconf.org>

Paris, 14-15 June 2018

The power of corporate business has been a subject of intense debate and many social science studies since the 19th century. This conference is based on the idea that, not only has this power varied among industries, countries and different periods, but also that the way in which it is wielded has evolved over time. By bringing together scholars from various backgrounds within the field of the social sciences, we intend to provide new insights on the multiplicity, depth and limits of the forms of influence that corporations, or the organizations furthering their interests – business associations, think tanks, communication or public relations agencies, foundations, etc. –, have on public policy.

The role of corporate organizations in the shaping of public policy has been a classical subject of interest in sociology and political science. Since the seminal work of C. Wright Mills, Elmer E. Schattschneider, Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz in the fifties and sixties, it has fuelled much research on the interactions between economic, administrative and political elites, on the production of decisions or “non-decisions”, and on inequalities of access to political power. Yet, although these issues have played a key part in the development of sociological and political science studies on issues of power, many of them no longer receive any attention, especially in public policy analysis.

Two main reasons justify revived interest in these issues today. First, multiple reforms, often of neo-liberal inspiration, have undermined or even dismantled whole bodies of regulations, or have set up regulatory tools or instruments that clearly favour economic or financial interests. Some of these reforms have also facilitated the commodification of certain public services, or have strengthened international authorities that are biased towards promoting certain market mechanisms. These trends beg the question of how corporate organizations have contributed to such reforms, and on the benefits that they have derived from doing so. But what effects have the reforms additionally had on the promotion and representation of corporate interests in the public institution arena? How can the multiple forms of big business’ presence within these same institutions be characterized? To what extent do these trends, accompanied by ever greater demands for transparency, also result in more normative power in the hands of corporate authorities, while democratic forms of government are constantly being undermined?

Second, the development of new approaches such as research on the social production of ignorance, or on health and environmental justice, invite us to consider forms of action and influence of economic actors to whom researchers have paid scant attention until now. These streams of research are fostering interest in the ways in which corporate organizations can affect the production, interpretation and dissemination of certain knowledge, and how they facilitate certain forms of misunderstanding or ignorance on particular problems, thereby influencing the policies that are supposed to solve them.

This – non-exhaustive – corpus of literature can be expected to afford greater insight into how corporate authority has contributed to the neoliberal turn in public policy. It should also account for certain corollary processes, such as changes in the types of knowledge used in public policy, the weakening of nation states in the definition of certain economic, social, sanitary and environmental

policies, and the decline of democratic government as it makes way to more authoritarian ways of exercising power.

If we are to understand the nature and modalities of corporate actors' influence, it is important to examine how they are constituted in the various sectors (chemicals, agriculture, finance, energy, water, health, etc.) and at different scales: local, national and global. One of the aims of this conference will be not only to enable geographic or inter-sectoral comparisons, but also to obtain as complete a picture as possible of these pervasive powers.

Submission Guidelines

The Conference will welcome scholars from various fields of the social sciences (sociology, history, political science, science & technology studies...). The abstracts, the papers and the oral presentations the day of the conference will be in English. We may cover travel expenses, in accordance with the budget of the conference.

Abstracts should be, as a general rule, 300-400 words in length, and should offer a precise description of your methods and data. They should be submitted **before October 31th in the latest**.

To submit your abstract, please go on the following link :

<https://pervasivepowers.sciencesconf.org>

Notifications of acceptance will be sent before the end of October. If your abstract is accepted, you will be asked a pre-circulated paper (about 5000 words) to be sent before May 15th 2018. The pre-circulated papers will be disseminated only to the speakers and discussants.

For any enquiries, or if you have any difficulty with the website submission procedure, please contact: **pervasivepowers.conference@gmail.com**

Place of the Conference

The conference will be held at the Université Paris-Dauphine, Place du Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny, 75016, Paris

Organizing Committee

Sara Aguiton (CNRS/CAK), Marc-Olivier Déplaudé (advanced researcher in sociology, INRA/IRISSO), Emmanuel Henry (professor of sociology, Université Paris-Dauphine/IRISSO), Nathalie Jas (senior researcher in STS, INRA/IRISSO), and Valentin Thomas (Ph.D. candidate in sociology, Université Paris-Dauphine/IRISSO).

Scientific Committee

Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier (CNRS/CSO), Scott Frickel (Brown University), Mathias Girel (ENS/Caphes), Linsey McGoe (Sussex University), Sezin Topçu (CNRS/CEMS).

This conference is part of the programs **Regulrisks** (*Regulation of sanitary risks, economic stakes and industrial innovations*), **Propublics** (*Revisiting public problems and controversies: the "Problem-Centred Democracy" in question*), and **SHS-ENV** (*Environmental humanities in the Anthropocene era*), all of them funded by the PSL Foundation.