

call for papers

Graduate School of Social Sciences | University of Bremen

‘The “Governmediality” of Work, Welfare, and the Life Course: Regulating Lives in the Knowledge Society’

Workshop to be held at the
Hanse Institute for Advanced Study (*Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg*)
Delmenhorst, Germany
7-8 December 2006

The organizers of the International Workshop ‘Governmediality of Work, Welfare, and the Life Course’ invite contributions that investigate the relations between life course, social welfare reforms, media technologies, and expertise/professionalism.

The Workshop is supported by the Graduate School of Social Sciences and will be held at the Hanse Institute for Advanced Study (HWK) near Bremen, Germany. The HWK will host all participants for the duration of the workshop. Some travel funding for international speakers is also available.

The political as well as the economic and cultural regimes of governing one’s life are currently undergoing profound changes. Corporations, the state, and intermediary organizations are employing new modes of management that are frequently characterized as decentralized, flexible, and knowledge based. The individuals themselves are expected to be responsible and enterprising agents of their lives, acting as experts, maximizing personal benefits while minimizing their cost to society. Under these conditions, both institutions and individuals are required to develop new regimes of knowledge about themselves and their circumstances. The formation of such knowledge, its distribution and application is shaped by two interrelated factors currently underestimated in academic discussions: expertise and media.

We propose the term ‘governmediality’ to analyse the media and formations of (self-) knowledge and their application in governing the social and the self. Currently, a triad of expertise, decentralized bureaucracy and new media forms a specific new ‘governmediality,’ whose emergence we can observe and which we aim to explore at this workshop.

Experts and professionals such as consultants, coaches, therapists, welfare bureaucrats, social workers, and scientists appear wherever regimes of flexibilisation and networks emerge. Individuals are expected to become experts (of) themselves, while simultaneously a growing number of experts problematise lifestyles, reinterpret gendered working and caring habits, bear ambiguity, and guide decisions. Experts

interpret situations and collect information, creating or employing technical and moral standards that increasingly aim at what is constructed as 'life itself'. As 'mediating' actors, they govern potentially conflictual social practices and inequalities by linking social spaces, (social) technologies and subjectivities.

The Internet, as the latest development in the history of media, plays a crucial role in transforming organizational structures, social relationships and regulations of the self. New forms of production and representation of knowledge about social groups and individuals are available and used by institutions, by social groups, and by individuals themselves. The private sector has pioneered Internet-driven realignments between individuals and organisations, while the public sector only recently has begun to actively embrace these technologies under the keyword Electronic Government. In European welfare states, the reorganised management of life events like unemployment, education or illness is closely tied into E-Government.

The aim of the workshop is to explore the social relations, media regimes, and bodies of knowledge that constitute the contemporary governmentality of managing individual life courses. We invite both empirical and theoretical contributions discussing the following topics, among others:

- The ambivalent role and agency of experts/professionals in the broadening psycho-social sector and their (re-)construction of gender, race, class, and self
- The creation, application and legitimation of norms and standards in governing the social and the (enterprising) self
- Current standards and their application in education, work, healthcare, and social insurance
- Electronic Government, with special respect to welfare state reforms
- Media regimes and knowledge regimes in education, work, healthcare and social insurance
- Contemporary social theory, sociology of knowledge, and media theory – conceptual challenges and opportunities for the application of media theory to social thought and sociology

We welcome submissions (2-page abstract and a CV) to:

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Please submit your proposals no later than September 20.
Pre- and postdoctoral researchers are especially encouraged to contribute.

The Graduate School of Social Sciences (GSSS) was founded in 2002 by the top-ranked sociology and political science departments at the University of Bremen. The GSSS offers interdisciplinary doctoral education in an international environment.

The Hanse Institute for Advanced Study (HWK) was founded in 1995 and supports the disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration of outstanding national and international researchers, offering the opportunity to concentrate on chosen research projects and to absorb ideas and inspirations from other disciplines and differing national traditions of science and scholarship.