Taking practice seriously – Theoretical and methodological challenges of studying social practices

RELATE workshop, 29.–30. September 2016, University of Tampere

Organizers: Juho Luukkonen & Pia Bäcklund & Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen

With the keynote lecture by Professor Theodore R. Schatzki, College of Arts & Sciences, Philosophy, University of Kentucky (USA)

The theories of practice are not singular but rather a family of conceptions which have emerged from a bundle of writings authored during the last century or so. Practices are considered as the smallest and the principal unit of analyses through which other social phenomena and entities can be understood and scrutinized (Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2010; Bueger, 2014). Practice theories have been applauded for providing useful ways for overcoming dichotomies such as social–individual, agency–structure and material–immaterial. Practice theories provide useful ideas also for geographers to study territories, socio-spatial processes and institutional formations. While, for instance, the conventional state-based approaches tend to draw a simplified picture of territories with clear jurisdictional and competence boundaries between actors and institutions, practice accounts bring to the fore the complex interweavings of the manifold and often seemingly mundane practices through which the territorial assemblages are constituted.

Consequently, interest on practices has become widespread also in the field of geography. Call for shifting emphasis from the “big things” and “high politics” towards the “little things” and the everyday lives of everyday people have resulted in various geographical studies that focus on such diverse practices as bordering practices, practices of government, calculative practices or policy practices. However, it seems that the concept of practice plays often only a minor role in contemporary geographies as an auxiliary concept which is used to illustrate the importance of what takes place “on the ground”. Less frequently have the epistemological or methodological conditions and corollaries of studying practices been elaborately reflected in the studies.

The idea of this workshop is to discuss, what it means theoretically and methodologically when ontological priority is given to social practices. Special attention is given both to the practices of doing practice theory driven research and to the potential implications of practice thinking to the current geographical discussions on territorial/relational and topographical/topological spaces.

We invite scholars interested in practice theories and/or doing research on practices to participate in the workshop either with full paper, shorter texts discussing “work in progress” or with bullet points listing initial ideas and thoughts on the practice-related research. Participants are expected to give a short presentation laying out the main questions they wish to address (10–15 minutes), followed by 15 minutes of discussion.

Call for papers: To enroll to the workshop, please send a 200-word abstract of your work to Juho Luukkonen (juho.luukkonen@oulu.fi) by Thursday 01.09.2016.
Preliminary program

Thursday 29.9.

10.00 Opening words (Room PinniB 1097)

10.05 Keynote talk, professor Theodore R. Schatzki: *Analyzing Large Social Phenomena: A challenge for practice theory*

11.00 Commentary by professor Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen

12.00 Lunch

13.00 – 16.00 workshop presentations (room PinniA 3103)

16.00 Discussion

19.00 Dinner

Friday 30.9.

9.00 Keynote talk, professor Theodore R. Schatzki: *Practice Theoretical Flat Ontology and Social Geometries* (room Paavo Koli -auditorium)

10.00 Commentary by professor Jouni Häkli

11.00 Brunch

12.00 – 14.00 workshop presentations (room PinniA 3107)

14.00 Final words