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CALL FOR ARTICLES

Rationalizations: New Readings, New Usages

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The concept of rationalization has been central to Max Weber's work and reputation. It is a model of historical development marked by the predominance of instrumentally rational action and guided by increasingly formalized and abstract norms and regulations. Weber examined its driving forces and empirical manifestations in a multitude of fields (religion, law, economics, administration, ethics, sexuality, music, etc.) and through many concrete objects: the construction of images of the world, the development of economic behaviour, the constitution of legal systems, the systematization of scientific knowledge or the extension of the power of bureaucracies. Although the concept has been used and discussed at a very macrosociological level to question contemporary social developments, for example in the context of the Frankfurt School (notably in the work of Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas) or the highly debated concept of the McDonaldization of society (Ritzer, 2014), its scientific uses seem to have declined, probably because of the oversimplified and teleological significance it has acquired over time. Today, we are more inclined to talk about the neo-liberalization of the world, its financialization or digitalization than its rationalization.

Precisely, the aim of this issue of L'Année sociologique is to revive this concept in two ways: first, by going back to its multiple meanings and the complex mechanisms described in M. Weber's work; and second, by exploring the concept's operationalization in empirical contributions. This project thus seeks to bring together empirical contributions that make use of the concept of rationalization and that showcase its fertility and relevance. Far from seeking a convergence of the multiple meanings of this concept, we would like to highlight how it enables to typify and interpret a very diverse set of political and social phenomena. In the same way the existing literature uses this concept in very different ways, we are looking for the greatest possible diversity among contributors: our goal is to represent the various subfields where this notion is mobilized. Finally, we view this issue as an opportunity for young researchers to interact with more experienced colleagues.

Harnessing the different dimensions of the concept of rationalization

The starting point of the project for this issue is a paradox. We know that Max Weber was careful to lay out the multiple meanings associated with the notion of rationalization (Weber, 1978, p. 30). And yet, subsequent scholarship has ended up restricting it to a univocal process affecting all social spheres, namely, the steel-hard casing of efficiency and control. One possible reason for this development may be attributed to Weber himself: a prominent commentator noted that he used the notions of rationalization and rationalism in an inflationary manner (Schluchter, 1992, p. 100). According to Weber's writings (Sociology of Law, Sociology of Religions) and several of his commentators (Beetham, 1974; Brubaker, 1984; Kalberg, 2002; Lallement, 2013; Schluchter, 1985; Sutton, 2001), the concept of rationalization can be considered to have at least five distinct but complementary dimensions.

- The instrumental dimension is marked by the predominance of means-adjusted rational action, i.e. by the progression of formal or instrumental rationality, which entails a predominance of means-end calculations. Rationalization is based here on the explicit definition of goals and the emphasis on precise forms of calculation meant to mobilize the most efficient means to achieve these objectives (Beetham, 1974, p. 68).

- The cognitive dimension refers to the exercise of reason in social activities, increasingly governed by explicit rules and the diffusion of specialized knowledge and concepts, organized and structured in a coherent theory.

- The formal dimension corresponds to the prevalence of abstract reasoning and "abstract interpretations of meanings," which stands in contrast with reasoning focused only on concrete facts and details. Rationalization goes hand in hand with the power of abstraction (in law), formality (in economics) and impersonality (in the state through its bureaucracies). The rational-legal mode of domination is obviously part of this trend, and the bureaucratic form of administration (Duran, 2009) is its vector.

- The cultural dimension refers to "the increasingly clear separation of social action areas" (Lallement, 2013, p. 34) where each area, by promoting its own values, reinforces its specialization and autonomy. Rationalization goes hand in hand with a process of differentiating spheres (Schluchter, 1985, p. 70-75), i.e. the creation of autonomous spheres.

- The disciplinary dimension addresses the theme of control (Brubaker, 1984, pp. 33-35; Marcuse, 1971). Increasing technical rationalization - which translates into the development of more effective ways of achieving goals - leads to an increase in the extent of effective control over material objects, individuals and oneself.

Teasing out the tension between formal and substantive rationalization

Reassessing the nuanced meaning of rationalization applies means that we also should stress what Michell Lallement (2013) called a "major tension" between formal and substantive rationalization. Formal rationalization corresponds to the "development of the internal law of a phenomenon" (Weber, cited by Steiner, 1998, p. 25) in the sense that rationalization (of the law for example) leads it towards greater consistency and abstraction. It is part of an endogenous dynamic, often driven internally by the field's (law, music, economics, etc.) experts and theorists. Formal rationalization thus refers to a process by which abstract legal rules and concepts are systematized according to an internal logic (Coutu, 2018). The formal dimension takes on its full meaning when it is contrasted with substantive rationalization, which refers, on the contrary, to the consideration of interests and values of social groups that stand outside the social sphere at hand (law, economics, politics).

Here lies the difference between our project and the usual readings of Weberian rationalization. Our approach consists less in surveying the deleterious effects of the expansion of instrumental rationality than in taking seriously the immanent tension between the two processes of rationalization. They must be viewed as two parallel, yet competing trends, with effects that go "sometimes in the direction of a greater formal integration of reasoning, sometimes in the direction of a greater adaptation to practical situations" (Benamouzig, 2005, p. 13). For Weber, for example, when the capitalist economy is at its peak, formal rationality radicalizes capitalist forms by giving all power to owners (increased centralization of private property) and through an extreme strengthening of their control over the means of production (discretionary power of owners to hire and fire workers, without constraint). As R. Brubaker (1984, p. 38) states, the greater the formal rationality of an economic system, the more vulnerable it is to criticism pointing to its substantive irrationality. One of the advantages of the formal/substantive distinction is thus to help us identify distinct dynamics of rationalization and to be able to account for the transformation of multiple action spheres.

A variety of possible fields and empirical objects

The variety of fields where this conceptual pair can be applied, the diversity of the phenomena it refers to, and the formal/substantial dialectics reflect the empirical fecundity of the concept of rationalization. It is especially interesting to mobilize this concept today to account for the transformations of capitalism and labour, the transformation of states with the rise of neo-managerial devices or renewed forms of expertise, the transformation of law and economic regulation, or the transformation of organizations. Those shifts are the bedrock of multiple and

original forms of rationalization of conduct, norms and representations. But to make this concept fully heuristic, it is necessary to reflect on how to operationalize and integrate it into scientific practice. Current diagnoses often drift towards oversimplification by associating social change with a dominant trend (financialization, neo-liberalism, deregulation, the rise of digital technology, etc.). Taking seriously the plurality of forms of rationalization and highlighting the tensions between them is an alternative way of appropriating and rejuvenating the Weberian heritage.

The purpose of this special issue is to bring together contributions where rationalizations have played a decisive role in the construction and analysis of the empirical case. Over the past twenty years, some social science research has applied the tension between formal and substantive rationalization to relatively small-scale objects and by associating it, most often, with an empirical case-study (Bezes, 2014; Bidet, 2010; Billows, 2017; Steiner, 1998; Stryker and Pedriana, 2017; Le Velly, 2006). A sign of the openness and stimulating nature of these concepts, this research has blossomed in diverse subfields (economic sociology, sociology of work and professions, sociology of public action, sociology of law, etc.). However, no matter the quality of the existing work mobilizing the concept of rationalization, it must be noted that it remains quantitatively rare and has yet to engage in mutual dialogue. Thus, the purpose of this thematic issue is to build a point of anchoring and comparison for those whose research, current or past, makes use of Weberian insights on rationalization processes. We expect contributions that tease out the tension between formal and substantive rationalization, that put forth, when appropriate, temporal models to understand medium- or long-term historical trends. We value contributions that strive to mobilize, separately or jointly, the instrumental, cognitive, formal, cultural and disciplinary dimensions of rationalization.

Submission of manuscript proposals and calendar

Authors must first submit a manuscript proposal (in French or in English). It must present the argument, the empirical case and how the author intends to make use of the Weberian concepts relating to rationalization. These proposals, which must not exceed 5000 characters in size (excluding bibliography), must be sent by e-mail before 1 April 2019 to all the coordinators of the special issue and to Delphine Renard, who is the editorial assistant for L'Année sociologique (delphine.renard@sorbonne-universite.fr).

Those whose proposals have been selected by the coordinators (responses sent in early May 2019) must submit their papers by 1 February 2020. The length should not exceed 65,000 characters (including spaces, bibliography, and figures). Each article will then be evaluated, anonymously, by the editorial board of L'Année sociologique.

We invite interested authors to read the author guidelines available on L'Année sociologique's webpage (PUF website: [http://www.puf.com/L' Année_sociologique](http://www.puf.com/L'_Année_sociologique)). The issue is expected to be published in Spring 2021.

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