

Call for Papers

Science-Policy-Interfaces

2nd Annual Conference of the Science Communication Section of the German Communication Association (DGPuK), supported by the working group “Politics, Science, and Technology” of the German Political Science Association (DVPW)

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The production and mediation of scientific knowledge are highly relevant to modern society as it processes social issues, conflicts, and crises. At the same time, science, its organizations, and individual actors both face public and political expectations that they contribute to these issues and confront skeptical arguments concerning their role in social progress. In the knowledge society, science and politics are thus in a state of reciprocal dependency.

On one hand, it is claimed that the political system is increasingly dependent on scientific expertise in order to adequately address increasingly complex social problems and to legitimize public political action. In this context, scientific policy advice has increasingly institutionalized itself over the past decades. On the other hand, science is fundamentally dependent on public funding and thus, above all, on political regulation, which takes place within the framework of science and university policy and in various governance constellations. In the context of these interdependencies, a wide range of interaction and communication relationships—science-policy interfaces—have been established at the border of science and politics and have become the focus of social science research.

The aim of this conference is to examine these interfaces between science and politics, especially from a communication science perspective. However, contributions that look at this topic from other disciplinary or interdisciplinary perspectives are also expressly desired. The following topics are of particular but not exclusive interest:

1. New/old conflicts I: Self- and misconception of scientific political consulting

Science has a long-standing tradition of being a source of political and public consulting. How it should and can fulfill this role has been debated in academics just as long. In which constellations of actors does scientific political consulting take place? Which agenda do actors from politics and science have, and which concept of consulting do they exhibit? How does scientific political consulting proceed within various policy fields (such as climate and environment, medicine and health, economy and economics, and integration and security)

and in regional, national, and international frameworks? Which modes of communication can be observed, and what influence do mass and digital media have, in addition to from interpersonal communication?

2. New/old conflicts II: Politicizing and staging science in the public sphere

In both “postnormal” constellations and the context of social crisis, the boundary between neutral scientific expertise and opinion-based statements becomes fluid. A prominent example is the role of scientists in the US-American climate discourse. Recently, an increased public awareness of science has been demanded in the context of the emergence of right-wing populist movements in the Western world. The public self-positioning of scientists as well as the attribution of roles for scientific actors in the (mass media) public sphere are subjected to significant politicization in the course of this process. Scientists no longer solely appear as experts with objective assessments but have become visible as political figures with influence on public opinion and, subsequently, political actions. This gray area of scientific work raises questions: How are scientists perceived publicly, and in which roles are they publicly visible? Do differences in the perception of scientists from different disciplines exist? What is the self-conception of publicly communicating scientists, and how do they perceive potential conflicts in roles? What effect does the public positioning of scientists have on the internal and external reputation of the scientific community?

3. New/old conflicts III: Science policy, university governance, and “freedom” of research

University and science policies are executed in various national and international interactions and negotiation systems between actors of policies and science. The progression and configuration of the science system can be characterized as a permanent negotiation and mediation process between science and politics, which remains widely unobserved by the public. So, how are communication systems structured? Which systems of negotiation can be found on the side of science and politics? Which actors define structures and programs in this field? To what extent are constellations of governance from science and politics publicly visible beyond enclosed spaces of interaction?

4. New/old actors: Mediators between science, politics, and the public sphere

Aside from science conducted at universities, a wide array of actors is active at the intersection of science and politics. In past years, think tanks have been established in Europe in the context of this development. These think tanks tend to describe themselves as independent producers of scientific knowledge but are by nature of their constitutions and funding heterogeneous and often operate on the edge of public awareness. While the influence of think tanks in the USA on politics and public opinion is fairly well documented, the communication strategies and effects of these actors in German-speaking countries are lesser-known. The same applies to lobbyists in various societal spheres (for instance, corporations or NGOs), which rely on scientific information by a growing factor but are using and mediating these against the backdrop of their specific contexts of action. Which role is assigned to these alternate science mediators at the intersection with politics? How do they use scientific knowledge, and which strategies do they pursue?

Submission and deadline

Proposals for individual papers can be submitted through September 15, 2017, via email to zpk@zu.de.

Abstracts should be written in English or German and contain a clear outline of the argument, the theoretical framework, and, where applicable, the methodology and results. The maximum length is 800 words (excluding references). Abstracts should include a separate cover with the presentation title, name(s), and contact details, as well as an anonymized text component with the presentation title.

Partners

The conference is supported by the Political Communication Section of the German Communication Association (DGPuK), the Working group "Politics, Science, and Technology" of the German Political Science Association (DVPW), the project netPOL (funded by the State of Lower Austria), and the Energy Cultures Research Group (funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research).

Timeline

Submission of abstracts: September 15, 2017
Notification of acceptance: November 15, 2017

Conference venue

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