

## STANDING WORKING GROUP (SWG) 7

### VISUALIZING INSTITUTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE

SUB-THEME FOR THE 30<sup>TH</sup> EGOS COLLOQUIUM IN ROTTERDAM, JULY 3-5, 2014

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

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“In no other form of society in history has there been such a concentration of images, such a density of visual messages. One may remember or forget these messages but briefly one takes them in, and for a moment they stimulate the imagination by way of either memory or expectation.”

John Berger, in: *Ways of Seeing* (2008 [1972]: 123)

#### SUB-THEME DESCRIPTION

Institutions reside in inter-subjectively shared knowledge about the world. Visuals are probably the most immediate system of symbolic communication – and an extremely powerful way in which large parts of the socially shared stock of knowledge are manifested and distributed. In fact, the visual preceded the written word, and is, in all modern societies, of growing omnipresence both in everyday life and organizational contexts. The role of the visual has been widely neglected, however, and remains under-theorized in organization and management studies, institutional studies included.

Taking up the overall theme for the 2014 EGOS Colloquium (i.e., “reimagining, rethinking, reshaping”), this sub-theme sets out to rethink how images – and visual meaning in particular – shape organizational life, and how the visual has been anchored in the institutional research agenda so far. We intend to take stock of existing organizational research that studies the role of the visual, explore current developments and promising ideas, and jointly work on a fertile future research agenda. At this stage, more breadth and depth of research as well as consolidation of previous efforts is needed, accompanied by stronger theorization (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013). We therefore welcome manuscripts that integrate visual aspects of organizations into the central concepts of our discipline, present core starting points for a future research agenda, and/or reflect on the place of visualization as scientific evidence.

Taking the visual seriously in institutional thought – and organization and management studies more broadly – will enhance understanding of a plethora of empirical phenomena, and offer considerable potential for theory building and advancement. Social mechanisms and concepts (e.g., categorization, theorization, translation and re-contextualization, colonization, identity construction, legitimacy, institutional work, or institutional logics) are not only accessible through practices and verbal text but are also reflected in a broad array of visual artifacts such as photographs, paintings, pictures, drawings, sketches, logos and corporate iconography, webpages, design, or architecture, among many others. Examples of work in this spirit are, for instance, Quattrone’s (2009) research on the power of the visual in the context of diffusing accounting practices; Hardy and Phillips’ (1999) examination of political cartoons within the broader societal discourse around immigration; various studies on the use of visuals in annual reporting (e.g., Graves, Flesher, & Jordan, 1996; Preston, Wright, & Young, 1996); Justesen and

Mouritsen's (2009) analysis of how visualization connects, translates, and performs various organizational activities; or Pratt and Rafaeli's (1997) research on the role of organizational dress in identity construction. Recently, a number of scholars have called for a thorough integration of visual material in the research agenda of our discipline (see, e.g., Bell, Schroeder, & Warren, 2013; Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & van Leeuwen, 2013; Puyou, Quattrone, McLean, & Thrift, 2012). Some research traditions go, in this respect, beyond an 'archeological approach' (i.e., beyond collecting and analyzing existing visual artifacts) and implement visual strategies as a pivotal element in the methodological design (e.g., by using methods like photo-elicitation, or by integrating visuals in experimental or ethnographic designs).

Our call for papers encourages the submission of manuscripts that broadly explore issues outlined above, including their relationships and intersections. We also welcome submissions that explore links to various related disciplines each having a long-standing tradition of incorporating the visual in their empirical and conceptual research agenda (among them, for instance, anthropology, sociology, art history, social semiotics, communication and media studies, and psychology). With this, we particularly invite – but do by no means restrict submissions to – manuscripts addressing one or several of the following topics:

- The 'visual construction' of meaning and institutions (i.e., visualization and the visual as part of practices, institutions, and/or the process of [de-]institutionalization);
- Institutions and their manifestations in visuals (i.e., the visual as a 'container' of institutionalized knowledge);
- Research on the specific persuasiveness of visual rhetoric as compared to, or in combination with, verbal text (i.e., the visual as rhetorical strategy), as well as research directly analyzing verbal text as a symbolic system (i.e., the written word as visual signifier);
- Research strategies that, more generally, draw on visual means as a decisive element in their empirical design;
- Novel visual research methods that enable and foster the study of organizations, institutions, and institutionalization;
- Consolidation of existing research on the role of the visual, including a stronger theorization and integration of visual aspects of organizations and organizing into the central concepts of our discipline;
- Critical reflections on the impact of visualization on research and scientific practice (including the aspect of visualizing knowledge in terms of how scholars depict their results).

## REFERENCES

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## ABOUT THE CONVENORS

*Markus A. Höllerer* is at the Australian School of Business, University of New South Wales, in Sydney, Australia. His research interests include the dissemination and local adaptation of global managerial concepts, in particular the heterogeneous theorizations and local variations in meaning, and the relationship between different bundles of concepts and their underlying governance and business models. Recent research is concerned with the role of visuals in meaning construction.

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