



Navigating in the Logics of Inter- and Multigenerational Relations and Public Policy

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Abstract:

What's missing in the way critical thinking is taught? The challenge I am addressing is teaching social science students and supervising young researchers. As teachers and supervisors, we are obliged to illustrate the different logics of research and practice. It would help them immensely.

Keywords: Logics of Inter, Multigenerational Relations, Public Policy

Introduction

Navigating in the Logics of Inter- and Multigenerational Relations and Public Policy

What's missing in the way critical thinking is taught? The challenge I am addressing is teaching social science students and supervising young researchers. As teachers and supervisors, we are obliged to illustrate the different logics of research and practice. It would help them immensely.

Scientific findings do not in a straightforward way align with public policy. The idea of useful scientific knowledge is understandable and legitimizes funding of research and scientific efforts. However, scientific evidence is pointing at a considerable gap between research and practice suggesting fundamental differences in institutional logics between science and other social spheres (Lattu & Cai 2023). I argue that the theory of practice is different from the theory for practice. The inherent logic in the field of science is different from the inherent logic of field of public policy (Bourdieu 1977, 2020).

In critical thinking I suggest paying attention to the different logics between the science of inter- and multigenerational relations, or generally the science of social stratification/reproduction, and public policy for social spheres/practice. Importantly, public policy is often constrained by practical and political field structures, tensions, and conversions of specific kinds of capital.

To be concrete for learners and educators, I provide two examples and finally list a set of points needed to be aware of.

Our studies of intergenerational- and multigenerational relations continuously reveal that family origin and socioeconomic position are drivers of changing and level of life-chances and social mobility (Harding & Munk 2020). However, the significant finding of declining intergenerational income mobility in Denmark is surprising because policymakers commonly believe that social mobility in universal welfare states is high. In fact, changes connect to the degree of work experience in both parent and child generations, and family stability of parents. A change toward downsizing welfare schemes is speculated to be pertinent.

toward downsizing welfare schemes is speculated to be pertinent. However, absence of stable family structures and work experience, and disintegration of the household (Weber 1978) are probable scientific explanations. In fact, we show that the highest intergenerational income mobility within middle-income rural municipalities and the lowest intergenerational income mobility within urban and poor rural municipalities. Relative mobility within Denmark is comparable with relative mobility within Canada and larger than within the United States. In Denmark, within-country intergenerational mobility is positively correlated with the share of working-age employed and married inhabitants, and negatively with the share of single parents, teen births, non-western immigrants, and inhabitants outside the labor force (Eriksen & Munk 2020).

Furthermore, our recent study of grandparents implies that childbearing has multigenerational consequences that are structured by gendered caregiving, the caregiving needs of the parent generation, and the delegating capacity of the grandparent generation (Joo, Elwert & Munk 2024).

Yet another widespread idea – perhaps even a valid assumption – is that public policy plays a role in improving life chances and living conditions, e.g. indicated by the statistical association between the level of economic redistribution (public policy) and degree of social mobility or economic development (science) across countries (Andreescu et al. 2025). A competing view is that the

Protestant ethic (promotion of reading skills and education in the family) is a main driver of social mobility or economic development (cf. Becker & Woessmann 2009).

A challenge is that public policy or practice is produced by different logics compared to the logic of purpose-free scientific knowledge (Stichweh 1992), and in modern societies cardinal changes of social reproduction and public policies are taking place, implying that the translation of scientific results into public policy is not straightforward.

Firstly, particularly in the Nordic welfare states they have increasingly undertaken systemic and incremental changes of public policies resulting in an iron cage of rationalization and institutionalization of communities, childhood, family and work-life rather than strengthening conditions of the family and work. Secondly, after World War II a narrowing set of typical life-modes evolved, as wage earners in large companies or in an expanding public sector, as recipients of social welfare or marginalized workers on the labor market, with much fewer self-employed life-modes. Thirdly, communal anchored social status is largely being pushed out by societal based social status Munk 2026). Fourth, divorce is a clear dimension of modern family life (Harding & Munk 2020). Fifth, fertility rates are falling.

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