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Abstract

Wandering off the Beaten Path: An STS Study of Sociology

Numerous scholars in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) have sought to address, explore and challenge the complex and intricate network of assumptions and figurations pertaining to the relationship between the social/political and scientific/natural orders. Their attention, however, is usually directed at expertise emanating from the more traditional and established scientific disciplines (i.e. natural and engineering sciences) or forms of social science that generally have a pronounced quantitative dimension (e.g. economics). The involvement of, and contribution made by, sociology and its specificity as a purveyor of knowledge has, curiously enough, inspired little scholarly attention. This paper explores a number of challenges and complications that an STS project can face in trying to study sociology in a post-Soviet context (Latvia). I argue that, in addition to being confronted by confounding internal heterogeneity vis-a-vis epistemic and ontological commitments, a significant problem is the tension between genealogically related styles of reasoning whose surface similarities obfuscate profound theoretical differences. This, I suggest, highlights the need to reconsider the way we understand the relationship between sociology and STS, the geographically divergent theoretical trajectories that these fields of inquiry have taken, and the implications this has for STS research on cognate academic fields. The paper is based on my interviews with Latvian sociologists as part of my PhD at Lancaster University.