

# The Subject–Object–Relationship in the Social Sciences - The Epistemic Participation of the Analyzed

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In this paper I ask: How is the relationship between the epistemic subject and object special in the social sciences? To answer this question I use an integrative approach that translates ideas from STS to analyze a social science and - at the same time - tries overcome still powerful separations, such as e.g. practice/institutions/structures.

The classic argument that, in contrast to natural scientists, social scientists are part of the field they analyze leads me to ask about the epistemic consequences of this supposed overlap and its implications for the “truth-machineries” (Knorr Cetina 1999) of the social sciences. Using two cases in economics, I argue that the epistemic object is constitutive and active in the epistemic process in an inimitable way. Thus, borders between object and subject seem to disappear. To summarize this phenomenon I bring forward the notion of “epistemic participation” (Reichmann 2013) that goes far beyond other concepts of active objects such as the “mangle of practice” (Pickering 1995), material “obduracy” (e.g. Hommels 2005), or the “guerre et paix des microbes” (Latour 1988).

The paper bases on empirical research of two different groups of economists: economic forecasters and public debt managers. Whereas the former are public visible academic scholars driven by the idea of “truth”, the latter are hidden practical economists leaded by the notions of efficiency, stability, and reliability. The data used in this paper include interviews, participant observations, and document analysis in economic forecasting institutes and organizations engaged in public debt management in the German-speaking countries.