How Evidence Results from Political Work.[1]

An Ethnographic Study of Cultural Production in Parliaments

How evidence results from political work.

An Ethnographic Study of Cultural Production in Parliaments

Jenni Brichzin

Institut für Politikwissenschaft und Soziologie

Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg

Wittelsbacherplatz 1

97074 Würzburg

Abstract:

What logic underlies political practice in parliaments? This study looks into the black box that still exists at the intersection between sociology and political science: political practice in our main political institutions is yet to be further illuminated. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice helps to accomplish this. In the political field, seen as a field of cultural production, political practice is a form of conceptual work that transforms ordinary ideas into ideas with the capacity for social mobilisation. This transformation of ideas is empirically reconstructed in an ethnographic study on four parliamentary levels. The resulting model of political work with its three crucial parliamentary work modes – the political game, the settling of issues, and political resourcefulness – uncovers the productive dimension of political work in the generation of evidence.

Key words: parliaments; political practice; cultural production; model of political work; evidence

---

1. On the boring of hard boards

The political field is one of the central spheres of modern society and as such it is particularly affected by the social changes that result from globalisation and pluralisation. These processes have significantly increased the need for cooperation and problem solving in politics and thus the expectations placed on political actors. In the early 20th century, when these developments first started to emerge, Max Weber addressed future politicians in a lecture entitled "Politics as a Vocation" (Weber 1992). In this paper, he encourages politicians to recognise their profession as a "vocation" that requires a sense of "responsibility" and "proportion". A task that demands strength of character, persistence, and personal skills for "a strong and slow boring of hard boards" (Weber 1992: 82) – i.e. political work in the service of a "cause" (Weber 1992: 62). Weber thus creates a profile of the profession, which he believes should be capable of facing the challenges of the future: with a "passionate" (Weber 1988: 524) devotion to the political cause.

But what defines the job of political actors, what do their everyday duties involve, which he metaphorically refers to as a boring of hard boards? Traditionally, sociology offers two answers to this question. The first of these answers is: political practice is inevitably the exercise of power (cf. Foucault 2008: 1130). Politics is a more or less open struggle for social supremacy. This struggle takes place in a domesticated form in democratic societies – for example through the differentiation of government and opposition (Luhmann 2002: 96). From this perspective, the normative ideal of rational democracy merely conceals the production of inequality which is considered to be at the core of the political process. Analyses following this tradition often join the critical disclosing and exposing movement that shape public political debate (cf. Maier 2000: 47). While this theoretical perspective focuses on the effect of power on political practice, another prominent view of politics emphasises the object of political practice – which, of course, is the foundation for the effect of power (Weber 2008: 38). This object is defined by "collectively binding decisions" (Easton 1965: 352f.). Thus, the second traditional answer to this question is: political practice must be described as the practice of decision making. Focussing on decision making makes it possible to evaluate the social impact of the decisions made during the political process (cf. Pressman & Wildavsky 1974) and permits a rational and theoretical reconstruction of individual reasons for these decisions (cf. Pappi et al. 1995). The "black box" (Easton 1957: 390) of the decision-

making process itself – i.e. actual political practice – is only of secondary epistemological interest.

The objective of the following paper is to break open this "black box" by making political practice the focus of scientific contemplation. About half a century ago, a similar analysis of political practice was outlined in an instructive analogy in the seminal parliamentary study "The Legislative System" (Wahlke et al. 1962):

> "Action in the legislative arena can no more be wholly comprehended by merely recognizing that its object is primarily to 'make laws' than can football be comprehended by knowing its object is to score more points than the opposing side." (Wahlke et al. 1962: 136)

This study contained an appeal – still up-to-date today – to consider the internal logic of political processes, instead of only beginning an analysis when this process is largely completed (cf. Schöne 2010: 15). In answer to this appeal, this study focuses on the political practice of parliaments – and thus of those pivotal democratic institutions about which we still have far too little knowledge of practice (section 2). The research question is: what logic underlies political practice in parliaments? In order to reach the level pracitce, a theoretical perspective is taken into account that does not begin with the products (decisions) or the impact (power) but instead with the productive dimension of political practice: Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the political as a practice of cultural production (section 3). I will explain how cultural production takes place using data from an ethnographical parliamentary study on four parliamentary levels (section 4). This empirical data enables the reconstruction of a model of political work in parliaments (section 5). Finally, parliamentary practice can thus be understood as the practice of generating symbolic evidence, i.e. establishing political influence by producing immediate insightfulness into a certain way of interpreting the world (section 6).

2. Parliamentary practice – a new research perspective

This study examines parliaments, the pivotal democratic institutions of modern political systems. Parliaments can be defined as "bodies of representation that are the result of regular elections and have the task of representing the people" (Marschall 2005: 58). They comprise "[...] a large number of individual representatives with equal rights who have a free mandate" (Marschall 2005: 58). Contemporary democracies cannot function without parliaments: they are responsible for many of the institutionalised and non-institutionalised processes that are involved in decision making, debate, the scrutiny of

government, and legitimation (Schüttemeyer 1986: 164; cf. Beyme 1999; cf. Bagehot 1971). Parliaments are the central place of professionalisation for political actors. They educate the public and shape the general perception of politics (Mayntz 2002: 211). Furthermore, they play a crucial role on all levels of political influence (cf. Scharpf 1985). Last but not least, history has shown that parliaments are "one of the most viable constitutional mechanisms for the institutionalised mediation of political and social conflicts" (Beyme 1999: 525). At the least, these findings relativise the post-democratic belief that parliaments are no longer relevant.

2.1 An analysis of political institutions as a desideratum of political sociology

However, I did not choose this topic of research solely because of the centrality of these political institutions. There is an urgent need for research that can help us to better understand political practice, especially with regards to parliaments. A tacit division exists between sociology and political science regarding empirical research on political processes, which has led to a research gap on the practice of political institutions (see Brichzin 2016a: 91f.). Political (constitutional) institutions, including central parliaments, are the focus of scientific interest in political science. However, this interest largely is largely directed towards the structural constitutional conditions of political institutions as reflected, for example, in the norms of constitutional law (cf. Schöne 2010: 15). The special expertise of sociology, on the other hand, is a differentiated understanding of practical social and especially political processes (cf. Nassehi/Schroer 2003). By attempting to avoid the traditional tendency to limit political science to an analysis of political institutions, sociologists largely lose sight of these institutions, dedicating their research instead to political processes that take place in everyday society (cf. Siri 2012). If we take Pierre Bourdieu's definition of practice as the logics of reactions of social actors (based on their habitus) to "unforeseen and ever-changing situations" (Bourdieu 1979: 165) from which everyday life is constituted[2], it is possible to say: genuine practical analyses of political institutions are hard to find; until now very little conclusive research has been carried out on the logic of political practice in parliaments.

---

2   In contrast to many contemporary concepts of practical theory (cf. Reckwitz 2003).

2.2 The contribution of legislative studies: on the structure of parliamentary situations

Parliamentary research (or legislative studies) in particular has produced numerous insights that are relevant with regard to parliamentarian practice, especially with regard to the institutional structure of parliamentary situations. These situations include the conditions of parliamentary practice without which this practice cannot be understood. The results of this traditional research thus enable us to make well-founded statements on the four central constituents of parliamentary practice: the basic conditions, parliamentary actors, constellations of parliamentary relationships, and a differentiation into various parliamentary contexts. These will be summarised in the following overview (for more details see Brichzin 2016a).

An analysis of the basic conditions of parliamentary practice shows that this practice takes place under drastically overwhelming conditions. This applies to three aspects in particular. First, with regards to content: due to the historically successive "expansion of government activities" (Ismayr 2009: 37) combined with the expansion of the political sphere (Lessenich 2008: 12ff.), parliaments have been given responsibility for any societal issues (e. g. Patzelt/Edinger 2011: 11; Ismayr 2009: 37). Second, and as a consequence of the flood of political issues, these overwhelming conditions include the aspect of time: there is a chronic shortage of time – which should be seen as a critical factor for parliamentary practice (Palonen 2008) –, many MPs attempt to compensate by extending their own work hours (Patzelt 1996: 480; Best et al. 2011: 174). Third, and finally, political actors are faced with considerable normative demands (cd. Hitzler 1994: 281). In the name of democracy, they are expected to practice self-denial for the greater good and show assertive authenticity, to carry out an independent analysis of the cause, and at the same time to be an obedient representative of the people (and much more). Overload in terms of content, time, and normative expectations is not simply something that occurs as an exception, but should instead be seen as "business as usual" for MPs.

Parliamentary actors who must cope with this work overload are usually members of highly skilled professions (Borchert 2003) who build up a personal distance to the population over the course of their careers. A look at the social structure of members of parliament, whose composition greatly differs from the average population with regards to education, professional socialisation, gender makeup, and age distribution, emphasises this distinction (Feldkamp 2011). Politicians spend an average of ten years in the

Bundestag, a figure that has remained fairly consistent; after each election, a third of the members of parliament are newcomers (Feldkamp 2011). In order to be elected, politicians must have been politically active for many years. This period is known as the "Ochsentour", the oxen tour, or the slow, hard road to the top (Patzelt 1996: 467). Until today, the precise skills a politician must acquire during this time are not entirely clear: in addition to the necessary knowledge and organisational skills, political expertise is essential (cf. Sarcinelli 2011: 131). This expertise includes knowledge of ideologies and their impact, political positions and their strategic effectiveness, the formation of coalitions and alliances, and the rules of political confrontation and consensus building (cf. Wodak 2009: 46; Searing 1994: 372). Explanations on this topic usually end with the comment: it's all about knowing the "rules of the game" (Searing 1994: 372). However, a look at individual MPs – and that does not even include the extremely important role of parliamentary employees (Jekewitz 1995) – is insufficient. This is due in part to the fact that most parliamentary rights of influence are group rights (Schütte-meyer 2003: 82): parliamentary practice cannot be understood simply as the voluntative result of individual decisions. Until now, two approaches to parliamentary relationships have dominated the debate: a "model of bureaucratic-rational progress" (Leuschner 2011: 13), which only recognises the illegitimate expression of undemocratic irrationality in political relationships, is contrasted by a second perspective that sees relationships as a constitutive component of a "project-based polis" (Leuschner 2011: 13) grounded in policy networks that determine efficiency. As early as 1989, Renate Mayntz and Friedhelm Neidhardt determined – in one of the few parliamentary studies with a decidedly sociological focus – the importance of understanding the firmly established relationships within parliamentary practice. Mayntz and Neidhardt emphasise competition as an "elementary experience" of parliamentary practice (Mayntz/Neidhardt 1989: 374), whereas Vinzenz Leuschner, for example, examines the influence of parliamentary friendships on a politician's capacity to act within the complexity of political bodies (Leuschner 2011: 319). At this point, it is important to carry out additional analyses on the influence of various parliamentary relationships.

In addition to relationships, parliamentary practice is also heavily dependent on the individual contexts in which it takes place, and parliaments can vary dramatically depending on these contexts. There are two crucial levels of context differentiation. The first level is the distribution of power within the contexts of government and opposition that, at least within parliamentary governments, are fundamental for parliamentary

analyses (Ismayr 2003: 47). This is because much depends on the distribution of power – from the election of government and the makeup of parliamentary bodies to the chances of success for legislative initiatives (Marschall 2005: 163). The second level are the arenas for parliamentary debate, which includes plenaries, committees, and parties. While plenaries are primarily "shop windows" (Marschall 2005: 117) displaying the current distribution of power, the true political work of "working parliaments" (Steffani 1965) in Germany takes place in committees, where debates tend to be much less confrontational and more collegial than in plenaries (cf. Oertzen 2009), and especially within the parties – amid the tension between free mandates and the pressure for coherence in the party. Parliamentarians respond to this wide variety of contexts with a multi-faceted practice that is scientifically described using its "typical" (Patzelt 1996: 480) individual components – from participating in meetings, communicating with colleagues, public administration, and citizens, providing information and establishing contacts, carrying out administrative duties, reading, and taking care of correspondence (Holtenkamp 2011: 110; Patzelt 1996: 480f.; Herzog et al. 1990: 86f.).

2.3 The search for a theoretical framework: what do political actors do?

These attempts at categorisation fail to represent the overarching logic of parliamentary practice (cf. Busby 2013: 95; cf. Wodak 2009: 24); they are merely descriptive. This is primarily due to the fact that there is often no sustainable concept for parliamentary activities (which is needed for an analysis of practice). It is my thesis that this is largely due to the narrow view of political activity taken by democratic theories. To what extent is this the case? According to democratic theory, the apparent task of political actors is representation. One prominent theory proposed by Hanna Pitkin sees representation as a process of recalling something that is essentially absent (Pitkin 1967: 9), in the case of politics the will of the people. While Pitkin does mention the receptive as well as the proactive dimension of representation – namely "responsiveness" and "political leadership" – a concept of representation that primarily emphasises receptivity dominates the research on parliaments: parliamentarians thus appear merely as place-holders for the interests of the citizens (Fraenkel 1991: 302), their actions only become visible in relation to the "will of the people". The personal contribution of representatives cannot yet be systematically examined from the point of view of democratic theory (except as an aberration). Understanding the complex conditions of parliamentary practice, as described above, is, however, inconceivable without this

active personal contribution. From a practice analytical perspective this results in a paradox: if we wish to analyse the parliamentary activities related to representation, it is important to disregard the personal contribution of the actors.

With the introduction of the decision-making perspective to political research brought on by the rise of systems theory, this belief is changing – the political system's own contributions to political outcomes and thus those of the actors are coming into view: "Inputs of demands alone are not enough to keep a political system operating. They are only the raw material out of which finished products called decisions are manufactured" (Easton 1957, p. 390). As a result, researchers are now primarily interested in determinants and the consequences of prior decisions – everything that must happen before a decision can be made disappears into the unearthed depths of theory (cf. Kingdon 2011, p.1). On the other hand, some "light [is shed] on the shadows of the black box" (Blum/Schubert 2011, p. 25) by the influential heuristics of the "policy cycle", in which the subject of political debate goes through several phases – from agenda setting and political formulation to implementation and, finally, evaluation (Windhoff-Héritier 1987). While dividing the formation of political content into different phases has been a great inspiration for research (Sabatier 1999: 6), the findings on individual phases often remain unconnected with one another (cf. deLeon 1999: 23). Overarching theoretical considerations provide some relief, including John Kingdon's "multiple streams" theory (Kingdon 2011), which he developed in the mid-1980s in connection with the "garbage can" model of organisational choice (Cohen/March/Olsen 1972). Kingdon starts out with the question: "[...] what makes an idea's time come?" (Kingdon 2011: 1). In order to answer this question, he conceptualises a "window of opportunity" (Kingdon 2011: 166) which must open for said idea. This occurs when the three initially independent streams – social problems ("problems stream"), politically formulated alternative proposals ("policy stream"), and current constellations in the distribution of power ("politics stream") – come together (Kingdon 2011: 87). Political actors only begin to matter when they must take the opportunity presented to them (Kingdon 2011: 127f.). According to Kingdon's concept, they do not play a defined role when formulating political proposals because the policy stream follows an autonomous logic: "The process is evolutionary, a selection process in which some of these ideas survive and flourish" (Kingdon 2011: 124). The selection of content does require some explanation, although its formation does not – the appearance of ideas and alternatives seems to be rather a spontaneous process.

A new research movement shows that this is not the case. This movement sees parliamentary processes as the place where political content is produced and focuses on the "'doing' aspect in shaping politics" (Wodak 2009: 1). A similar approach can be found in the work of Thomas Scheffer (Scheffer 2014) and Tanja Pritzlaff, who illustrated that in relation to the parliamentary process "the actors may be shaped by the context in which they move, by its norms, values, and rules, by the context of defining common knowledge, but at the same time, they actively shape their environment" (Pritzlaff 2003: 246). The premise of such approaches is based on the realisation that parliamentary "output" cannot be sufficiently understood without any knowledge of the practical process of production. An approach that focuses on production thus addresses the question of political work in the service of the cause, which was long neglected in the reception of Weber's political sociology (Borchert 2003: 68). From the start, this approach resists the impulse to separate political practice from social practice or to make an a priori classification (according to democratic theory) of this special aspect. The research focuses more on the question of how political content is created within the parliamentary process, where positioning – with regard to the positions taken on certain issues, which must successfully pass several thresholds for examination (Scheffer 2014) or in terms of positions taken by the actors within the political sphere (Pritzlaff 2003) – appears to play a crucial role. In the next section, I would like to go into this new research focus in more detail.

3. The political field: the practice of cultural production

An examination of parliaments that analyses their product has one weakness in particular: the theoretical context usually remains very vague and, while the relatively frequent application of cultural theory (Mayntz/Neidhardt 1989; Schöne 2010; cf. Nullmeier et al. 2003) enables a candidness in the observation of political processes, which are otherwise often restricted in their theoretical scope, this comes at a price: the approach lacks the capacity for theoretical systematisation – the results are often limited to a descriptive level. I therefore suggest connecting an analysis of political production with a theoretical perspective on politics, an approach that I believe has been hitherto undervalued: Pierre Bourdieu's concept of politics as a process of cultural production. The usual interpretation of Bourdieu's political sociology focuses on the common topos of inequality, which Bourdieu significantly promoted. I will present a short summary of this interpretation and its relevance for politics. According to Bourdieu's theory, the

political field is one of those social spheres that perpetuate the existing distribution of power. Specifically, the political field is given special significance: if we see the question of "forms and effects of symbolic power" as the "leitmotif of Pierre Bourdieu's studies" (König/Berli 2012: 326), then the structure of ascertainable inequality mostly depends on which groups currently possess the authority of interpretation in a society. In the political field, the struggle for this authority of interpretation is openly carried out (Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996: 101). The legitimate "principles of vision and division" (Bourdieu 1998: 52) of a society are at stake – that is, the principles that permit the division of social events into categories of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, valuable and worthless. Success or failure in the political field thus becomes an important determinant for one's position in the social "field of power" (Bourdieu 2009: 83). Bourdieu reveals mechanisms that prevent the political struggle for the social authority of interpretation from being a fair game, thereby also giving ruling social groups predominance in the political sphere. Thus, political capital (Bourdieu 1991: 504), the specific resource of this field, is of central importance: from the start, high-ranking social groups – who are considered credible and thus awarded the power of representation (Bourdieu 1991: 504) – have significant advantages, because the possibility of having "symbolic impact" largely depends on economic, social, and especially on cultural capital as well as the faculty of speech (Bourdieu 2010: 176f.). The command of legitimate language as a central medium for constituting meaning, enables the "creation of legitimate problems and opinions" (Bourdieu 2010: 126) and implies the ability "to provide a political answer to a political question" (Bourdieu 2010: 176f.). Once again, the lower classes are disadvantaged, the struggle for social authority of interpretation appears to be almost hopeless for them – the political field as well tends to be a field of hierarchic reproduction.

In Bourdieu's works on political sociology, however, this perspective of politics as a field of hierarchic reproduction is accompanied by a view of politics whose relationship to the first perspective is at least somewhat unclear: an understanding of the political field as a social field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1992). In this sense, "culture" refers to the symbolic or social regime of interpretation, which assigns social objects their value. This is how far we already got with Bourdieu's reproduction approach to politics: politics is all about the interpretation of social reality. It also follows that Bourdieu did not see politics as a constitutive component of every social order nor as an anthropological constant (in the sense of seeing people as genuine "political beings";

cf. Arendt 1993: 11). According to Bourdieu, "politics begins, strictly speaking, with the denunciation of this tacit contract of adherence to the established order which defines the original doxa [...]" (*ibid.*, p. 11) – i.e. when social interpretations are recognised as such. The term production, on the other hand, provides a new dimension to our analysis of politics: politics focuses on producing new symbolic value in a continuous systematic fashion. Therefore, where Bourdieu's concept of politics looks into the productive dimension, practice theory predominates over theories of inequality (which are otherwise dominant). It is not the perpetuation of the (hierarchic) constant, but rather the genesis of new symbolic forms for overcoming unforeseen situations, the possibility to actively influence a change in symbolic orders, that becomes the centre of attention. Bourdieu thus makes it clear that he does not see power alone as the specific characteristic of politics: within a social "field of power", politics is characterised by its productive approach to symbolic orders.

As opposed to the political mechanisms of hierarchic reproduction, Bourdieu did not carry out empiric research on how this process of cultural production truly takes place, although he did develop a concept for it. So how does the political process produce these symbolic values, which are capable of influencing social regimes of interpretation? To complement the term production, Bourdieu uses the term labour – although he introduces it in passing (cf. Fritsch 2001: 17) – to describe the central form of social practice, i.e. the attempt to focus the impact of one's actions on current situations in order to actively and systematically change the conditions of future situations. In the case of politics: future symbolic relationships. He calls the specific form of labour in cultural production the "labour of enunciation" (Bourdieu 2010: 13f.): political actors process content so as to enable them to assemble social groups of support, i.e. to develop the power of mobilisation. During the political process, ideas are transformed into "idées-forces" (Bourdieu 2010: 107), powerful ideas – which is how Bourdieu defines the product of this process. Bourdieu describes political labour of enunciation as labour "which is necessary in order to externalize the inwardness, to name the unnamed and to give the beginnings of objectification to pre-verbal and pre-reflexive dispositions and ineffable and unobservable experiences, through words which by their nature make them common and communicable, therefore meaningful and socially sanctioned" (Bourdieu 2010: 13f.). By seeing the assembly of social groups as the result of the political process, Bourdieu reverses the usual definition of the term representation: according to his concept, the will of the people, which is to be represented,

is already present in society, and need only be heard by political actors. Instead, representation is the outcome of the political practice of politicians in which they succeed in producing ideas with which people can identify and which therefore have a mobilising effect.

However, since Bourdieu did not carry out any empirical studies on this issue, one question remains unanswered: how can the political process succeed in making social issues significant, i.e. how can ideas be transformed into "idées-forces". The empirical study described in this paper is an attempt to answer this question.

4. Parliamentary ethnography as a research method for political practice

This theoretical introduction enables the initial question regarding the logic of parliamentary practice to be reformulated: how does political work produce powerful ideas in parliaments? In order to answer this question, I carried out an ethnographic study on four parliamentary levels in Germany. This study follows the production approach to parliaments described above, which draws from the even older (though still seldom used) tradition of parliamentary observation (Fenno 1978). Ethnography, which is understood as a flexible "strategy of knowledge" (Amann/Hirschauer 1997: 20), is based on the basic assumption that social structures are constituted through the situative influence of social actors (cf. Garfinkel 1984: 11) – the ethnographic approach to reality corresponds with the epistemological interest in processes of political practice.

The aim of this approach is not to generalise – ethnography, like other qualitative empirical methods, is not a method for testing hypotheses. Instead, its objective is to systematically develop theories (Glaser/Straus 1971: 1): the question raised here is answered using a theoretical model that sheds light on central categories that were hitherto latent and the impact of these categories. In order to achieve this, I concentrated on a few cases, which, however, I analysed in depth. In order to gain a (theoretical) perspective of the determinants that were not yet considered, this ethnographic study had to avoid the two central biases that are common in scientific analyses of parliaments (Brichzin 2016a). The first is the "big arena bias", which tries to establish relevance by concentrating on the institution that receives the most public attention, i.e. the Bundestag. For this reason, this study, which I carried out between 2012 and 2014, focuses on four levels of parliament – federal parliament (Bundestag), state parliaments (Landtag), city councils (Stadtrat), municipal parliaments – (thereby somewhat shifting the focus away from the Bundestag) in order to avoid being overshadowed by

the work methods of only one parliamentary body. Instead, my emphasis was on the continuity of parliamentary practice. Since parliamentary practice is derived from the demands of democratic thinking, this continuity exists across all levels of parliament. The second is the "big decision bias", which draws the attention of scientific observers to decisions that have a high media impact and thus away from the – much more frequent – procedures that generate less public interest. In order to achieve this, I shadowed two MPs from each level of parliament (one member of parliament from the Bundestag) for a little more than a work week (just under two months in total) throughout their entire range of duties – in plenary meetings, committees, factions, work groups, party and public events, during informal debates and consultations etc.[3] Ethnographic shadowing (Czarniawska 2007) is a relationship-based method that is heavily dependent on a trusting relationship between the researcher and the MPs, thereby giving the researcher access to sessions that would otherwise be difficult to observe (cf. Nullmeier et al. 2003: 41). The personal relationship to one parliamentary actor thus grants admission to the everyday practice of many other actors with whom the MP deals with during various shadowing situations.

I was therefore able to collect a comprehensive corpus of data consisting of observation and conversation protocols, interviews, and process produced documents.

Member of Parliament (anonym.)	Parliament	Political Status:	Interviews	Minutes (observ.)	Minutes (discussion)	Documents
Mr Adam	Municipal	Government	2	8	-	5
Mr Bertram	Municipal	Opposition	2	8	4	6
Ms Christl	Municipal council	Government	2	15	2	9
Mr Decker	State Parliament	Opposition	2	19	3	18
Ms Eck	State Parliament	Government	2	14	1	3
Mr Fischer	Municipal council	Government	1	5	-	7
Mr Günther	Bundestag	Opposition	-	19	3	8

---

3   In addition, at the beginning of the study I profited from my four years of experience as an elected volunteer member of a municipal parliament.

Just as several parliamentary levels were included in order to compensate for idiosyncrasies in the observation, I shadowed more than just one MP for each level of parliament (however, for reasons of "theoretical sampling" (Glaser/Straus: 61), I did not shadow a second MP on the last level of observation, the Bundestag). The selection of individual MPs was based on two criteria. First, the MPs needed to be willing to accept this massive intrusion into their sphere of work. I tapped into personal networks in order to establish the necessary contacts. Second, two representatives of one parliamentary level had to differ in relevant aspects, in particular with regards to party membership, membership to government or opposition, gender, and age, which I was partially able to achieve. My decision to only include German parliaments in my study was made primarily for pragmatic reasons – I also assumed (perhaps falsely) that national differences could divert the focus away from the common features. The data was evaluated using a reconstructive analysis (Bohnsack 2010).

5. The politics of cultural production – the achievements of parliamentary work

So how does the practice of cultural production in parliaments take place? How does a political idea, which Bourdieu sees as the object of political work, become an "idée-force"? The ethnographic data confirms what the research indicated: this transformation involves a complex process, which I will reconstruct in a model of political work in this paper. The three central dimensions are: First, problems that need to be addressed on the level of symbolic order – according to Bourdieu, political labour of enunciation begins where the interpretation of relevant social occurrences has become questionable. Second, different modes of dealing with these problems – this makes it clear that there is not only one kind of political work. Third, and finally, these different modes of political work in parliaments involve very different forms of interaction. It is only possible to understand the transformation of an idea to an "idée- force" when the interactions between these three dimensions have been understood.

5.1. The selectivity of parliamentary work: political issues as problems of symbolic order

Political work is only considered to be necessary when existing interpretations have been recognised as a relevant social problem of interpretation. Whether and how this problem is addressed therefore depends on this question. How do MPs arrive at these problems of interpretation? To begin with, their narrations revolve around political work

in service of the cause (Adam Int1 Z101) in Weber's sense of the word, i.e. the debating of social issues (Eck Int1 Z836; Christl Int1 Z382). For example, MPs report that they went into politics because they "*enjoy it: speaking openly, so just being able to think about an issue in a whole new way and do something different.*" (Decker Int1 Z33) and that their political work is about clarifying the question: "*How do we see this issue?*" (Adam Int1 Z255). It is remarkable how often the term issue is used throughout all of the interviews. Even the specific frustrations of the profession are represented using the term issue: "[...] *there is nothing more demotivating than spending hours on an issue and thinking up a concept that no one is interested in*" (Decker Int1 Z515). The fact that issues – and not, say, decisions, which are otherwise often the focus of de-pictions of political activities – are the decisive point of reference for parliamentary work is particularly apparent when MPs talk about the really "*interesting issues that involve a bit more than just [...] ah, I don't know, making a decision – and that's it. It's the issues that you have the ability to shape to some degree*" (Adam Int 2 Z1604). Issues thus appear to be the starting point for political actions; they are indicators for problems on the level of symbolic order.

Although this may sound trivial – after all who does not deal with issues in one way or another? – the analysis revealed that this was a key aspect for understanding parlia-mentary activities. If issues are seen as symbolic problems, then we can begin to un-derstand some of the special characteristics of parliamentary work that result precisely from the assumed triviality of the term issue: for one thing, issues, which are abstractly understood as objects of intellectual contemplation, are characterised by their infinite potential – anything that can be named can also be turned into an "issue" through reflection. The ever increasing capacity for politicisation in the modern age has resulted in parliamentarians dealing with "*essentially everything*" (Eck Int1 Z284). Potentially, anything can become a problem for politicians, which means that they – as mentioned above – are in a constant state of overload. Second, issues always have a history of their own – they have been debated by the public, by predecessors, and political op-ponents etc., i.e. a wide range of groups have previously dealt with an issue and left their traces on it. Thus the issues that MPs must deal with do not have a "natural state" (cf. Marx 1975: 192). Because previous processes of formation must be addressed, a kind of resistance develops and the issues can thus become "*never-ending problems*" (Bertram Int1 Z404) that must be "*ploughed through*" (Decker Int1 Z475) over years.

Third, and finally, and this is perhaps the most important consequence: in their description of their own work, MPs refer to issues in the plural – parliamentarians do not deal with one issue at a time, to which they can dedicate all of their attention. The exceptional quality of political activities is that politicians are always confronted with numerous relevant problems and must constantly switch between them: *"If you take one day as an example, then I may go in to a school, talk with the teachers. An hour later, I'm in a large consortium for company X, or something like that. Afterwards, I go into the forest to look at a new path. Then I drive out to a bypass and then I go to see [a high-ranking member of the party] because he is having a women's meeting to see how we can appeal to more women. Right? So the issues – in my opinion, the difficult thing is the speed at which we have to switch from one issue to a completely different one. That's the great part. I mean that's the great part that makes it – that's exactly why it's so much fun. And it's what is so tiring, to immediately switch to the next thing"* (Eck Int1 Z561-569). The constitutive characteristic of parliamentary work is thus an extreme changeability that results from transitioning between different issues. This is the case not only because the transition between issues often involves a change of place and participants. What is more relevant is that the type of political work required changes with the type of problem – it "*depends of course on the issue*" (Christl Int1 Z577) and varies "*depending on the issue*" (Decker Int2 Z35).

Parliamentary work, therefore takes a different form depending on the type of problem it is faced with. From an empirical point of view, however, these forms are not arbitrary: in order to be able to tackle the large number of issues, MPs sort them into categories – which, however, are not to be seen as ontological. The corresponding categorisation, which enables MPs to sort issues according to their perceived relevance as problems in the symbolic order, is the first central achievement of political work in parliaments. In doing so, they determine and legitimise what can be accepted as a social problem of interpretation. From an analytical perspective, this process of categorisation has two levels: On the first level, all issues are rejected that are not currently recognised as a political problem. Issues must thus overcome the threshold to parliament, must become "parliamentary issues", and the vast majority of issues that are brought to an MP's attention do not achieve this (cf. Scheffer 2014): because "*you always have to look at it realistically: you can only comprehensively deal with a maximum of two issues [...]*" (Eck Int1 Z923). However, the rejected issues are not always dealt with in the same way: while "*singular interests*" (Eck Int1 Z272) are denied any political relevance,

"*background subjects*" are considered legitimate, although only of local relevance – "*that isn't something that ends up in the [committees] of [parliament] but instead something that we try to hand over to a ministry as quickly as possible*" (Eck Int1 Z364). The second level of categorisation refers to the subcategorisation of parliamentary issues. Real parliamentary work begins on this level. The focus of interest here is not on whether the current issue is politically relevant but on how politically important it is: if an issue has the potential to spark a high level of public interest, a wide range of reactions from citizens, and the massive disapproval of those with different political opinions, i.e. a "*snowball effect*" (Bertram Int1 Z370) or to become (or already is) an "*ongoing issue*" (Decker Int1 Z542), then it can be defined as a "resonant issue". If this is not the case, then it can be considered a "marginal issue". Here, resonant and marginal issues are two poles of one continuum and the process of categorisation is to be understood as a collective process. Placing issues onto this continuum is always temporary: something that was initially presented as a resonant issue in the media can soon wind up in the largely unnoticed regional sections. And something that was initially considered an uninteresting specialist issue can suddenly rise to be of extreme political importance (cf. Nullmeier et al. 2003: 169). The vast majority of issues are clearly marginal in nature (Fischer TO Ple3), whereas the general perception focuses on resonant issues, which parliamentary actors debate much more intensely – and, as will become clear in the following section, in a very different manner than marginal issues.

5.2 The variability of parliamentary work: three modes of cultural production in parliaments

Political issues thus denote problems on the level of symbolic order and the goal of political work is to resolve these problems of interpretation using the correspondingly adapted ideas, i.e. replace them with political ideas. However, my research into parliamentary practice shows that this cannot be done in only one specific manner – the changeability of parliamentary work mentioned above manifests itself in quick alternations between the three central modes of political work. I refer to these modes as "the political game", "the settling of issues", and "political resourcefulness". In the following section, I will describe each of these in more detail.

The mode of parliamentary work that both the public and the MPs are most conscious of is the "*political game*" (Eck Int1 Z455). Ms Eck describes the political game from the perspective of the opposition: *"The other parties submit applications and have to hope*

that they are denied so that they can tell the public: the government is a catastrophe and we would have liked to help but unfortunately we couldn't… That is the political game, it doesn't have anything to do with the people or what party you belong to [...], it's always the same no matter what side you're on" (Eck Int1 Z455ff.). This form of "ritual antagonism" (Mayntz/Neidhardt 1989, p. 382) – usually between the government and the opposition – gives us insight into the primary aim of this work modus: it mainly involves positioning (Scheffer 2014). The goal of the political game is to negate the position of your political opponent and to propagate your own position as a positive alternative interpretation. The form of an idea is determined by constructing one's own new (and of course better) position and distinguishing it from another position. How this is done becomes clear when we consider the following (stylised) discussion in a city council plenary session:

> *The agenda contains a motion proposed by Party A on an important issue: The government is to buy out a large company that has gone bankrupt. Party A and Party B argue about the pros and cons. Mr Mölke (Party A) is speaking and his argument is based on a recent statement made at a higher political level. In his view, this changes the situation in a decisive way: the government has essentially been given permission to purchase the company, thus revealing that all of the earlier statements made by the political opposition that the purchase was not possible for legal reasons were an intent to deceive – at least, this is Mr Mölke's interpretation. Party B simply did not want to assume responsibility for the employees of the company, says he, they are only thinking about the money. Party A, on the other hand, is standing up for the employees: they are reviewing further possibilities for making the purchase. Now Ms Kurt (Party B) is given the floor. She discredits the explanations made by the other party as being a campaign manoeuver void of any evidence. She completely negates the importance of the statement made by the higher ranking politician: the legal possibilities have not even been discussed; the situation therefore remains unclear. Since Party A pretends that the – legally precarious – purchase can be easily made, they are placing the very employees that they say they wish to support in a situation that will likely remain very insecure for years. The debate continues in this manner.* (Fischer Ple3 Z3653ff.)

The central aspect of the political game is to present the opposing position in a negative light, which then allows one's own position to be perceived positively. Party A presents Party B's position as an attempt to deceive voters that is motivated by greed, while Party A is primarily concerned about the employees. Party B, on the other hand, illustrates Party A's position as populist actionism, which must be countered by their own realistic intention for a solution. Like the positive, the negative form is only a construction of the political process itself, making this process a feat of double construction.

The important task is to determine which aspects of the opposing position can be effectively negated (despite the resistance of previous interpretations and older definitions), which facets are helpful for supporting the party's own contrasting position, and which should be omitted because they could be counterproductive. As contrasting positions are the primary objective, this work mode is surprisingly productive: since it is clear from the beginning that a party's own position must be different from that of the opposition, the political game becomes a true generator of alternative interpretations for dealing with symbolic orders.

However, the political game is an extremely costly work mode: a successful double-sided construction requires a great deal of time. This time is only available for resonant issues. Now, it was previously emphasised that the majority of issues do not generate the public attention required to become resonant issues – so how are marginal issues dealt with? The primary objective here is just as clear as for the political game: to cross the issues off of the agenda as quickly – and the same time legitimately – as possible: they need to be "settled". This mode is a reaction to the fact that in modern and pluralistic democracies many more indicators and red flags for disruptions and problems in the symbolic order appear at the same time than can be dealt with at once. The mode I call the settling of issues is thus largely recognisable by the frequently quick pace at which it takes place (Brichzin 2016b). The imperative for debating all of the issues on the agenda means that they cannot simply be ignored in these sessions. But how can an idea be given a concrete shape in as short a timeframe as possible? The problem inherent in the settling of issues becomes clear in the following example from a committee session:

> *It's about a petition: a farmer has built a building – that is used for both farming and commercial purposes – on his property without a permit. He has received an official order to tear it down since building for commercial purposes without a permit is illegal. The farmer has appealed to the committee. Now the committee must determine whether the building is being used primarily for commercial purposes or for farming. And whether it can remain standing. The reporting MP has taken an inductive and empathetic approach to the issue (instead of reviewing documents) by visiting the building in question and is therefore able to focus on the decisive question: can the farm's large farming vehicles be parked elsewhere or not? Because the MP viewed the situation on site, she has the legitimacy to narrow down alternative solutions in the decisive committee session. A new expert report leads to the conclusion that the vehicles can indeed be parked elsewhere. Afterwards, other MPs come up with additional ad hoc arguments – tearing down the building could financially ruin the business, the business is principally worth supporting – but these arguments are not further debated. The*

> *MPs vote on a situation that is still extremely unclear but now has a functional argumentation and a completed discussion behind it.* (Eck Aus16 Z149ff.)

Even though the MPs disagreed in this situation – the decision was not unanimous (*ibid.* Z233) – at no time is there any argument between the parties, the potential for conflict is left untapped, the discussion is not drawn out by contesting the interpretation of the reporting MP. The form that has been established is clearly considered to be sufficient. The settling of issues is characterised by the ad hoc generation of arguments and the corresponding use of knowledge resources in the situation, the selective application of information sources that were available in the situation, and the spontaneous, inductive narrowing down of alternative decisions. The – frequently plausible but usually fairly unstable – form of an idea is developed by the arrangement of the apparently situational arguments. In contrast to the political game, the settling of issues leads to outcomes that are surprisingly unpredictable, ideological contrasting is essentially avoided in this mode. This process appears to be normatively regulated – if a confrontation in the sense of a political game takes place, then someone soon says: a discussion of this kind "*doesn't do us any good*" (Decker Aus14 Z214) in this issue and the matter is dealt with collaboratively. This mode for debating political issues in parliament may seem problematic from the outside, but it does not contradict the expectation of rational, well-founded decision making. From the inside, the process is seldom seen as a problem: all MPs are aware of the necessity of debating the many issues that are raised in parliament in order to be able to conclude their work. In view of the symbolic order of society, the special accomplishment of the settling of issues is not to offer interesting alternatives or comprehensive solutions to existing problems. Instead the settling of issues is more about superficially ironing out or providing a quick fix for a problem – unproblematic areas of symbolic order should be re-established as quickly as possible and a concluded debate in parliament legitimates decisions.

By contrast, the third work mode, political resourcefulness, cannot easily be placed at either pole of the continuum of marginal and resonant issues. This work form, which from an empirical point of view is seldom used on its own, often appears in conjunction with the other two modes. Political resourcefulness becomes increasingly important with the degree of perceived urgency of a problem and the visibility of the associated

level of suffering (extreme examples include ongoing emergencies such as cata-strophic flooding)[4]. It is therefore not the a priori objective to quickly work through the agenda nor is the focus to propagate one's own position – neither time nor the thematic focus are the central restrictions for this mode. The primary focus is an effective change of the social status quo, which is largely influenced by a differentiation from or creative use of existing laws. This can be illustrated by the following example from municipal politics:

> *As part of the planning for a green space, a pedestrian/cycling bridge is to be built in a location where cars are currently permitted to drive. There is clear resistance, two parties stand in opposition to one another: Party C takes the side of those seeking local recreation and therefore reject traffic. Party D takes the side of the residents who feel cut off from their neighbour-hood without a bridge for traffic. The conflict has been dragging on through-out several sessions; the time has come to make a decision: either traffic, or pure local recreation. There is then a turn of events in the issue: the focus is now on a regulation that stipulates that the bridge must be built in such a way as to bear the "majority of the impact of car and lorry traffic", ensuring access for emergency vehicles. Thus the parliamentarians come up with the idea (which may be somewhat surprising in Germany) to not put up any signs – neither signs that forbid traffic nor any that expressly permit it. The thought behind this is that people who are not familiar with the area would be afraid to use the road through the park, but the neighbours could con-tinue to pass through it. In this way, most cars would avoid the area and yet the neighbours would get the help they requested. (Adam Verw2, Aus3, Ple4, Ple7, AG8)*

In this case, a conflict between interests that are recognised as legitimate is resolved in a fashion that is initially unexpected for observers: the legal conditions – which are repeatedly and emphatically referred to – are the material that give the idea its concrete shape and give it its positive form. Often, the legal status quo becomes a negative form in this work mode. The ambivalent relationship of employees to jurists is a clear indi-cation for this development: MPs frequently resist limitations to their scope for action by legal interpretations and demand autonomy in their interpretation of reality: "*You didn't become a jurist in order to tell me what can't be done, I would like you to tell me how it can be done*" (Eck Int1 Z510). Thus, professional political actors do not see the legal limitations of the laws, statutes, and bylaws that have an impact on everyday life. Instead, they see them as a starting point for discovering new possibilities; existing law becomes the basis for creative solutions. This is accompanied by a specific political

---

4   The visibility of the level of suffering explains, for example, the positive effect the presence of applicants has on their own cause (e.g. Eck Aus11 Z216f.).

skill: the ability to discover new possibilities in given symbolic circumstances. The product of the work mode political resourcefulness is thus neither to formulate symbolic alternatives nor to quickly cross off issues from the list of social problems. Instead, the product of this mode is the potentially effective superimposition and thus local reordering of social orders of interpretation.

5.3 The covariance of political forms of work and interaction

The quick and often abrupt change between various work modes depending on the type of issue at hand is therefore a large part of the peculiar nature of the parliamentary process. Switching work modes involves a drastic change in the form of interaction: a situation defined by antagonistic confrontation can turn into a discussion on a related issue that had been deemed secondary, and which is carried out in agreement between all of the fractions. It is precisely this alternation between confrontation and cooperation that allows the parliamentary process to appear so unintelligible from the outside (Brichzin 2016b):

> *Extremely controversial issues were debated in the committee session and now similarly loaded issues are still on the agenda. The session is drawing to a close; all of the MPs have important appointments afterwards. But first, the MPs would like to hear the mayor who came specifically to speak about a certain issue. However, when the mayor begins to extensively criticise the approach taken by the government, he is immediately interrupted by the chairman (a member of the opposition): "STOP!" From then on, everyone speaks as little as possible: no further conflicts develop and the voting for the final items is quickly concluded. The meeting finally ends only 15 minutes later than scheduled.* (Eck Aus15)

While the political game has a strong confrontational nature, which all of the parties use to position themselves in a positive light for the public – "*if everything is decided unanimously, we can't benefit from it*" (Decker Int2 Z40) – the decisive form of interaction for the settling of issues is cooperative and consensual, cooperation is even celebrated:

> *The first item on the agenda of the committee session is a report from an MP from the governing party. An MP from the opposition, who also makes a report, comes to the same conclusion: she couldn't have put it better.* (Eck Aus11 Z22ff.)

> *While debating one of the items on the agenda, which all MPs agree had developed poorly, the reporting MP concludes: If "we" (the committee) had dealt with this issue, then things would have gone better.* (Eck Aus 11 Z56ff.)

Conflicts, and to a larger degree ideological discussions, require time – time that is lacking during the settling of issues. Cooperation between the fractions allows marginal

issues to be debated much more quickly: only when the participants of the situation cooperate with one another is it possible for them to spontaneously mobilise enough symbolic resources to achieve an ad hoc settlement of symbolic orders. And only by avoiding a pronounced confrontation can they succeed in minimising the time needed: slipping into the mode of political game is a constant latent danger that threatens to dramatically increase the time required to debate an issue. However, the relationship between work mode and form of interaction is not one-sided: a certain form of interaction can also evoke a corresponding work mode. Smaller parliaments in particular, in which the MPs often know each other very well and therefore have a personal relationship in addition to a political one, more often forgo the political game. Vice versa, a conflict-ridden relationship between MPs can incite this mode (cf. Decker Aus14 Z141ff.). However, the direction of parliamentary work processes is never solely dependent on individual actions – it must always be considered in relation to the constellation of the corresponding committee.

The inconceivability of the back-and-forth between these contrary forms of interaction in everyday social situations reflects the importance of a social process in which this alternation is institutionalised. This process is particularly possible because the term political "game" is more than just a name: the dramatic differences in content and work mode inherent in the political game and the drastic antagonism aimed at other parties, and at times individuals, is not taken seriously – most of the time they appear to be a necessary manoeuvre in a competition for public approval. Parliamentarians see this as a sportsmanlike ritual of hostility between political parties. Thus Ms Eck's previous serene reflection: "[…] *it's always the same no matter who is on which side"* (Eck Z461). At many points, it is therefore possible to recognise signs of reflective distance to this mode, which surprisingly often lead to collective amusement:

> *The committee chairman gives the floor to a colleague from the other party – this colleague is now responsible for making a report on all of the applications that had been considered to date (nine items). This announcement causes general amusement. The chairman cheerfully adds: "You can make it short!" Clearly amused, the colleague answers: That will not be easy after this introduction. Again general amusement follows.* (Eck Aus15 Z184ff.)

MPs rarely mention that they are conscious of the position they share within the complex social arrangement of parliament that surfaces in such moments. Everyday moments of consensus are marginalised in the perception of the MPs. From the outside, parliamentary activities appear to be a constant confrontation between different political groups – a pure struggle.

5.4 From an idea to an "idée-force": the generation of evidence as the central achievement of political work

The model of political work in parliaments established here can be summarised as follows: the model focuses on the three central modes of political work, i.e. the political game, the settling of issues, and political resourcefulness, which shape ideas in different ways. MPs switch between these modes very quickly in everyday parliamentary work. Which of these modes is selected is primarily dependent on how problematic each of the thematic fields of the social order of interpretation are considered to be (if they are indeed problematic): if an issue is considered to be more resonant, a political game is likely to ensue. If, however, the issue is a more marginal one, the settling of issues mode is more like to apply. Political resourcefulness seldom takes place alone, often it appears in conjunction with the other two modes – the use of this mode appears to increase with the urgency and visibility of the problem. Alternations between the various modes are accompanied by a drastic change in forms of interaction: while the political game is usually characterised by a high degree of antagonism, the settling of issues is dependent on cooperation. Personal relationships play an important role for political resourcefulness in particular.

PARLIAMENT
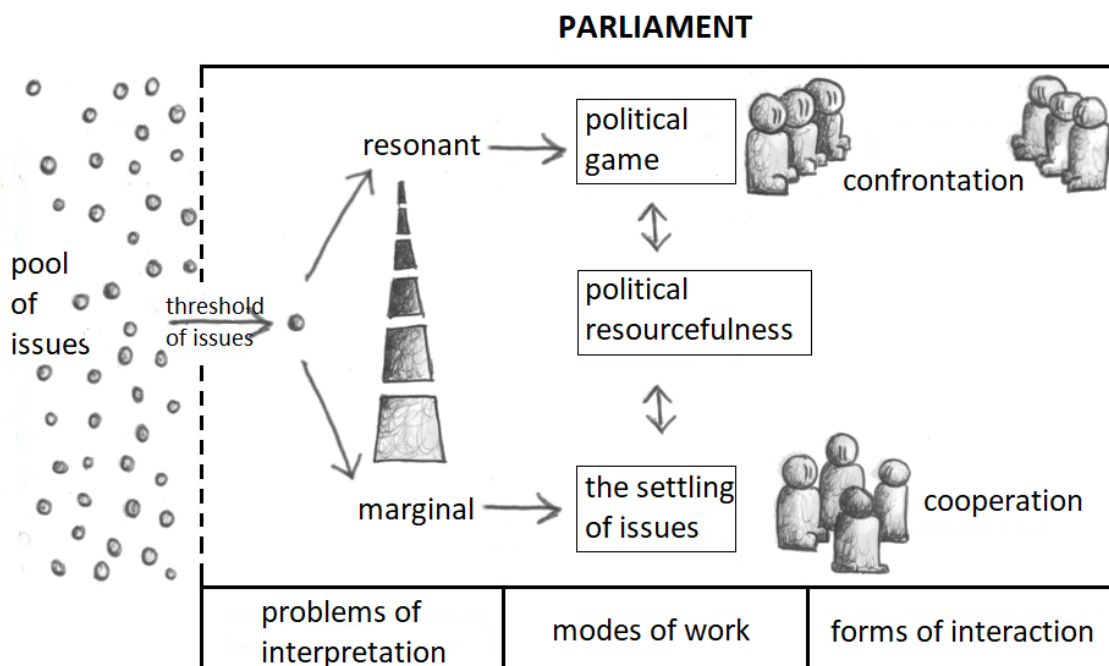
It is important to emphasise that none of these attributions and directions of causality are unidirectional: just as assuming a certain mode of work can change how relevant

an issue is considered to be, a certain form of interaction can also prompt a certain mode. On the other hand, the traditional division of parliamentary activity presented above, which is strongly dependent on the corresponding context – e.g. plenary, faction, committee or official session, informal conversations, public events etc. – has little explanatory power for the formation of political ideas: the different modes of political work determine what happens in each of these contexts; at the most their emphasis can shift. The political game tends to play a larger role the more public attention a certain context (e.g. plenary) has. The same also applies for the parliamentary levels – the higher the level the more important the political game.

But to what extent is an "idée-force" the result of this process and to what extent can the ideas produced be given meaning so that they can replace the interpretation that has become so problematic? Not every idea is successful, but an idea does succeed if, after it has been thoroughly debated, the (majority) of the participants and the public feel that it is an appropriate solution. At least some people must believe that a transmitted idea is the correct view of the world in order for it to develop symbolic efficacy – it must be translated into a "collective experience" (Otten 2001: 209). Only then can it have a mobilising effect and become an inherent part of a shared order of interpretation. In order to accomplish this, evidence must be generated. Evidence thus refers to the unmediated ability to understand an idea (Weber 2008: 5) – it is therefore a mode of human insight that is not based on lengthy discussions and justifications. It is generated when an idea transports a new concept that can be directly linked to familiar or existing ideas. Evidence is thus characterised by two aspects that have a dialectic relationship with one another: on the one hand there is the new idea that must first be understood. And on the other, this new idea must be connected to existing concepts if it is to be (mostly) accepted without resistance. When it comes to the evidence of political ideas, this means that new ways of looking at the world are not conceivable if they cannot be directly connected in some way to traditional world views. Particularly in the modern era, where countless levels of values and interpretations exist, partially mesh, and oppose one another, the generation of evidence becomes a requisite process. While the settling of issues enables the drastic reduction of important subjects that must be dealt with – a process that is crucial for the generation of evidence – the political game and political resourcefulness are clearly aimed at establishing a connection: a party's own idea becomes immediately comprehensible by contrasting it with the position of the political opposition or with the legal status quo.

Above and beyond this basic constitutive focus, parliamentarians use a variety of means to improve and stabilise this connection. This includes, among other things, illustrating issues using metaphors such as a "*roof [...] that keeps the house together*" (Günther Ple6 S5820). It involves the construction of historical continuities or discontinuities – for example when someone claims that the decision made is "*an important step in the right direction*" (Günther Ple6 S5821). And it especially means telling stories that help to establish an identity – for example in consultations on a possible protective bill for whistle-blowers: "*Without the lorry driver who uncovered the dodgy meat scandal by notifying the police, we would likely have had food poisoning from the rotten meat. Without the geriatric nurse who made public the poor conditions for 150 residents in a nursing home in Berlin [...] their condition would not have been remedied. [...] Without Edward Snowden we wouldn't know that we were being spied on or what we need to be able to defend ourselves*" (Günther Ple7 S6019). Components like these are used to form political ideas and help us to accept the presented symbolic values into our own system of interpretation; they allow these values to seem evident and are thus required for legitimacy. These components are connected to an idea by arguments that, as a result, no longer appear to be the absolute normative point of reference for democratic politics, as is often the case in deliberative democratic theories (Habermas 1998). Instead, they can be seen as tools that are just as much the product of previous formations as all other components of a political idea. The art of evident speech (i.e. rhetoric) is thus less an art and more hard work. This work means producing new self-evident facts in a world in which nothing is self-evident anymore.

6. And again: the boring of hard boards

In the beginning I asked what Weber really meant when he used the metaphor "the boring of hard boards" to describe political work. This study has demonstrated that political ideas are the hard boards and that the boring is the complex and strenuous task of working on these ideas. This task is reproduced in a model of political work that comprises the three work modes I call the political game, the settling of issues, and political resourcefulness. But according to Bourdieu the ideas are not "hard boards" because they must be integrated into an objective truth in a rational way or into the will of the people by representation. Instead, dealing with political ideas is so challenging because it does not have an objectively manifest, invariant, and a priori given external size, no invariant outer appearance – like truth and the will of the people – that could

give it a clear direction. Instead, political practice has an effect on symbolic order, which in turn has an impact on political practice: their relationship is dialectic. By working on establishing the connection between an idea and the symbolic order, political actors change this very order by attempting to generate evidence. And they thus change our view of the world as a prerequisite for future political practice.

This theoretical model was empirically established over a limited period of observation while shadowing a few MPs, and it must now be tested for sustainability, integrity, and generality. Can this model withstand a wide application in additional parliaments? Can a historical development of the work modes be reconstructed, and, if we wish to go a step further: is this a specific German pattern of parliamentary work or can a similar practice be reconstructed in other western parliaments? Can we create work profiles for different parties, and are there any important aspects that were not considered in this model? This study cannot provide answers to these questions. But perhaps it has become clear how a theoretical perspective that takes an interest in the productive impact of politics on culture can reveal a new point of view. Of course, this realisation does not challenge the relevance of political theories that focus on power or decision making. Incorporating new theoretical considerations can, however, serve to clarify the categories we use to better understand political phenomena: not everything that is power is politics and not every decision we make is political. This analysis supports the assumption that politics – as a struggle for a social authority of interpretation (cf. Bourdieu/Wacquant 1996, p. 101) – is defined in the productive connection between power and symbolicism: the basis for political power is its influence on symbolic orders; the generation of evidence in political work refers to the moment when this influence can be actively obtained. Insight into the logic of political practice can thus help to understand this relationship.

Literature

Amann, K., S. Hirschauer,1997: Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm. p. 7-52 in: S. Hirschauer & K. Amann (ed.), Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Arendt, H., 1993: Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlaß. Edited by Ursula Ludz. Munich: Piper.

Bagehot, W., 1971: Die englische Verfassung. With an introduction by Klaus Streifthau (ed.). Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand.

Best, H.; S. Jahr, L. Vogel, 2011: Karrieremuster und Karrierekalküle deutscher Parlamentarier. p. 168-191 in: W. Patzelt & M. Edinger (ed.), Politik als Beruf. Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Sonderheft 44. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Beyme, K.,1999: Die parlamentarische Demokratie. Entstehung und Funktionsweisen 1789-1999. Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Blum, S., K. Schubert, 2011: Politikfeldanalyse. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Bohnsack, R., 2010: Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung. Einführung in qualitative Methoden. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.

Borchert, J., 2003: Die Professionalisierung der Politik. Zur Notwendigkeit eines Ärgernisses. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus.

Bourdieu, P., 2010: Politik. Schriften zur politischen Ökonomie 2. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

Bourdieu, P., 2009: Religion. Schriften zur Kultursoziologie 5. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

Bourdieu, P., 2001: Das politische Feld. Zur Kritik der politischen Vernunft. Konstanz: UVK.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1998): Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1992): Language and Symbolic Power. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1991): Die politische Repräsentation. Berliner Journal für Soziologie 4: 489-515.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1977): Outline of a Theory of Practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P.; L. Wacquant, 1996: Die Ziele der reflexiven Soziologie. p. 95-250 in: *Ibid.*, Reflexive Anthropologie. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp,

Brichzin, J., 2016a: Parlamentarische Praxis – der Stand der Forschung zur zentralen Institution der Demokratie. Soziale Welt 67: 91-112.

Brichzin, J., 2016b: Krise des politischen Alltags – Eine ethnografische Parlaments-studie zur Entfremdung des Politischen. P. 91-112 in: F. Adloff, A. Antony & G. Sebald (eds.), Handlungs- und Interaktionskrisen. Theoretische und empiri-sche mikrosoziologische Perspektiven. Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziolo-gie 41.

Busby, A., 2013: Normal Parliament: Exploring the Organisation of Everyday Political Life in an MEP´s Office. Journal of Contemporary European Research 9: 94-115.

Cohen, M.; J. March, J. Olsen, 1972: A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. In: Administrative Science Quarterly 17: 1-25.

Czarniawska, B., 2007: Shadowing and Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Mod-ern Societies. Herndon: Copenhagen Business School Press.

DeLeon, P., 1999: The Stages Approach to the Policy Process. What Has it Done? Where is it Going? P. 19-32 in: P. Sabatier (ed.), Theories of the Policy Pro-cess. Boulder: Westview Press.

Easton, D., 1965: A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Feldkamp, M., 2011: Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages 1990 bis 2010. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Fenno, R., 1986: Observation, Context, and Sequence in the Study of Politics. Ameri-can Political Science Review 80: 3-15

Fenno, R., 1978: Home Style. House Members in Their Districts. Boston/Toronto: Lit-tle, Brown and Company.

Foucault, M., 2008: Sexualität und Wahrheit. In: *Idid*, Die Hauptwerke. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Fraenkel, E., 1991: Deutschland und die westlichen Demokratien. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Fritsch, P., 2001: Einführung. In: Bourdieu, Pierre: Das politische Feld. Zur Kritik der politischen Vernunft. Konstanz: UVK.

Garfinkel, H., 1984: Studies in Ethnomethodology. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Glaser, B.; A. Straus, 1971: The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research. Chicago: Aldine.

Habermas, J., 1998: Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Herzog, D., H. Rebenstorf, C. Werner, B. Wessels, 1990: Abgeordnete und Bürger. Ergebnisse einer Befragung der Mitglieder des 11. Deutschen Bundestages und der Bevölkerung. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Hitzler, R., 1994: Die banale Seite der Macht. Politik als Beruf heute – und morgen. P. 280-292, in: H. Berking, R. Hitzler & S. Neckel (ed.), Politikertypen in Europa. Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch.

Holtenkamp, L., 2011: Professionalisierung der Kommunalpolitik? Empirische und normative Befunde. P. 103-120, in: W. Patzelt & M. Edinger (ed.), Politik als Beruf. Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Sonderheft 44. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag,

Ismayr, W., 2009: Der Deutsche Bundestag seit 1990. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 28: 34-40.

Jekewitz, J., 1995: Das Personal der Parlamentsfraktionen. Funktion und Status zwischen Politik und Verwaltung. Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 26: 395-422.

Kingdon, J., 2011: Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies. Glenview: Pearson.

König, A.; O. Berli, 2012: Das Paradox der Doxa – Macht und Herrschaft als Leitmotiv der Soziologie Pierre Bourdieus. p. 303-333 in: P. Imbusch (ed.), Macht und Herrschaft. Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien und Konzeptionen. 2nd Edition Wiesbaden: Springer VS Verlag.

Lessenich, S., 2008: Die Neuerfindung des Sozialen. Der Sozialstaat im flexiblen Kapitalismus. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag.

Leuschner, V., 2011: Politische Freundschaften. Informelle Beziehungen im Deutschen Bundestag. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Luhmann, N., 2002: Die Politik der Gesellschaft. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.

Maier, J., 2000: Politikverdrossenheit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Dimensionen – Determinanten – Konsequenzen. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Marschall, S., 2005: Parlamentarismus. Eine Einführung. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Marx, K., 1975: Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Ökonomie. Book I: Der Produktionsprozeß des Kapitals. Berlin: Dietz Verlag.

Mayntz, G., 2002: Der unbekannte Star: Die Präsenz des Bundestages in den Medien. p. 201-214 in: H. Oberreuter, U. Kranenpohl & M. Sebaldt (ed.), Der Deutsche

Bundestag im Wandel. Ergebnisse neuerer Parlamentarismusforschung. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Mayntz, R., F. Neidhardt, 1989: Parlamentskultur: Handlungsorientierungen von Bundestagsabgeordneten – eine empirisch explorative Studie. Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 3: 370-387.

Nassehi, A., M. Schroer, 2003: Der Begriff des Politischen. Soziale Welt Sonderband 14. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

Nullmeier, F., T. Pritzlaff, A. Wiesner, 2003: Mikro-Policy-Analyse. Ethnographische Politikforschung am Beispiel Hochschulpolitik. Frankfurt/New York: Campus.

Oertzen, J., 2009: Rollentheorie als Werkzeug der Parlamentarismusforschung. P. 217-230 in: H. Schöne & J. Blumenthal (eds.), Parlamentarismusforschung in Deutschland. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven 40 Jahre nach Erscheinen von Gerhard Loewenbergs Standardwerk zum Deutschen Bundestag. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Otten, H., 2001: Wie kreativ ist der homo politicus? Überlegungen zu Max Weber. P. 189-214 in: H. Bluhm & J. Gebhardt (eds.): Konzepte politischen Handelns. Kreativität – Innovation – Praxen. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

Palonen, K., 2008: The Politics of Limited Times. The Rhetoric of Temporal Judgment in Parliamentary Democracies. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Pappi, F., T. König, D. Knoke (1995): Entscheidungsprozesse in der Arbeits- und Sozialpolitik. Der Zugang der Interessengruppen zum Regierungssystem über Politikfeldnetze: Ein deutsch-amerikanischer Vergleich. Frankfurt a.M.: Campus.

Patzelt, W., 1996: Deutschlands Abgeordnete: Profil eines Berufsstands, der weit besser ist als sein Ruf. Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 27: 462-502.

Patzelt, W., 1994: Das Volk und seine Vertreter: eine gestörte Beziehung. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 11: 14-23.

Patzelt, W., M. Edinger, 2011: Politik als Beruf. Zum politischen Führungspersonal in der modernen Demokratie. p. 9-32 in: *Ibid.* (ed.), Politik als Beruf. Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Sonderheft 44. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Pitkin, H., 1967: The Concept of Representation. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Pressman, J., A. Wildavsky, 1974: Implementation. How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pritzlaff, T., 2003: Positionierung im parlamentarischen Prozess. p. 245-266 in: M. Maier, F. Nullmaier, T. Pritzlaff & A. Wiesner (ed.), Politik als Lernprozess. Wissenszentrierter Ansätze der Politikanalyse. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Reckwitz, A., 2003: Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive. Zeitschrift für Soziologie 32: 282-301.

Sabatier, P., 1999: The Need for Better Theories. p. 3-18 in: *Ibid.* (ed.), Theories of the Policy Process. Boulder: Westview Press.

Sarcinelli, U., 2011: Politische Kommunikation in Deutschland. Medien und Politikvermittlung im demokratischen System. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.

Scharpf, F., 1985: Die Politikverflechtungs-Falle: Europäische Integration und deutscher Föderalismus im Vergleich. Politische Vierteljahresschrift 26: 323-356.

Scheffer, T., 2014: Die Arbeit an den Positionen. Zur Mikrofundierung von Politik in Abgeordnetenbüros des Deutschen Bundestages. p. 369-389 in: B. Heintze & H. Tyrell (ed.), Interaktion - Organisation - Company. Sonderband Zeitschrift für Soziologie.

Schöne, H., 2010: Alltag im Parlament. Parlamentskultur in Theorie und Empirie. Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Schüttemeyer, S., 2003: Die Bundestagsabgeordneten im Kräftefeld von Parlament, Fraktion, Partei und Wählern. p. 77-100 in: G. Breit & P. Massing (eds..*ibid.*): Parlamentarismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine Einführung. Schwalbach: Wochenschau.

Schüttemeyer, S., 1986: Bundestag und Bürger im Spiegel der Demoskopie. Eine Sekundäranalyse zur Parlamentarismusperzeption in der Bundesrepublik. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Searing, D., 1994: Westminster's World. Understanding Political Roles. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Siri, J., 2012: Parteien. Zur Soziologie einer politischen Form. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Steffani, W., 1965: Amerikanischer Kongress und Deutscher Bundestag: Ein Vergleich. Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 43: 12-24.

Wahlke, J., H. Eulau, W. Buchanan, L. Ferguson, 1962: The Legislative System. Explorations in Legislative Behavior. New York/London: John Wiley and Sons.

Weber, M., 2008: Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Frankfurt a.M.: Zweitausendeins.

Weber, Max (1965): Politics as a Vocation. Fortress Press.

Weber, M., 1988: Gesammelte Politische Schriften. Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr.

Windhoff-Héritier, A., 1987: Policy-Analyse. Eine Einführung. Frankfurt / New York: Campus Verlag.

Wodak, R., 2009: The Discourse of Politics in Action. Politics as Usual. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.