

Research on Peer Review - in search of a theoretical approach

07.03.2018

Martin Reinhart & Cornelia Schendzielorz

Common denominator

Peer review is a mechanism

- to assess quality based on expert judgement
- to decide on scarce resources
- to self-govern science

Shortcomings

- Unanimity in expert evaluations as dominant criterion for a qualitatively good assessment
- “variations in disciplinary evaluative cultures” (Lamont/Guetzkow 2016: 33) and
- different reading modes of reviewers and editors (Hirschauer 2010. 77-78) are neglected

Approach for a theory of peer review

1. Peer review as a social process
2. Dimensions of legitimation within the process
3. Types of procedural legitimation

1. Peer Review as a social process

- an assessment in which a value is assigned to the assessed object
- carried out by means of various forms of reading by reviewers and editors and the discussion of diverse readings
- a relational assessment of values is consolidated in the decision-making (see Hirschauer 2010: 78-94).

2. Two dimensions of legitimation

1. Internal legitimation

creation of legitimation through procedures

2. External legitimation

legitimacy of decision

3.1 Types of procedural legitimation

Minimum procedure

Postulating activity

Consultative activity

Decisive activity

Administrative activity

3.2 Types of procedural legitimation

Minimum

Postulate

Administration

Consultation

Decision

Additionally up to the

Maximum

Discussion

Presentation

Moderation

Observation

Conclusion

- Process-oriented approach
- Legitimation as central theoretical concern
- Applicable across cases

References

- Abbott, Andrew (2016): *Processual Sociology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bornmann, Lutz (2011): Scientific peer review. *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, 45: 197–245. doi:10.1002/aris.2011.1440450112
- Hirschauer, Stefan (2004): Peer Review Verfahren auf dem Prüfstand: Zum Soziologiedefizit der Wissenschaftsevaluation (Peer Review Research – Reviews. Sociological Shortcomings of Academic Evaluation). *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 33(1), pp. 62–83.
- Hirschauer, Stefan (2005): Publierte Fachurteile. Lektüre und Bewertungspraxis im Peer Review, in: *Soziale Systeme* 11(1), pp. 52-82.
- Hirschauer, Stefan (2010): Editorial Judgements: A Praxeology of ‚Voting‘ in Peer Review, in: *Social Studies of Science*, 40(1), pp. 71-103.
- Lamont, Michèle/Guetzkow, Joshua (2016): How Quality is Recognized by Peer Review Panels: The Case of the Humanities, in: Ochsner, Michael; Hug, Sven E.; Daniel, Hans-Dieter (eds.): *Research Assessment in the Humanities. Towards Criteria and Procedures*, Springer, pp. 31-41.
- Luhmann, Niklas (1983): *Legitimation durch Verfahren*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
- Reinhart, Martin (2012): *Soziologie und Epistemologie des Peer Review*. Nomos: Baden-Baden.
- Weller, Ann C. (2001): *Editorial Peer Review: Its Strengths and Weaknesses*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.
- German Council of Science and Humanities (2017): *Reviews in the scientific system. Position Paper*, Berlin <https://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/6680-17.pdf>.