

Rethinking economics and economies

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Abstract

The systems of innovation (SIs) is the main heterodox framework to understand and drive innovation processes in society. Ontologically, SIs represents very well the structure and evolution of innovation. However, the research of SIs has mostly generated partial and superficial descriptions of structures instead of comprehensive theoretical explanations. This has been due to the fragmentation of research in the area, the deterministic response to political interests, and the difficulties to mix in research different disciplines and interdependent technological fields.

There has also been a preponderance of the study of structures at the expense of agency and the endogenous evolution of systems. This is attributed to the early focus on discrediting the orthodox view of linear innovation. The idea was to provide to policymakers, purported to be the main change agents for innovations, with a better conceptual foundation to intervene the institutional landscape that affects incumbent organisations. This has favoured the status quo because of the more powerful lobbying and economic capacity of those organisations.

In response, we propose critical realism (CR) as the philosophy of SIs. We demonstrate their ontological correspondence based on various criteria: macro structures, multilevel emergence, system boundaries, decision-making, temporal stability, agential action, change dynamics, and inherent uncertainty. CR can act as a disciplining device and provide research approaches to study the structure and evolution of SIs, e.g., the staged model (Danermark et al. 2002) and the morphogenetic approach (Archer 1995). The CR-based research of structures can be undertaken through comparative studies, which is instrumental to identify 'system failures' and recommend policies. Comparative studies can help to discover opportunities to evolve, trigger morphogenetic cycles, and avoid trajectories that favour vested interests. Finally, morphogenetic studies can be forward looking and emancipatory, using an action research methodology.

A Critical Realist Approach Towards the Relationship Between Marxism and the UK's Betting Shops

Presenter/s: James Wheaton

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Abstract

Drawn from the author's recent PhD study, the paper aims to evaluate how a Critical Realist approach can be used to investigate the relationship between stakeholder perceptions of the land-based betting industry and Marxist theory. Betting shops have undergone significant digital transformation in recent years with shops embracing an omnichannel network of platform gambling, characterised by the presence of fixed odds betting terminals, self-service betting terminals and online gambling. These digital platforms have theoretically transformed the way in which capital is extracted from worker and customer alike. Platforms deploy characteristics which extract further spend - or immaterial labour - from customers, whilst also rendering betting shop labour obsolete. Following a proto-theoretical approach which viewed the digital transformation of the industry through a Marxist, theoretical lens, the researcher's study relied upon qualitative data drawn from owners, customers and employees of the UK's main betting shop chains (William Hill, Ladbrokes, Coral and Betfred) with emergent themes then being explored to uncover the key, perceived characteristics of platform gambling within betting shops. To this end, the paper evaluates how a Critical Realist philosophical and methodological approach eventually resulted in a structure emerging from the development of platform gambling within betting shops which is comparable to the transformative nature of a stratified, Marxist ontology as inspired by Fleetwood (2002) in his chapter in *Critical Realism and Marxism* (London: Routledge). The stratified nature of Marxist ontology, itself dependent on socio-technical and material-technical evolution, is reflected within the perceived development of the UK's betting shops. The paper, after briefly contextualising the current digital nature of the land-based betting industry, evaluates how the philosophical and methodological approach adopted by the author resulted in a Critical Realist-led, Marxist critique of an economy which has proliferated as a result of previous neo-liberal deregulation.

Case Study Research on Innovation Systems: Paradox and A Critical Realist Dialectical Resolution

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Abstract

This paper deals with a largely unnoticed methodological paradox concerning the scientific status of case study research on innovation systems (ISs). On the one hand, case study research has been instrumental to the genesis and establishment of the IS approach as one of the most widely-used theoretical and policy-relevant perspectives on innovation in the social sciences. On the other hand, however, IS scholars have often argued that case study research is not able to study generality and causality. To heighten our understanding of, as well as to resolve, such a methodological irony, the paper utilises the philosophical method of dialectic; in particular, the analytical scheme of the *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis*. The analysis shows that the paradox in question is attributable to (a) the prevalent belief that the hypothetico-deductive model of scientific explanation constitutes the most desirable way to study causality (*deductive thesis*); as well as (b) to the absence of a well articulated *antithesis* to the deductive thesis. In line with a growing number of critical realist studies on innovation, the paper utilises the critical realist mode of scientific explanation (namely, *retroduction*) to articulate the *retroductive antithesis*, whereby case study research is necessary to learn about the general aspects of causality, especially causal mechanisms. Overall, the methodological analysis in this paper demonstrates that the ability of case study research to produce generalisable, causal-explanatory knowledge depends mainly upon the model of scientific explanation that informs the analysis (*dependency synthesis*). The paper ends by discussing how the dependency synthesis enables IS researchers to conduct case study research in a paradox-free, stand-alone and causal explanatory manner.