

Call for Contributions:
Science, Numbers and Politics

**International Research Project Funded by the
Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities**

Background and Project Description

Over the past few decades, following a more general trend towards social rationalization, a growing *Vervissenschaftlichung* (“scientization”) of politics can be observed – that is, the ways in which science and quantitative measures increasingly come to define and shape politics. Today, empirics and evidence almost always accompany policy making, and quantification and the use of statistics have become increasingly central to the practice of contemporary politics.

The primary objective of this interdisciplinary research project, funded by the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, is to **assess the relationship between politics and science with special regard to “quantification” and “rationalization”**. How has this relationship evolved over time, and what are the opportunities and risks of an intensifying interaction between the political and scientific world? Of particular interest is the role played by “numbers” within contemporary education policies, by reason of their close interrelation with economic, social and cultural policies more generally.

Scholars of all disciplines are invited to **submit proposals for research contributions related to any of the project’s three main sections specified below**. Both empirical and theoretical approaches addressing the theme of the research project are welcome. Proposals should clearly outline the relevance and key features of the suggested contribution (significance of the topic, specific research questions and objectives, choice of methodology) and indicate how it will contribute to the overall project.

This project is collaborative and interdisciplinary, offering participants an opportunity to develop their initial proposals within workshop-conferences that emphasize intellectual exchange, feedback, discussion, and debate. In order to allow for the necessary collegial exchanges and to guarantee the complementarity of all contributions, **two interconnected project conferences** will be taking

place in Heidelberg (Germany). The first will be held from **28-30 April 2016**, at which time invited participants will present the outlines of their research in moderated panel workshops, and debate across panels in topically organised roundtables. In **early 2017**, contributors will gather a second time to present the progress of their research within their respective panels and contribute to the concluding plenary debate. **The conference organisers will cover all travel and accommodation costs for participants. The results of the research project will be published.**

Section I: Historical Genesis

This section takes up the historical development of numerical-quantitative approaches within politics, and will investigate the ways in which quantitative and qualitative descriptions of the social world have evolved together over time. Specifically, we seek proposals that address one or more of the following questions:

- How have mathematics, measurement and statistics historically shaped the development of quantitative approaches to politics and economy, and how might these histories illuminate the possibilities and limitations of quantitative analysis?
- How did probability, prediction and quantification help to shape evolving notions of truth, fairness, objectivity and utility? How and why have quantitative descriptions of social processes come to be understood as “neutral” or “objective”?
- What social, political and economic factors have historically contributed most to the appeal of or objections to quantitative types of analysis?
- How have processes of quantification been shaped by particular national or regional histories, as well as the networks of social institutions and/or relations that are the expressions of these histories?

Section II: Politics and Science Today

This section examines the current state of evidence-based decision-making in contemporary politics with an emphasis on the process of *Verwissenschaftlichung* (“scientization”). It evaluates the advantages, disadvantages, and dynamics of the special relation between politics and (quantifying) science. With this in mind, contributions dealing with one or more of the following issues are welcome:

- How and by whom are quantitative “indicators” used in contemporary policy-making? How does the choice of indicators affect the implementation of policies? What, if any, are the effects of chosen indicators on the perception of an issue within politics and society?

- How is the relation between science/academia and politics shaped by their respective value systems and logics, and what is the dynamics of their interaction (e.g. emergence of “arms races” in evidence collection on different sides of the political spectrum)?
- How is scientific uncertainty incorporated into political decision-making? How are scientific debates/disagreements perceived in the public and political sphere?
- What is the state of evidence-based policy advice today? What is the role and impact of “internal” (e.g. parliamentary/governmental research services) vis-à-vis “external” sources of information and analysis (e.g. advocacy groups)? How are patterns of prestige, legitimation, verification and transmission formed and maintained, and to what extent are these processes at cross-purposes with the data?

Section III: Case Study – European Education Policies

This section looks at the role of numbers and quantitative decision-making in European and especially EU education policies. We seek contributions addressing one or more of the following points:

- How significant are numbers in European education policies (e.g. the Education and Training 2020 strategic framework), and what is the role of scientific rationality and quantification at the European level, as compared to national or regional levels?
- How do the peculiarities of the European political sphere (e.g., often strongly diverging national priorities and interests, or the lack of a common language) affect the decision-making process as well as the latter’s susceptibility to *Verwissenschaftlichung* and a preference for evidence-based decisions?
- Which players bring quantitative numbers and evidence-based arguments through which channels into the decision-making process? How important are other political organisations, NGOs, and scientific policy advisers to the making of European education policies? Who are the main external protagonists, and what social, national and/or institutional locations do they occupy?

Practicalities

Please send **1) your proposal (up to 600 words)**, accompanied by **2) a short bio (no more than 250 words)** and **3) information on your affiliation/position** as well as **main areas of research/professional expertise** and a list of any **relevant publications**, to: numbers-and-politics@adw.uni-heidelberg.de.

Kindly indicate **full contact details** in your proposal and clearly highlight the section you are applying to in the email subject header, which should have the following format: “Proposal [Family Name], Section [I, II or III]”. The **deadline** for proposal submission is **30 September 2015**. Proposals will be reviewed by the Project’s organising committee, and selected contributors will be notified in November 2015. For further information on the research project and extended section descriptions, please consult the project website: <http://www.haw.uni-heidelberg.de/forschung/win-kolleg/win-politics/welcome.en.html>