Evidentiary Practices: Testing, Measuring and Accounting in Global Infrastructures

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Topic:
This workshop brings together scholarship on (i) the development and implementation of tests and testing devices, (ii) procedures to measure the efficacy of testing, and (iii) on accounting procedures to monitor the efficiency of interventions. We are interested in forms of evidentiary practices as they travel across various fields where decision-making hinges on "best evidence" and where holding others responsible and accountable for interventions rests on having abided by the correct testing and measuring procedures.

Evidence production is, for instance, central to malaria control. Health planners need to know the overall burden of disease, the effectiveness of control interventions, their costs and what alternatives are available. Counting the numbers of anti-malarial drugs prescribed by health workers was considered to be sufficiently good evidence during the era of the "engineering state" (Desrosières) mainly flourishing between 1960s and 1980s in what were known as "developing countries". Since the 1980s, however, the emergence of internationally funded health projects furthered the projectification and NGO-ization of the health sector into different realms of accountability. This fragmentation of the health sector coincided with the spread of New Public Management as part of the "neoliberal state" (Desrosières) requiring more detailed procedures of evidence. For malaria this implied new procedures that would distinguish more reliably between malaria proper and unspecific fevers easy to be mistaken for malaria. The tendency towards evidence-based policy gained further prominence when the understanding emerged that testing produces the best evidence for any field – randomized clinical trials figuring as the ideal source of

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protocols. Against this background the WHO began recommending the use of new *Rapid Diagnostic Tests* (RDTs) in 2010. The tests operate with a binary mode (positive and negative); only positive cases count as malaria. On observing the aggregation of data produced in district health centers on a national level in Uganda, a significant gap emerged between the number of positive tests and the number of anti-malarial drugs prescribed, the latter significantly outnumbering the positive cases. While this probably means that other fevers still are treated as malaria, the procedures and interventions necessary to account for the gap have become more complicated and costly. Testing mainly revealed the necessity of more and new techniques of testing.

The case of malaria diagnosis illustrates that controversies in governance often evolve around the question of what comes to count as evidence. In this workshop we are interested in the making of evidence and the technologies, infrastructures and legal definitions that need to be mobilized to convince specific publics. These publics are in the classic sense fora constituted by and around a specific forensis that establishes matters of fact (in the sense introduced by Steven Shapin). Evidentiary practices seek to identify regularities. Establishing evidences of regularities is particularly important because it enables predictions and opens up spaces for controlled interventions. In this sense, evidentiary practices are about a particular gap – the gap between predictability and the unknown. To govern, this gap needs to be navigated. This means establishing as many stable facts as possible, and thereby rendering the unpredictable more predictable; yet, an unsettling residuum of unpredictability appears inexorably tied to human endeavors.

Evidence-based policy is often presented as the lesson learned from failed modernist designs that sought to secure a better future for the greatest number of individuals possible. Instead of trusting the visions and capabilities of engineering infrastructures that promise to lead to better futures, evidence-based policy claims to be based on verifiability and is done in little, corrigible steps – in projects – that are conceived as quasi experiments pro-jecting or hypothesizing specific effects of defined interventions that can be falsified. This ostensibly scientistic design promises the verification of the efficacy of projects as they are being implemented. And it protects the experts in charge from being held accountable for what was beyond their control. However, while evidence-based policy tries to render politics into the realm of supposedly neutral technocracy, it renders the political and ethical trajectories invisible, which unavoidably still inflect on the process.

Three dimensions of testing are at the heart of our endeavor: *First*, tests are usually developed and tried out in laboratories or other contained / controlled settings, sharing the assumption that experimental constructions and simulations of real-life situations allow us to draw conclusions about reality beyond the lab. *Second*, implementation is run as a form of impact testing: after being developed and tried in

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the lab, tests are done in the field (rapid diagnostic malaria tests, GM crops, pharmaceuticals, etc.); this field implementation aims to verify the test's assumptions. *Third*, testing needs to be accounted for in terms of responsibility, efficiency and cost-benefit-analysis. This latter dimension of evidence-based practice through measurement creates new evidence at a higher level of data aggregation, including the intervention's economic rationales.

Instead of assimilating our own approach to an efficacy test of the same category and methodology, we propose to examine testing and accounting ethnographically as a particular way of world-making. In doing so, we take the perspective of second order observation and employ analytical categories and interpretative schemes from ethnomethodology, genealogical method, pragmatism and STS.[1]. Thereby, we are able to stay true to the long established insight that every evidentiary regime (including our own) allows only certain realities to count, while rendering other realities invisible and mute.

We want to specify the widely accepted assertion (Yaron Ezrahi) that the new political importance of testing is the lesson learned from the 20th century disillusionments of high modernist designs of better futures. At the same time we also want to differentiate the assertion (Alain Desrosières) that testing and measurement are part of a neoliberal attempt to redesign politics by simulating supply and demand mechanisms (New Public Management). We thus want to investigate how far mechanical objectivity – produced by measurement, testing, and accounting – can be apprehended as a meta-code aiming to bridge ontological differences on a global scale.

We invite theoretically guided empirical contributions that engage with evidentiary practices of testing, measuring and accounting as technologies of ordering in various domains. It would probably intensify the workshop debates if the contributions were to engage with some of the following questions:

- How exactly is testing done in your field? And how is it observed?
- When and where does it take place?
- How do tests and testing practices shape evidence?
- How and where does verifying the efficacy of testing generate new evidence?
- How and where does the auditing and accounting of verified testing produce new evidence?

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[1] For *ethnomethodoly* we follow the genealogy from Harold Garfinkel through Michael Lynch to 'many of us'; for the *genealogical method* we follow the genealogy from Michel Foucault through Paul Rabinow and Niclas Rose to 'many of us'; for *pragmatism* we follow the genealogy from John Dewey through Luc Boltanski to 'many of us'; and finally for *science and technology studies* we follow the genealogy from Ludwig Fleck through Steven Shapin, Simon Schaffer, Trevor Pinch, Annemarie Mol to 'many of us'.

- How is all of this negotiated when being translated into new contexts?
- What are the normativities of evidentiary practices?
- What kinds of responsibilities emerge out of evidence-based policies?
- What comes to count as criteria to distinguish between "good" and "bad" evidence?
- What are the stabilities and temporalities of evidences? What is the role of infrastructures in this?

15 Confirmed Participants

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