

Consulting as an academic practice - exploring the science-society interface

Call for Papers – Paperworkshop of the Intersectoral School of Governance Baden-Württemberg (ISoG BW, DHBW CAS) and the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT, Erasmus University)

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In this workshop, we aim to delve deeper into consulting as an academic practice and to explore how it can be situated alongside forms of action-oriented, participatory and transdisciplinary research. We will examine – both empirically and theoretically – which forms academic consulting takes, the roles it plays, the functions it performs and what this means for science-society interfaces and relations.

In an era of increasing complexity and global challenges, consulting seems to become an ever more significant academic practice. The role of scholars as advisors to politics, society, and the economy raises numerous questions. Should scientists aim to remain purely objective or should they try to link their findings to policy? Are they responsible for advocating certain measures amidst the current circumstances of polycrisis? What are other alternatives? There have been studies into the roles of scientists in decision-making in politics and policy (Pielke, 2014), into their roles in action-oriented research (Horlings et al., 2020; Wittmayer & Schöpke, 2014) – and also into how these roles might be conflicting (Bulten et al., 2021) or the challenges that arise from assuming different roles (Kruijf et al., 2022).

When thinking about the generation and application of knowledge as the main objective of academic consulting, it is crucial to explore what kind of knowledge is being sought for and what appropriate quality standards for this knowledge are. For example, Weingart (2016) and Shugan (2004) suggest that knowledge for immediate use in consulting may need to meet different quality standards than those produced for scientific use. This raises the question of the status of mixed forms of knowledge in the spectrum between scientific advice and action-oriented research (Defila & Di Giulio, 2019), such as co-produced knowledge (Bergmann et al., 2005), action-oriented knowledge (Caniglia et al., 2021), or socially robust knowledge (Nowotny et al., 2001, 2003).

The embeddedness of various forms of consulting and co-production of knowledge within the academic system but also their situatedness at the science-society interface raises questions around power dynamics, legitimacy and ethics (Caniglia et al., 2023; Strumińska-Kutra & Scholl, 2022; Turnhout et al., 2020; van Kerkhoff & Lebel, 2015; Wittmayer et al., 2024). Being generated according to scientific standards often lends greater, or at least a specific, value to knowledge and positions scientists as legitimate spokespersons. Furthermore, scientists and scientific knowledge are often assumed to be neutral and objective. On closer inspection, this is difficult to fulfil (Unger, 2014). Should researchers strive for neutrality, or is it more a matter of reflecting one's positionality and articulating one's attitudes? Fundamentally, it is a question of how academics through their practices relate to others and on the basis of which ethical principles and approaches (Caniglia et al., 2023; Wittmayer et al., 2024). Not least, this is mediated through an academic system, which is known to be a rather closed system that tends to hinder rather than enable more policy- or society-oriented work (Horan et al., 2019; Kump et al., 2023; Loorbach & Wittmayer, 2024; Trencher et al., 2014).

We hope these thoughts provide you with a flavour of what the workshop could be about. We warmly invite you to engage with the above questions as an inspiration for your contributions – together we hope to increase our understandings of consulting as an academic practice as well as advance our actual practice. The thematic focus of contributions can be, but is not limited to:

- Theoretical implications around consulting as an academic practice
- Empirical cases of successful or failed consulting/action-research settings, possibly combined with some role specific reflections
- Consulting activities and academic careers: interrelations, effects and integration pathways
- Differentiations and similarities between various forms of academic practices
- Explorations into the legitimacy of knowledge and power constellations, including reflections on the role of science
- Ethical considerations and dilemmas in academic consulting and reflections on the contribution of science to tackling global challenges
- Resources in consulting and transdisciplinary settings
- Fit of consulting as academic practice within knowledge institutions and the current academic system
- ...

Submission:

Potential authors are invited to submit an extended abstract of up to 2000 words to verena.schmid@cas.dhbw.de. Accepted contributions will be presented at the workshop and can be published in the ISoG BW Working Paper Series after the workshop.

Important dates:

- Submission deadline for the abstracts: 15. September 2024
- Notification of acceptance: 01. October 2024
- Workshop: 12. December & 13. December 2024

Location:

The workshop will take place online (Zoom). You will receive further information on the workshop programme and other organisational matters in November. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Verena Schmid (verena.schmid@cas.dhbw.de) and Prof. Dr. Monika Gonser (monika.gonser@cas.dhbw.de).

You are welcome to share the CfP in the relevant networks.

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