

## **Knowledge from the margins, marginal knowledge? Sources, scope, and legitimacy of critical economic knowledge**

Throughout the twentieth century, American universities and administrations gradually monopolised the production of legitimate economic knowledge. They were soon followed by their Western European counterparts and later by the rest of the world. These institutions and their intellectuals have appropriated the positions from which such knowledge is produced, the means of imposing its codes and content of economic discourse. In the process, they have introduced a hierarchy within the academic world and between the academic and non-academic world. They hold the authority to frame the controversies over the analysis of economic dynamics and the ways in which they can be steered via public policy. As economic competence has become essential to government, scholarly literature has focused primarily on how these professional economists have acquired a decisive hold on this political process.

Our conference will look at the processes of marginalisation that are the counterpart of this monopolisation. It aims to shift our gaze from the realm of the accepted and legitimate in terms of economic knowledge to those forms of knowledge that have been sidelined and devalued. How can the margins of economic knowledge be characterised, who are the actors located at these margins, how do they evolve over time? Most importantly, we would like to question how the analysis of the margins of economic knowledge can help bridge the gap between the economy - processes of production, consumption and exchange - and economics, the academic discipline modelling and analysing the economy.

### ***Theories and practices as sources of economic knowledge***

We postulate that various forms of economic knowledge - discursive and practical - cannot be limited to the academic sphere. Economic knowledge is also the principle and outcome of everyday participation in social exchanges happening in modern societies. It might be derived from the practices of non-experts, as well as being produced by the experts in the academic world.

Marginality should not be considered a given property of actors or spaces involved in the shaping of knowledge about the economy, but a relational situation. The definition of a marginal situation depends on the ability of a centre to establish itself as the focal point of the field, capable of defining its rules and regulations. Thus, marginality is no static situation. It is a historically defined condition of illegitimacy or the exclusion of agents or institutions that challenge mainstream analysis of economic processes and try to model their alternative regulation of a given economic system.

Characterising marginality as an unstable and disputed social, economic, and academic relationship with dominant agents brings about a discussion of its qualification as “critical” point of view. Marginal knowledge can then be analysed as critical knowledge in keeping open the two senses of “critical thinking”. First, economic knowledge coming from the internal and external margins of academia is critical in the sense that it challenges mainstream discourses. Second, it represents a tipping point beyond which changes occur.

### ***Questioning marginality as the lack of resources***

Many geographers, sociologists and economists mainly associate marginality with a spatial distance to the centre, an institutionally relegated position, or class-, gender- or race-based dominated position. Most of these analyses share a definition of the margins focusing on the lack of resources, as they are defined by the actors at the centre, who hold the legitimate definition of mainstream knowledge.

The conference would like to question three points:

- the equalisation of margins with a deficit of academic, political, economic, social, resources
- the sociopolitical dynamic dimension of marginality: What are the processes and power issues at stake in (self)-marginalisation?
- change: How does the historical assessment of a marginal situation help characterise the historicity of economic systems?

### ***Renewing the intellectual framework for analysing critical economic knowledge coming from the margins***

Recent research has shed light on marginal actors and places producing economic knowledge, which challenge mainstream economic discourses. We encourage contributions from a variety of actors, spaces, institutions, and periods from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The conference welcomes proposals dealing with marginality and economic knowledge dealing with one or several of the three following concepts:

#### **1. Precarity**

Marginality is not just a lack of economic, social, or academic resources that impede actors from producing legitimate economic knowledge. Considering it a precarious situation rather than an absolute inadequacy allows questioning the historicity of this eventual scarcity. It encourages focussing on the evolution of a marginal position over time and its relation to the legitimate form of political economy in a given socio-economic system (notably capitalism, socialism, co-operative). Analysing marginal situations as precarious situations also means questioning the process by which critical economic knowledge is legitimated. Even though knowledge coming from the margins might be on the edge, it is still part of a system whose limits it might shift or challenge.

#### **2. Otherness**

Marginal economic knowledge can also be characterised by its difference to mainstream economics. The conference welcomes contributions analysing this difference related to:

- the status of the actors producing marginal economic knowledge: workers, women, lay people, non-academic actors, etc.
- the places in which marginal economic knowledge is produced: international organisations, enterprises, etc.
- the mechanisms of production of marginal economic knowledge. Here the process of inducing knowledge from the practical experience of production, consumption, or exchange would provide a counterexample to the thought experiments conjured up to prove a pre-existing academic model or theory. The amount of formalism in the knowledge elaborated at the margins, its ability or willingness to sustain a model and provide reproducible analysis might also be an element of inquiry.

### 3. Agency

Finally, we are interested in case studies that go beyond an analysis of marginality in terms of passivity and dependency to dynamics determined by the centre. In this regard, contributions analysing the confrontation between marginal economic knowledge and mainstream economic discourses, or the process of legitimation of experiential knowledge from lay people against academics are of particular interest. Even though marginal economic knowledge struggles most of the time to challenge mainstream academic economics in its claim to be the sole legitimate analytic tool, it does not mean that it cannot have agency at all. Contributions dealing with case studies at the local level or within specific groups (feminist, environmentalist, etc.) and how they challenge some specific features of mainstream academic economics will here be valued.

#### ***Application and information about the conference***

The conference will take place at Sciences Po Grenoble on **12-13 June 2025**.

Participation in the conference is free.

Participants' travel and accommodation costs will be covered (in full or in part, depending on the outcome of the grant applications), if these cannot be covered by the institution employing them. Priority will be given to early-career researchers.

#### *Application:*

Proposals (max. 500 words in Word file) including a title, an explicit problem, a bibliography (max. 5 references), a short bio-bibliographical note (max. 15 lines) must be submitted by **31 January 2025** to [simon.godard@iepg.fr](mailto:simon.godard@iepg.fr)

The working language of the conference is English.

Selected participants will be informed by 28 February 2025.

Papers must be circulated by 1 June 2025.

#### ***Organising committee:***

- Pierre Alayrac, Associate Professor, University Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis
- Simon Godard, Associate Professor, Sciences Po Grenoble - UGA
- Tobias Rupperecht, Head of the research group "Peripheral Liberalism", Free University of Berlin

#### ***Scientific Committee:***

François Allisson (University of Lausanne) ; Cléo Chassonery-Zaïgouche (University of Bologna) ; Olessia Kirtchik (CERCEC, EHESS-CNRS) ; Emmanuel Murlon-Druol (European University Institute, Florence) ; Alexander Nützenadel (Humboldt University, Berlin) ; Laurent Warlouzet (Paris Sorbonne University)