



Colloquium on the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices

Dear colleagues,

we cordially invite you to join the Biographies of Artifacts and Practices (BOAP) Research Colloquium. Based on a collaboration of researchers from the University of Edinburgh, Aalto University, and the Technical University of Berlin, this bi-monthly colloquium provides an open platform for an international network of researchers interested in BOAP and related methodological and analytical approaches. Its main goal is to contribute to strengthening the robustness of research designs in STS and the sociology of technology and innovation. Each event features the presentation and discussion of one research project that traces the biographies of complex sociotechnical systems across multiple locales and extended timeframes, often linking multiple studies and scales of analysis.

The colloquium will take place online on **July 4th, 4pm (CEST)**. It will feature a talk by **Neil Pollock** and **Robin Williams** (University of Edinburgh) titled “The Sociology of the Digital Future: A Biography of Artifacts and Practices (BOAP) Perspective.” Drawing on the example of the Gartner Hype Cycle, they will focus on the role of a new class of actors, promissory organizations, in the construction and productization of expectations about emerging innovations.

About the talk:

Future studies are back in fashion. [Beckert](#) argues that expectations about the future are critical to the operation and dynamics of capitalist markets. However, economists (e.g., [Kay](#)) have struggled to address the profound (Knightian) uncertainties surrounding a future that remains unknowable. Science and Technology Studies has tools for understanding the work of future-making – however, the methods by which we seek to analyse and understand the future require careful attention. Drawing on a Biographies of Artifacts and Practices (BOAP) perspective, our work has criticised studies within the sociology of expectations which projected forward and tacitly imputed performativity to particular imaginings of technoscientific futures. Our research, by contrast, has highlighted the role of a new class of actors, which we have termed [promissory organizations](#) that give dimensions to the emerging future, thereby making it more navigable.

In this talk, we focus on the leading industry analyst Gartner Inc. Gartner’s work is pivoting towards emerging innovations rather than navigating existing markets in the face of the increasing pace and salience of potentially disruptive, emerging innovations, with new knowledge products such as its ‘Cool Vendor’ list and the ‘Gartner Hype Cycle’. Our analysis focuses on how the Gartner Hype Cycle has become a product – that decision-makers are willing to pay for – indicative of its value as a tool for managing uncertainty (over time). We focus on this distinctive epistemic system; how the Gartner Hype Cycle has become a product, and how it is shaped by distinctive productization, distribution and consumption processes.

Specifically, through studying the Gartner Hype Cycle, we analyse the expertise, practices and materials involved in judging whether a specific technology has entered or exited the Hype Cycle. By unpacking these processes and the mechanisms that underpin them, our study



extends our understanding of the productization of hype cycles, the factors shaping the cyclical movements of the digital economy, and the role of uncertainty in technology expectations.

About the speakers:

Neil Pollock is Professor of Innovation and Social Informatics at the University of Edinburgh Business School. He is primarily known for his interdisciplinary research on IT that sits at the intersection between Information Systems, Innovation Studies and Economic Sociology. Neil has published in the highest rated academic journals which include: MIS Quarterly, Information Systems Research, Accounting, Organizations & Society, Organization Studies, Social Studies of Science and Science, Technology & Human Values. He has recently completed a [JAIS special issue on Information Infrastructures](#) with Eric Monteiro and Robin Williams. He is a senior editor at the journal [Information and Organization](#) and his books include [Putting the University Online](#), [Software and Organisations](#), and most recently [How Industry Analysts Shape the Digital Future](#) and [Thinking Infrastructures](#).

Robin William's research focuses on the social shaping of technology, highlighting the influence of a variety of actors on the design, implementation and use of ICT. A major concern has been with enterprise systems and other large, complex information infrastructures. The Biography of Artefacts perspective he is developing with Neil Pollock and other colleagues explores the co-evolution of technologies, practices and institutional arrangements. Their work has explained how standardized packaged solutions can be created that can successfully be implemented in many diverse organizations, and has highlighted the role of new types of player (such as industry analysts) in constituting and shepherding technology fields and markets. These insights are being applied further in the area of e-health, where, he is now investigating the development and adoption of packaged solutions for e-prescribing in hospitals.

Zoom link and contact:

<https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/67424696344?pwd=WHBiQ1MzVlVoWDFTQzd1dzJ3YXZlZWQ09>
Zoom PW: 120631

If you are interested in the activities of the research network, or would like to present at the colloquium, get in touch at david.seibt@tu-berlin.de.

Next dates in the BOAP Colloquium

(all colloquium sessions start at 4 pm, Berlin time)

04.07.2022, **Neil Pollock & Robin Williams** (University of Edinburgh): The Sociology of the Digital Future: A Biography of Artifacts and Practices (BOAP) Perspective

05.09.2022, **José David Gómez-Urrego** (University of Edinburgh): Following the life of Yachay, the city of Knowledge: the rise and fall of Ecuador's largest and most controversial infrastructural project

07.11.2022, **Mats Frank** (University of Edinburgh): tba