



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 **November 7th, 4pm** (CET). It will feature a talk by **Mats Frank** (University of Edinburgh) who will present insights from his research focusing on the platform driven financial inclusion of Micro- Small- and Medium Enterprises in China, to illustrate the potential benefits of applying a critical realist lens to the study of socio-technical phenomena.

About the talk:

In this talk Mats Frank draws on his research on Financial Inclusion (FI) in the era of the platform economy to highlight the benefits of underpinning an enquiry into complex socio-technical phenomena with a critical realist framework and to discuss how such an approach can strengthen the robustness of research designs within STS.

In the first part of the talk and starting from the observation that digital platforms such as Alibaba (through its affiliate Ant Financial) have in recent years become a key source of debt financing for Micro-Small- and Medium- Enterprises (MSMEs) in China, Mats uses preliminary findings of his research on Ant Financial to present several hypothesized generative mechanisms which can help to explain observed demi-regularities on supply and demand side and to illustrate their refinement throughout the research process following a retroductive logic of inquiry. Drawing on the hypothesized generative mechanisms and their interplay, he argues that a holistic explanation for the development trajectory of Alibaba/Ant Financial viz. from an e-commerce platform to a leading debt financing provider for MSMEs in China, has to take into account structure, culture and agency as well as their interplay within different spaces. In this context preliminary empirical findings particularly attend to recent calls in platform literature (e.g. Bonina, Koskinen, Eaton and Gawer, 2021) to shed light on the developmental implications of digital platforms as well as to provide a more holistic account of platform expansion and development (e.g. Ozalp, Ozcan, Dinckol, Zachariadis and Gawer, 2022).



Drawing on his previously introduced research design, Mats discusses in the second part of the talk how critical realism with its ontological and epistemological assumptions may be combined with- and provide a benefit for biographical studies within STS, opening room for a broader discussion relating to Theory-Method Packages in STS (e.g. Silvast and Virtanen, 2021).

About the speaker:

Mats Frank is a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh's Business School where his research focuses on the emergence and expansion of digital platforms in China. More specifically he is interested in the socio-technical mechanisms and configurations that have enabled platforms like Alibaba and Tencent to become an important alternative to the traditional banking system and to grow into a key driver of organizational financial inclusion in the country. Conceptually, Mats draws on a critical realist perspective in which he integrates analytical approaches and insights from STS.

Mats received a BBA (Hons) in European Management from the University of Lancaster, a B.Sc in International Management at the European School of Business in Reutlingen as well as a MA in International Relations from the University of Durham. Subsequently, he lived for several years in China and other parts of Asia where he has worked in different roles for a Global Medical Technology company.

Zoom link and contact:

<https://tu-berlin.zoom.us/j/69935202202?pwd=Zkl2RW5zTmdKam1mbmpHQ0FXRldTZz09>

Zoom PW: 099802

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)

07.11.2022, **Mats Frank** (University of Edinburgh): Financial Inclusion in the era of the platform economy: Opening the 'black-box' of digital lending to Micro-, Small and Medium Enterprises in China

09.01.2023, **Peter Fuzesi** (University of Strathclyde): tba