

PAPER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP (PDW)

The interfaces of legal and illegal activities

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Organizing committee

Guillaume Dumont, Emylon Business School, France.
Loïc Pignolo, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Theme

Legal and illegal economic activities are often considered separate social spheres and studied in isolation. However, recent studies have advocated for a more nuanced of how legality and illegality are interconnected (Beckert & Dewey, 2017; Beckert & Wehinger, 2013; Mayntz, 2017). Ethnographic scholarship on law and illicit economies illustrates how the illegality of activities is constructed in relation to legal norms, and explores how illegal activities are intertwined with legal activities in their daily unfolding. Illegal economies, for instance, often build on available legal infrastructure (Columb, 2020; Feltran, 2022). Moreover, people engaged in illegal activities interact with “official guardians of legality” (Mayntz, 2017, p. 44), eventually leading to corruption (Dewey, 2020) and strategies of concealment (Steiner, 2017). Also, specific activities and practices across contexts can be viewed as meaningful and legitimate, despite their illegality (Contreras, 2012; Dewey, 2020; Rodgers, 2022). These works point to the importance of legitimacy and social legitimization when understanding the relationship between legality and illegality (Beckert and Dewey, 2017; Mayntz, 2017).

The concept of “interface” captures the points of intersection, connection, and linkages between legality and illegality, and between illegality and legitimacy (Beckert and Dewey, 2017; Mayntz, 2017). In this context, we believe that ethnographic investigations are crucial for developing an empirical understanding of the strategies allowing people to navigate these interfaces and the resulting ambivalences, contradictions, and dilemmas. After the success of the 2023 edition, this year workshop takes the intimate interconnectedness between legal and illegal activities as a starting point to uncover empirically and explain theoretically how people create, negotiate, and implement specific practices and activities at their interface. Investigating this question is theoretically significant because it poses substantial challenges to people and calls to extend the previous efforts centered on market exchanges to encompass other non-economic, but no less critical, spheres of everyday life.

We invite papers investigating the interfaces of legal and illegal practices ethnographically. Ethnography has long proven vital in accessing hard-to-reach populations (Boeri & Shukla, 2019; Nordstrom & Robben, 1996; Pignolo & Cattacin, 2023). The immersion of the ethnographer is crucial to building trust and collecting in-depth data (Adler & Adler, 1987; Dumont, 2023), and capturing the doubts, dilemmas, joys, and anxieties inextricable from the experience of everyday life. Accordingly, we welcome ethnographic contributions exploring, but not limited to, the following questions:

- How do individuals respond to the development and enforcement of laws and regulations by inventing and implementing illegal practices enabling their economic activity?
- How is policymaking dialogically influenced by people's creative efforts to continue and develop illegal activities?
- How might the ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction, and negotiation involved in navigating the interface of the legal and illegal influence the process of identity construction, social legitimization, and aspiration building?
- What kind of resources for illegal actions can be found in legal settings, and how are these resources exploited?
- What is the role of local communities and inhabitants in shaping these interfaces, and, conversely, what consequences do these interfaces have on local communities and inhabitants?

Purpose and format

This PDW aims to provide ethnographers from different disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, criminology, management) and at different stages of their fieldwork and career with guidance and expertise in developing their papers. Invited discussants will help participants to: (1) think about novel ways to use their ethnographic data to construct a compelling narrative for their paper, and (2) develop a theoretical contribution building on this data.

This PDW is structured as a one-day workshop with an interactive format where each author will be provided 10 minutes to present the paper and 35 minutes for collective discussion. Two discussants will review each paper to provide developmental feedback to strengthen and improve the authors' work. All authors must also commit to reading two selected papers before the workshop to provide additional feedback.

Application

We invite authors to submit a 500-word abstract of their paper by December 15, 2023 to gdmont@em-lyon.com and loic.pignolo@unisg.ch. Notification of acceptance will be provided by January 5, 2024 and full papers must be submitted by April 1, 2024.

The workshop will take place at Emlyon Business School, France, on April 24, 2024. More details on travel options and accommodation will be provided upon notification. Lunch and dinner on the day of the workshop will be provided for participants.

References

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