

From niche to norm: Quo vadis Economic Pluralism?

What is the common sense which defines economics? Is it still right to criticize the Mainstream as orthodox science with just one methodology? What did the economic student movement, which started after the financial crisis, change within the economic discipline? What is the role of the former economic students which were active in the movement and are doing now their PhD or are working as Post-Docs in different fields of economic discipline?

7 years after the foundation of the Network for Pluralism in Economics (NPE) e.V. to emphasize the demand for more diversity in economic research and teaching, PhD students as well as postdocs met again to take stock of the development towards pluralism in economics. The network has more than 500 members, and is mostly driven by active student groups. Many of the members who have accompanied the founding period as students meanwhile pursue their research interests within the framework of PhD programs and post-doctoral research projects and are often only loosely associated with the network.

Under the title: „From Niche to Norm - 1. Scientific Workshop of the German Network for Pluralism in Economics“ 25 doctoral candidates and post-docs met in October at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) in Bielefeld to discuss their research interests as well as the formerly mentioned questions considering the development of pluralism in economics.



The mini-conference was supposed to offer PhD students and young postdocs the opportunity to present and reflect on their own research. Writing a PhD thesis is usually pursued in an individual study model. Students are part of a research group at the university or at a research organisation and are supervised by a university professor. Structured PhD

including a curriculum of courses are not the norm or even more driven by the mainstream PhD curricula. Hence, most PhD candidates are scattered in the research world and tend to lose touch with the ideas and the NPE. This is in particular the case if their research projects are not embedded within the niche of heterodox economics. A recent online survey with 448 PhD students in economics in the German-speaking students reveals an empirical turn among young scholars who trade the studied neoclassical framework for new econometric methods (Roos et al. (2019)). This might indicate that the younger scholars are not as driven by certain ideological schools and show curiosity for new methods and ideas. However, the survey reveals that the students are also unfamiliar with competing theoretical approaches and may therefore be less aware of the theoretical assumptions on which any empirical analysis must be based. A systematic evaluation of all three major surveys among German economists since 2006 also confirm that younger researchers show less understanding for the ideas of pluralism and the Rethinking Economics movement (Fricke (2017)). One explanation might be that the pressure of conformity is greater among younger economists who still have to fight for

permanent positions in science. Rommel and Urban (2020) show in their paper “German Economics - Its Current Form and Content”, which was presented as the conference opener, how the social reproduction cycle of economists hinders the institutionalization of pluralism in economics.

Barriers and hurdles were discussed that hinder new ideas in economic thought, Among others the focus on the top five journals is increasingly criticised not just from the niche but from some of the most prestigious economists, such as Heckmann (2020) and Akerloff (2020). Florian Rommel presented data, that document an increase of pluralism also in the mainstream literature, associated with an empirical and a normative turn. However, others argue that the paradigmatic dominance of neoclassical economics is still lasting (Beckenbach 2019). In another presentation, Rouven Reinke pointed towards paradigmatic constraints on the level of broader methodology in economics. He suggested that the pluralist movement is not ambitious enough by claiming a variety of economic theories and methods. It is rather necessary, Reinke concludes, that the network as well as its alumni organization aims at a multi-paradigmatic pluralism which reflects the normative or narrative foundation of each school of thought in order to promote a discourse between paradigms and to find solutions to real-world problems.

This new way of a multi-paradigmatic scientific exchange was exercised by the 25 participants of the conference as the presented topics reached from ergodicity economics aiming at the consideration of historical time in the decision making under uncertainty (Mark Kirstein), the role of (green) employment in the economy (Katharina Bohneberger, Birte Strunk) to research on new metanarratives that emerge due to the need for a social-ecological transformation of the economy (Hannah Heller). Even research on the current Covid-19 crisis was present in a presentation about the Care Penalty by Franziska Dorn. Communication and networking helped to overcome misunderstandings, to learn from each other as well as to enrich each other's thinking by taking different perspectives. The intention of the workshop was thus to strengthen both bonds of intellectual commitment to pluralist economics and networking within the community of heterodox and orthodox young scholars. This intention was fulfilled even though the conference was a hybrid format between online and offline presentations and discussions due to the Covid-19-pandemic. Our idea was to address especially young scholars that have been active in the "Rethinking Economics" movement (in Germany or abroad) as students and are now preoccupied and confronted with the scientific mainstream in economics.

The conference ended with a discussion on how the “grown-ups” of the student movement should position themselves to strengthen the pluralist idea in the field of research as well as teaching. Samuel Decker, one of the founders of the “Exploring Economics” Platform (currently 25.000 clicks per month) of the network, presented the new plans of expanding the E-learning platform to a teaching platform which can be used by lecturers to support a pluralist teaching. Also, the political positioning of the junior researchers was discussed at the conference. Is the fight for a sustainable economy within planetary boundaries a too political statement or is it rather the responsibility of future economists to be conscious about the performativity of their own work and make transparent how the economic research wants to improve our economic organization in a just and sustainable manner? Those questions cannot be answered solely by the 25 attendees of the first scientific conference of the German Network for Pluralism in Economics but should be discussed in society as well as other scientific disciplines to come to a new agreement of what is the role and responsibility of economics in society. The student network at least takes a clear position by claiming a more democratic way of practicing economics.

(see <https://www.plurale-oekonomik.de/projekte/impulspapier/#c919>). One impression lingers. That young critical spirits today are not just criticising others but become pioneers and work hard to co-create something new.