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Le convenzioni del lavoro, il lavoro delle convenzioni

a cura di Vando Borghi e Tommaso Vitale

contributi di Sonia Bertolini, Christian Bessy, Vando Borghi, Marc Breviglieri, Federico Chicchi, François Eymard-Duvernay, Olivier Favereau, Giovanna Fullin, Giorgio Gosetti, André Orléan, Alessandro Pizzorno, Robert Salais, David Stark, Richard Swedberg, Laurent Thévenot, Charles Tilly, Tommaso Vitale

ELENCO AUTORI:

Sonia Bertolini, *Università di Torino*

Christian Bessy, *CEE (Centre d'Etudes de l'Emploi) e IDHE, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan, Paris*

Vando Borghi, *Università di Bologna*

Marc Breviglieri, *GSPM e IUT dell'Università di Paris V*

Federico Chicchi, *Università di Bologna*

François Eymard-Duvernay, *Università di Paris X (EconomiX)*

Olivier Favereau, *Università di Paris X, (EconomiX)*

Giovanna Fullin, *Università di Milano-Bicocca*

Giorgio Gosetti, *Università di Verona*

Olivier Favereau, *Università di Parigi X (EconomiX)*

Alessandro Pizzorno, *Istituto Universitario Europeo*

Robert Salais, *IDHE, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Cachan, Paris*

David Stark, *Columbia University, USA*

Richard Swedberg, *Cornell University, USA*

Laurent Thévenot, *GSPM - EHESS Paris e INSEE (Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques)*

Charles Tilly, *Columbia University, USA*

Tommaso Vitale, *Università di Milano-Bicocca*

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QUARTA DI COPERTINA:

Nella seconda metà degli anni '80 è emerso in Francia un programma di ricerca finalizzato a rimettere al centro dell'economia politica le competenze normative delle persone: l'Economia delle convenzioni. Nel corso di questi vent'anni, l'Economia delle convenzioni è cresciuta notevolmente, coinvolgendo ricercatori e centri di ricerca ben al di là del primo ristretto gruppo di persone che la hanno fondata, suscitando un interesse crescente anche nel mondo anglosassone.

I fondatori del programma di ricerca hanno molta familiarità con la statistica e l'econometria, ed hanno lavorato molto sui processi storici di definizione delle categorie socio-professionali e dei criteri di codifica, partendo da una riflessione durkheimiana sui sistemi di classificazione. Ma a questo genere di riflessioni hanno accostato anche le acquisizioni più recenti sulle forme della razionalità, sul *coordinamento* in situazioni di incertezza radicale e sull'interpretazione delle regole nella vita economica. L'intreccio di tradizioni di analisi abitualmente tenute separate ha permesso di sviluppare una riflessione inedita sui criteri di valutazione (o "convenzioni") e di giocare, soprattutto in Europa ma progressivamente anche negli USA, un ruolo importante nel rendere riconoscibili e praticabili dei terreni di ricerca comuni fra economisti, storici e sociologi.

Questo numero monografico di Sociologia del Lavoro intende iniziare un dialogo intenso e dialettico fra la scuola dell'Economia delle convenzioni e la Sociologia economica e del lavoro italiane. L'introduzione (Borghi e Vitale) ricostruisce brevemente la storia dell'Economia delle convenzioni e ne mette in luce i punti di contatto con altre tradizioni di studio dell'economia come scienza politica e morale. La prima parte comprende un testo collettivo di presentazione del programma di ricerca e sei articoli inediti sia di ricercatori che hanno contribuito a fondare l'approccio (Eymard-Duverney, Favereau, Salais, Thévenot) sia di ricercatori più giovani che hanno contribuito a sviluppare la prospettiva (Bessy, Breviglieri). Gli articoli di questa prima parte si concentrano specificamente su temi legati all'organizzazione del lavoro e al mercato del lavoro. Nella seconda parte, l'Economia delle convenzioni viene discussa criticamente da alcuni dei massimi esponenti del dibattito in sociologia (Pizzorno, Stark, Swedberg, Tilly). In una terza parte, infine, alcuni giovani studiosi italiani di sociologia del lavoro (Bertolin, Chicchi, Fullin, Gosetti) discutono i limiti ed i possibili apporti dell'Economia delle convenzioni alla ricerca sociologica in tema di lavoro.

Vando Borghi lavora presso il Dipartimento di Sociologia dell'Università degli Studi di Bologna e insegna Sociologia dell'organizzazione e Sociologia dello sviluppo nella Facoltà di Scienze Politiche. Nelle sue ricerche si occupa di trasformazioni del lavoro, delle relazioni tra politiche del lavoro e politiche sociali, di trasformazioni delle organizzazioni e delle istituzioni pubbliche. E' segretario del Centro Internazionale di Documentazioni e Studi dei Problemi del Lavoro, membro di Sui Generis - Laboratorio di Sociologia dell'azione pubblica e di Active Social Policy European Network. Ha pubblicato di recente, con Roberto Rizza, *L'organizzazione sociale del lavoro* (Milano, 2006).

Tommaso Vitale, ricercatore di Sociologia generale presso il Dipartimento di Sociologia e ricerca sociale dell'Università degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, insegna *Programmazione sociale e Sviluppo locale*. Si occupa di programmazione delle politiche e dei servizi sociali, di movimenti e conflitti urbani e di cambiamento delle culture politiche. E' membro di Sui Generis - Laboratorio di Sociologia dell'azione pubblica, di PolisLombardia, del Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis e del Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale. Fra le sue pubblicazioni più recenti: *Partecipazione e rappresentanza nelle mobilitazioni locali* (Milano, 2007).

Abstracts

Conventions, Moral Economy and Sociological Analysis

Vando Borghi, Tommaso Vitale

In the first part of the article, the authors recall the origins of the approach of the Economics of Conventions (EC), presenting the relevant role of the Durkheim's legacy, of its various paths and redefinitions, and of the (mainly historical) studies of the categorization's processes. Then the most significant aspects the EC's research program are addressed and synthetically introduced. According to this perspective, one of the most important problem social actors usually have to deal with it's the problem of uncertainty; from this point of view, coordination become a crucial terrain of sociological analysis and some main research questions emerge: which are the criteria of evaluation on which coordination is based? how these criteria are (partially) fixed? which of these criteria are particularly relevant for the analysis of the economic life? Why these criteria could be described as orders of worth? In the third part, the authors discuss the EC approach and its similarities with the concept of 'moral economy' stressed by E. P. Thompson through its emphasis on the role of the normative nature of the social and economic action. In the final part, the authors underlines the character of publicness that the different regimes of action, according to the EC approach, assumes or, in other words, the relationship between economic spheres of action and the public sphere.

Values, Coordination and Rationality.

François Eymard-Duvernay, Olivier Favereau, André Orléan, Robert Salais, and Laurent Thévenot

The Economics of Conventions programme incorporates, in a new perspective, three issues that have been dissociated by a century and a half of economic thinking: the characterization of the agent and his/her reasons for acting; the modalities of the coordination of actions; and the role of values and common goods. If we agree that the coordination of human actions is problematical and not the result of laws of nature or constraints, we can understand that human rationality is above all interpretative and not only or immediately calculative. The agent first has to apply conventional frameworks to understand others' situations and actions before he/she can coordinate him/herself. This understanding is not only cognitive but also evaluative, with the form of evaluation determining the importance of what the agent grasps and takes into account. We aim for an integration that concerns the economic, social and political sciences equally. In this way, they should be brought closer together, rather than each one expanding separately at the expense of the others.

Labour Conventions, Worlds of Production and Institutions: a Research Path.

Robert Salais

The economics of conventions approaches the diversity of the human daily co-ordinations in markets, production and work through an analysis in comprehension. The elementary unit for observation is no more exchange or regulation, but situated coordination through mutual expectations based on conventions. The first part of the contribution addresses the question of the origins of this approach. The second part presents my works as elaborating a pragmatics of economic action. It focuses on the relationship between uncertainty and work as an activity based on conventions. The third part and the conclusion extend the theoretical framework to institutions. These are viewed as collective practices, aiming at guarantee the achievement of the common good and justice expectations. Some concepts are developed with regards to the convention of the State, common knowledge and the informational bases supporting institutions.

Organisation and Power: Critical Plurality of Engagement Regimes.

Laurent Thévenot

The article addresses three main topics of labour sociology and is based on the development of an analytical framework which offers new insights into them. The notion of organization is related to "investments in forms" that make equivalencies and contribute to broad-scope coordination. Power is related to a plurality of "forms of worth" which govern the qualification of persons on things, in the perspective of a critical test for legitimacy and justice. Work activity unfolds in a second kind of pluralism, that of "regimes of engagement"

which support unequally extensive modes of coordination, from close to distant and public, and refer to hardly compatible notions of the good, from familiar ease to the public good. This framework has played a significant role in the development of the "Economics of convention" and has contributed to the elaboration of a political and moral sociology, developed with Luc Boltanski.

The Economics of Conventions and the Theory of Wages.

Olivier Favereau

According to the "conventionalist" approach, wages are not prices but rules. Some rules, being informal, arbitrary and customary, are called "conventions". In this article, the view of wage rules as conventions is examined and rejected. Recalling the neglected fact that all rules are incomplete, and so need interpretation to be used, we build an alternative analytical model of convention. Convention becomes a social representation of the relevant collective entity in which a particular rule (e.g. wages) is seen to function adequately. Conventions in this sense are used by economic agents to go through the well known diversity/opacity of firms' wage policies, and interpret them. Four basic ways of criticizing/justifying wage policies are distinguished: market, industrial, domestic and civic.

Quality Conventions and Unemployment.

François Eymard-Duvernay

The exchange of goods and labour is conditioned by a consensus on the principles of quality, the quality conventions. After presenting this approach and seeing how it relates to neoclassical theory, we show that unemployment results from selection processes that refer to work quality conventions. Contrary to the standard economic approach, which postulates that the quality of work (its productivity) is a substantive feature, we presume that it varies with the evaluation framework, i.e. the quality conventions. One important variation concerns the transition from the enterprise to the market. An analysis of current unemployment must also incorporate transformations over the last thirty years in the principles of work quality.

Employment Contracts Plurality and Law Usages.

Christian Bessy

From the construction of a French data base of 309 employment contracts, we analyse current practices in firms, their manpower management methods and their use of the law in the drafting of employment contracts. We present a typology of 'employment contracts' based on different indicators characterising the terms of the employment relationship (flexibility, employee's subordination to the firm, employee's individual accountability, appropriation of immaterial asserts) Our observations show that the contractual framework and the legal guarantees that it offers are still used relatively infrequently and concern certain types of employment relationship.

Usual Gesture: Limits to Conventional Agency and Enrichment Sources for Organisations.

Marc Breviglieri

Focusing on social readings of routine, this paper shows the two-pronged look on routine: a critical outlook rising out the question of domination, and an attentive outlook on practical knowledge. These looks intertwine and generate a cycles of anxiety linked to work conditions. This article tries to understand these dynamics by putting out different perspectives on routine. But it also aims at enlarging Conventions Economics, showing what it does neglect, both its emotional savings and its own value, i.e. ease, which resists to the narrative language of sociology.

What Can Economic Sociology Learn from the Economics of Conventions?

Richard Swedberg

While economic sociology has been very successful since its revival in the mid-1980s, it is also clear that it still has some way to go. The economics of conventions, which has produced many excellent works, is therefore of great interest to economic sociology. In this article I especially focus on the ideas in the new program of the economics of conventions, “Values, Coordination and Rationality” that was presented in Paris in 2003

For a Sociology of Worth.

David Stark

The paper claims the necessity to abandon the Parsons’ Pact about the division of labor between economy and society. That Pact continues to structure much of the field of economic sociology: in schematic terms, the economists study value (in its strictly economic, financial meaning), the sociologists will study values (their embeddedness in social relations). According to the perspective proposed, the object of study for a new economic sociology becomes the sociology of worth. The polysemic character of the term – *worth* – signals that economic sociology is concerned with fundamental problems of value while recognizing that all economies have a moral component. Through two case studies of heterarchical organizations, the author exemplifies how a sociology of worth is working, analyzing the processes of evaluation, central to the problem of worth, and exploring the concept of *accounts*.

Another View of Conventions.

Charles Tilly

Conventions consist of conventionally accepted reasons for dereliction, deviation, distinction, or good fortune. Their use facilitates coordination of interpersonal effort through appeal to shared understandings that emerge from the push and pull of social interaction, but then constrain further rounds of that interaction. The use of conventions differs from three other well defined and widely used forms of reason giving: codes, technical accounts, and stories. All four do relational work, but conventions operate most easily and effectively when participants in social relations are simply confirming the character of those relations rather than establishing them anew, contesting them, terminating them, or transforming them. In those cases, participants are more likely to employ codes, technical accounts, or stories.

Social Capital, Reputation, Visibility.

Alessandro Pizzorno

This article explores the theme of reputation making, and the relationships between reputation and visibility. Both reputation and visibility will be understood starting from a theory of social capital. So, firstly I will discuss the kind of society where it is more probable that a demand for social capital emerges, and, consequently, where conditions for relationships nets making could come out. Doing so, I will discuss mainly the “Opinion” order of worth that the Economics of Conventions highlights and that particularly Boltanski and Thévenot have stressed. The second step will be to point out the effects that this kind of relationships structures could have on personal and group reputation making. That is why four meanings of the term “reputation” will be specified: reputation as credibility (or reciprocity); reputation as excellence; reputation as communitarian conformity; reputation as visibility. A third step will be to establish the main effects of visibility, considered as an activity sphere. They manifest themselves in four different fields: the nature of competition at individual and collective level; the definition of organisational ends; the functionings of democracy and of the nature of information diffusion; the nature of new sociality.

Recruitment Strategies and Labor Markets Inequalities. Some Notes from the Economics of Conventions.

Giovanna Fullin

The article aims to grasp some themes from the studies of the economics of convention in order to identify similarities and differences with Italian sociological researchers on the labour market.

In particular, the author focuses on the following themes: a) inequalities and discrimination, b) links between micro and macro approaches for labour market studies and c) social construction of statistical indicators (very relevant as far as planning and evaluation of policies is concerned).

As conclusion, some ideas for new sociological researches on labour market are derived from the contributions of conventionalists.

For a Critical Analysis of the *Economics of Conventions*: Some Brief Considerations about its Theoretical Status and its Relationship with the Sociology of Work.

Federico Chicchi

The Economics of Conventions introduces some relevant theoretical considerations about the nature of socio-economic actions. These considerations could actually help sociology to better precise the role of moral aspects inside the economic phenomena. However, at the same time and in general, the Economics of Conventions does not seem to really overcome the overbalancing of mainstream economics approach on the individualistic and cognitive action aspects. In this sense, in the essay, we propose to “contaminate” conventions theory with some important arguments of sociology of power and linguistics.

The Relation between Organizations and Planning: an Interpretive Contribution from the Economics of Conventions.

Giorgio Gosetti

The present paper wants to point out how the Economics of Conventions orientation could be useful to the comprehension of the relation between person's services organizations, particularly those facing social and sanitary aspects of life quality, and the whole of all the other subjects controlling *determining factors* of life quality itself. A *relation* that grows up inside a *place reciprocally and conventionally recognized*, inside a *shared planning* process. We'll find then the concepts of *recognition*, *respect*, *sharing* and *legitimizing* to underline the contribute from some conceptual categories proposed by the Economics of Conventions, particularly useful to integrate the sociological approach to organizations. In the end we'll also find out some potential research trajectories, that consent for example to clear up further on the argumentations proposed.

For a Greater Exchange between Economics of Convention and Sociology: Labor Relation Analysis.

Sonia Bertolini

In this article I try to compare the analytic tools of Economics of Conventions and of Economic Sociology and Sociology of Work. I develop considerations about similes and differences between the two approaches, starting from the articles of this anthology and I will try to show with some empirical application how an integration of the two approaches can be useful.