

Resourcification

THEME 2019-2020

In a world of nearly 10 billion people, competition for the conditions of life and wealth can only accelerate. Our contention is that with such increasing competition, people and organizations will turn an increasing amount of material as well as immaterial things into resources – a process that we label resourcification. This will have major consequences for social and natural worlds. To contribute to an understanding of the nature and scope of these consequences, the theme investigates processes of defining, producing, exploiting, utilising, managing and stewarding resources.

Resourcification is a complex process that includes social, symbolic, political and economic dimensions. It is not another term for processes of economisation such as commodification and marketisation –even if each of these can be part of it. The term is used to make explicit that things are not turned into resources by themselves, nor are they turned into resources randomly. Resourcification implies intricate social processes.

Resources are literally produced, and resourcification as a concept intends to provide an understanding of how, where, when, and for whom this production happens, thus creating a novel platform for a social critique of the evolution of the current economic, social and environmental order. For example, resourcification intends to go beyond the observation that common-pool resources such as ecosystem services are increasingly being privatised and enclosed; it aims at explaining why such a development is possible, how it happens, and who gets to lose or benefit from it.

Processes of resourcification are poorly explored. A resource is commonly understood as something having an a priori potential waiting for someone to utilise. Yet, nothing is valuable in and of itself in a social system. All things need to go through a situated process of valuation to gain value, highlighting the politics of value and of valuation. Consequently, resourcification processes depend on specific ways of valuing what is to be considered a resource.

Resourcification is a way to shift attention from essentialist queries about the nature of resources to a practical understanding of the social processes where things are turned into resources. We argue that the time is ripe to open up a field of Resourcification Studies to vitalise critical discourse and practice on social-environmental interaction, thereby finding new approaches to analyse

societies that seem genuinely unable to engage in profound change and renew themselves to meet the challenges of the Anthropocene.

The Theme is structured around an interdisciplinary case selection according to relevant and ongoing processes of resourcification: Waste, The Precariat and The Convention on Biological Diversity. Each case reflects the complexity of social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, although with different aspects for each case.

Participating faculties: The Faculty of Social Sciences, The Faculty of Science, The School of Economics and Management

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