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INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE: “OPEN SOCIAL SCIENCE CONFERENCE 2019 - PRACTICING NEW STANDARDS IN TRANSPARENCY AND REPRODUCIBILITY”

Svetluša Surová*

Open social science conference on practicing new standards in transparency and reproducibility was organized by Mannheim centre for European social research (MZES) and took place this year from January 25 to 27 at the University of Mannheim in Germany. The conference was supported by the Berkeley initiative for transparency in the social sciences (BITSS). The focus of the conference was on the credibility, transparency, and replicability of social science research. The goal of the conference was to discuss state-of-the-art in social science regarding to validity of published scientific findings and to suggest possible ways and new opportunities how to improve openness in science and transparency in research. Part of the conference was also a workshop on open science research transparency and reproducibility, which took place on January 27 at the same venue.

This international and interdisciplinary conference gathered around forty scientists from all disciplines of social science working with different methodologies. The conference program was divided into three thematic panels focusing on debating open science, advancing and doing it. The conference hosted four keynote speakers as follows: professor **Arthur Lupia** from University of Michigan, **Thomas König** from Mannheim University, **Julia Rohrer** from Leipzig University and **Jeremy Freese** from Stanford University. **Arthur Lupia** pushed forward the idea that transparency and the public value of science is up to scientists themselves. The value of social science is in his opinion ultimately about the quality of life. According to him, there are four ways of knowing things. The way that appeals to metaphysics; or to personal testimony; or cultural space between gods and man; and lastly science. He started his lecture with the quest for discontinuity in social science. This means

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that scientists should take time together to really have a distinct change in how the science is done and talked about. Professor Lupia advocated questioning of current scientific practices. In his opinion, science should be evaluated based on credibility and legitimacy criteria. Scientists have to be clear and honest about their methods and conclusions. He emphasized many times in his lecture that science has to be done in a right way because it depends on the research process. In science, the claim validity does not depend on faith, experience or truth but on the rigor of scientific method used. Professor **Lupia** was the only one on the conference who has mentioned the challenges of open science. Although many scientists advocate open science, there are no empirical data or evidence that it works.

Very interesting was the talk of Professor **Josef Brüderl** that he prepared together with **Katrin Aispurg**, both from LMU München, on credibility crisis in sociology. According to professor **Brüderl**, four types of errors can occur when doing scientific research: bad measurement, bad design, “bad” researcher (researcher that produces errors) and biased researcher not doing objective research. Biased researchers are those who commit fraud in their research by fabricating or falsifying data and/or analysis and who deploy questionable research practices (QRP). In professor’s opinion, errors of the biased researchers are widespread and from that is rising a credibility and replication crisis in science. The focus of his presentation was on quantitative data and social research in sociology with observational data. Professor **Brüderl** proposed also terms clarifications. In his opinion, the term ‘replication’ refers to reproducing results with new data, whereas the term ‘reproduction’ means reproducing results with same data. He has also shown data on retractions of published articles in sociology. According to his data, in the past few years there have been 390 retractions in sociology (data from November 2018) but only 11 in the high-quality SSCI sociological journals. Despite this, he has suggested with his colleague, that most of the published findings in sociology is false. In addition, he has mentioned the well-known problem in sociological literature of false positive results. Moreover, professor **Brüderl** has proposed a need for a cultural revolution in sociology. This revolution should include incentives for open data in science; starting all research with reproduction; publishing also positive reproduction in replication journals and new citation rule, where original work should be cited with its reproductions.

Similarly, Per **Engzell** from University of Oxford has talked about statistical crisis in social science. According to **Engzell**, replication crisis has centred to a

large extent on psychology and it relates to practises such as underpowered research designs, misuse of significant testing, hypothesising after results are known, researcher's degree of freedom, insufficient transparency and emphasis on novel results among others. All these questionable practises are leading to publication bias and proliferation of false positives and difficulty to do reproduction. He has shown from his own research how false positive in sociology looks like. Sources for false positives can be omitted variables, measurement error, reverse causality, survivorship bias, conditioning on collider, floor and ceiling effects, regression to the mean, ecological fallacy etc. Biased false positives are according to **Engzell**, by far the worst problem in sociology. His conclusion is that the problem in contemporary sociology is not too little replications but that they are done initially with the questionable methodology. Replication in his opinion cannot save sociology from itself. However, open science is a good thing, but its positives should not be limited to replications only.

Another thought-provoking talk was provided by **Nicole Janz** from University of Nottingham, on good and bad replications in political science and how replicators and original authors should talk to each other. When doing or talking replication in science, everybody is interested if the replicators have contacted the original authors and how they have reacted. It is also widespread to label replication as a "witch hunt" and many time replicators are labelled as "replication police". Contrary to this, professor **Janz** is advocating for open science, because it helps us to build on previous knowledge, advance knowledge and detect misconduct. However, scientists are in her opinion hesitant to run replications and to be replicated. The reasons lie in the fact that in the past the prevalent view was that replications can make or break scientists career. Instead, she suggests thinking of replications as a tool for overcoming obstacles and methodological or data-management challenges in different scientific disciplines. She has argued that replications should be a collective effort that improves science. As well, in her opinion replicators should talk with original authors in a way that does not perpetuate culture of fear from replications. From the conceptual perspective, professor **Janz** distinguishes between terms 'duplication' and 'replication'. The term 'duplication' means verification of results with the same data and same methods. Whereas, the term 'replication' refers to testing of research results with the new data and new methods. She is suggesting that before publishing their research findings scientists should give their study first to someone else to duplicate it. When it

comes to replication, which uses different data and methodologies, the reasons for different results can vary and they do not have to be as clear as in duplication. For example, **Janz** emphasised that replicators can use different methods, which can be better or not. The results of original study can be valid but only in a narrow context, for reasons which were not properly admitted in the study. Different results can also be achieved by chance. For **Janz**, replicators have to explain clearly which data and methods they have used, and which changes they have made. She has proposed how to do duplications and replications in a more constructive way. Firstly, replicators should be clear if they conduct duplication or replication. Secondly, they should be maximally transparent and reproducible. Thirdly, **Janz** suggests to researchers to emphasize that they are experts, who want to contribute to the existing literature and not only to cross check original study. Further, **Janz** proposed to avoid term "failed replication" and binary judgements, to avoid making replication personal and to remember that replications are not a final judgement on particular topic. She concluded her lecture with appeal to replicate others as we would want others to replicate us.

In his lecture, **Thomas König** raised the main difficulties that open political science faces today. **Julia Rohrer** spoke about the replication crisis in the field of psychology and what the other social science disciplines can learned from it. **Jeremy Freese** talked about the challenges of open social science in general. Besides keynote lectures, conference participants could listen great presentations on reproducibility and statistical crisis in sociology and social science, the importance of pre-registration, transparency in qualitative research, findings of meta-analytic research in social sciences and examples of good and bad replications among others.

Conference tackled the issues of credibility, transparency and reproducibility in social science from all angles and has raised important questions about the validity of published findings. At the same time, conference offered and suggested new tools and innovative steps how to approach the main problems that social science faces today. The main message of the conference was that open and transparent research is the right and best path to improve social science.