

ICOR - Management Research Seminar

'Institutional silence. A case study on the failed deinstitutionalization of hazardous waste dumping'

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How do harmful practices get deinstitutionalized? This question has become highly relevant given the increasing risks that emerge from so-called grand challenges such as global warming. Not many studies exist that examine processes of deinstitutionalization. The very few we have, focus on successful cases such as the fight against DDT or chemical pollution in general. Little is known about failed attempts to get rid of harmful practices with severe non-exclusive hazards to health and the environment. We thus ask the following question: Why and how do attempts to deinstitutionalize a hazardous practice with not-exclusive negative consequences for human health and the environment fail? In answering this question, we take a discursive perspective and present a longitudinal case study on the failed attempt to raise attention and deinstitutionalize the practice of toxic industrial waste dumping near Naples in South Italy. Since almost three decades, attempts to create a public debate and to stop the dumping of highly toxic waste have failed. Institutional theory assumes that societal change follows discursive struggles. The taken for granted assumption behind discursive change is that there is a debate between proponents and opponents of the practice at stake. However, what we find is that the failure to deinstitutionalize harmful practices relates to the fact that a critical discourse remains marginalized and thus no narrative battle occurs. From our findings, we theorize the concept of institutional silence, which we define as the systematic marginalization of texts and discourse. We elaborate on cognitive and emotional phenomena that explain the lack of discourse and as a consequence the failure to deinstitutionalize the harmful practice.

- **Paris: Room P225** (Promenade building, Paris La Défense)
- **Lille: VisioRoom B050** (B-Building 3 rue de la Digue, Lille)