



## How to study bureaucracies ethnographically?

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Wyk?ad prof. Thomasa Bierschenka (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz)

### [How to study bureaucracy ethnographically? Prof. Thomas Bierschenk \[1\]](#)

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**Recorded at:** seminarium IEiAK

**Date:** 20-02-2019

**Lecturer's name:** prof. Thomas Bierschenk

Bureaucracies are specific type of organization dominated by the bureaucratic control mechanism. They can be found in the public sector (e.g. public administration in a large sense), where they partake in the sovereignty claim of the state. They are also found as well as in the private sector (e.g. in large companies, but also in large non-governmental organizations). Bureaucracy is one of the most important 'traveling blueprints' that shape the contemporary world.

Like other organizations, bureaucracies are marked by a tension of formal and informal rules. Since its foundational moment in the 1920s, the basic tenet of organisation studies has been that organizations, including public ones, cannot be understood on the basis of official charts and regulations alone. This gives ethnography its pre-eminent role, as it is the only methodology by which informal practices can be accessed; thus, anthropology has not only been a co-founder of organisational studies but keeps a central place.

In this research tradition, methodological innovations (such as case studies and teamwork, as well as dealing with the modern world) were developed early on, which became accepted in mainstream anthropology only much later. This lecture will focus on the methodology of the ethnographic study of (public) organizations.

**Thomas Bierschenk** is professor of anthropology at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Germany). He has studied public services in Africa, and is the co-editor of 'States at Work. Dynamics of African Bureaucracies' (Brill, Leiden 2014), and is now conducting a research project on the management of cultural difference by German police.

SEMINARIA NAUKOWE IEiAK - w trakcie seminariów badania prezentuj? pracownicy instytutu, a tak?e antropolodzy i przedstawiciele pokrewnych dyscyplin z kraju i ze ?wiata. To okazja do zapoznania si? z najnowszymi badaniami i swobodnej dyskusji w kameralnej atmosferze. Spotkania s? otwarte dla publiczno?ci. Serdecznie zapraszamy wszystkich zainteresowanych: zarówno badaczy, jak i studentów, absolwentów oraz wszelkie osoby, którym bliska jest tematyka seminariów. Wi?cej o seminariach

Antropologia dzi? - otwarte seminaria naukowe – zadanie finansowane w ramach umowy 973/P-DUN/2018 ze ?rodków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wy?szego przeznaczonych na dzia?alno?? upowszechniaj?c? nauk?. Projekt jest realizowany przez Stowarzyszenie Pracownia Etnograficzna im. Witolda Dynowskiego we wspó?pracy z Instytutem Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej UW.



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