In recent years, abstract entities such as the State, the Citizen and Power inherited from political philosophy have been reassessed empirically, notably under the influence of pragmatist considerations in social science approaches of the political order. This important development has led to a much more concrete understanding of modern democracies, now seen as a contingent process rather than the direct outcome of institutional structures. The workshop will contribute to this development through presentation and discussion of related research projects. These projects have in common an observational approach to the situated practices through which political phenomena emerge in the first place. Ethnographical and video-supported enquiries are expected to demonstrate how the practices examined exhibit an orientation to their political dimension. While this dimension may concern the organisation, modification and discussion of ‘life in common’, how it is specifically produced remains to be described and explicated in each instance. In other words, the political character of the analysed practices has to be demonstrated as relevant for the participants involved and consequential for the organisation of their unfolding activity.

The workshop will be the second in a series of Situated Practices Seminars, following the ‘Scientific Practice as Ordinary Action’ International Workshop (March 2007 - Department of Social Sciences, University of Fribourg). The Situated Practices Seminars are intended to contribute to, and suggest the advantages of, a ‘practical turn’ in the study of social phenomena. The workshop will be conducted in English and French.

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Alain Bovet (Université de Fribourg), Esther González Martínez (Université de Fribourg) and Philippe Sormani (University of Manchester)

The aim of the workshop is twofold: first, to assess how relevant and important observational studies of situated practices are to the sociological understanding of political phenomena; second, to discuss key epistemological and methodological issues in the observational study of situated practices with a focus on their political dimension. In sum, the workshop is expected to provide a greater understanding of the concrete realisation of the political order, understood as a contingent and situated achievement. The results (and their publication in an edited volume) should therefore be of particular interest to the scientific community as well as to any citizen involved in the (re)organisation of the world we live in.

The workshop will be conducted in English and French.