

ECPR Workshop Rennes 11-16 April 2008

Politics of Intellectual Property

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Intellectual property (IP) has become an issue of utmost importance in the contemporary global economy. How should the private or collective acquisition and control of knowledge be governed? Which frameworks for managing IP are optimal for stimulating the production of knowledge while also facilitating use? These overarching questions are increasingly the subject of political conflicts over what types of knowledge can and should be privately owned, and about how much power owners should have to restrict access to privately owned knowledge.

The prevailing regulatory model, first adopted in the OECD and transmitted throughout the world by means of a variety of multilateral and regional agreements, is informed by an expectation that more and stronger intellectual property rights improves social welfare. Yet as some actors push for continuous expansion of IPRs, others point to the negative impact that strong private, exclusionary rights over knowledge can have on downstream innovation and consumers' abilities to access critical knowledge-based goods. Parallel to this welfare-based debate over the relative utilities of different IP frameworks, another debate focuses on the philosophical, ethical, and moral rationale for and objections to private ownership of knowledge. In short, the increasing importance of intellectual property in the global economy has been accompanied by a wide range of political conflicts, as actors contest the structure, scope, and boundaries of existing frameworks for establishing and regulating intellectual property rights.

The following areas of conflict areas are notable, though this list is far from comprehensive:

- Biodiversity: Patentability of genetic sequences of indigenous plants.
- Biomedical biotechnology: Patentability of genetically modified life forms and genetic sequences.
- File Sharing: Pirate parties, copying and distribution of music and videos.
- Public health: Access to essential medicines.
- Software: Patents for software (and business methods).
- Research Tools: Access to publicly funded research and the availability of research tools.
- Technology Transfer: The constraints placed on industrial firms in developing countries that seek to adapt advanced technologies to local demand.

Each of these issues raises complex economic, legal, and political questions. And each provides illustration of the sorts of conflicts – over utility and morality – indicated above.

Our workshop will examine these diverse lines of political conflict. We invite participants to present papers that address these (and other) areas of political conflict over IP. We welcome papers that do so theoretically and/or empirically.

While the broad topic of intellectual property has received considerable attention in recent years, particularly from lawyers and activists, remarkably few political scientists have turned their attention to this issue. Our workshop aims to encourage this incipient research agenda and encourage scholars to direct their analytic energies toward the *politics* of IP. As such, we invite scholars working in international relations, political economy, social movement studies, political sociology, and other fields to confront their respective methodological perspectives and theoretical assumptions in a productive exchange that promises to lead to a fuller understanding of the social and political processes that affect the governance of intellectual property.

Please submit abstracts by 1st December 2007 to:

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For more information see the ECPR website: <http://www.rennes2008.visionmd.co.uk/index.html>