

NEWSLETTER OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON CONCEPTUAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

International Sociological Association – Research Committee 35

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COCTA-News

Dear members and friends of COCTA,

Following our successful presence at the ISA-World-Congress 2006 in Durban, South Africa, here are some news.

During the business meeting held at the above congress, a new board was elected for the committee. Volker H. Schmidt and Hartmut Rosa were re-elected as President and Vice-President through 2010, respectively. New to the board are David Strecker from the University of Jena, Germany, who is serving as the committee's secretary, and Boris Holzer from the University of Lucerne, Switzerland.

For the future, we aim to achieve greater diversity in the board's composition. However, we will succeed only if members become more active and state their preferences/interests.

Before the next ISA-World-Congress in Goteborg, Sweden in 2010, for which we hope to receive proposals for sessions the committee might organize from all members, there will be two or three more occasions to meet. Firstly, our RC has accepted the invitation of the ISA's Vice-President for Research to participate in the First ISA World Forum of Sociology, to be held from 5th to 8th September in 2008. Included in this newsletter are seven paper calls for sessions we hope to hold during the forum, and we invite all of you to make proposals. Also, please pass the newsletter/call texts on to any colleague you think might be interested in one or more of the sessions. Secondly, plans are underway to organize a workshop on the concept of development in early May 2008, to be held in Singapore. Details about this workshop and a call for papers will be sent to all of you once the funding is secured and the date for the workshop finalized. Finally, we are considering to organize two RC-sessions as guests at the next congress of the German Sociological Association, which will be held in Jena in October 2008. Again, details will be provided about that event as soon as possible.

Cordially yours,

Volker Schmidt and Hartmut Rosa

Conceptual Change in a Global Era

**Sessions Planned for the First ISA World Forum of Sociology
in Barcelona, 2008**

Session 1

World Society and Global Sociology

Organizer: Volker H. Schmidt

Since the second half of the 20th century, sociologists have begun to consider the possibility that the whole world could become a singular social system. From the late 1960s/early 1970s onwards, at least four schools of thought emerged that either explicitly used or implicitly drew upon the notion of a world society, which was seen as a rapidly developing or already existing reality. Two of these schools, the approaches founded by the Swiss sociologist Peter Heintz and the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, respectively, focus primarily on the spread of capitalism and the impact that unequal core-periphery relations between nations and world regions have on the "world system's" internal power structure – in short, on world politics and the world economy. The other two approaches, the world-polity approach of John Meyer and the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, are more broadly conceived and aim to capture the entire structure of society. Coincidentally however, both have little to say about (world) politics and the (world) economy, even though at least Luhmann viewed the economy, alongside the sciences, as the most globalized of all societal sub-systems.

Despite the authors' prominence, it is probably fair to say that the concept of a world society is not yet part of the everyday language, to say nothing about the taken-for-granted analytical tools, of mainstream sociology. Most contemporary sociologists tend to equate "society" with the nation state and to concern themselves primarily with issues that are believed to be internal (and hence "relevant") to the country they reside in and/or know best. The development of a global sociology, which would be the logical complement of a world society in the making, is clearly not high on the agenda of academic sociology. However, if world society is a genuine reality (or possibility), then this would also cast doubt on the merits of a predominantly "nationalist" or "regionalist" orientation in sociology, as one would then expect growing interconnectedness, interdependence, interrelatedness of/between world regions, such that developments in one part of the globe would more and more impact on those in another – which is precisely what the globalization literature claims to be the case. But if that is true (as it doubtless is), then it should become increasingly difficult to understand even seemingly "local" affairs without considering them in the larger, "global" context they are embedded in.

It is against this backdrop that the present session aims to (re-)consider the concept of a world society. How real is world society (today), do we have reason to expect it will become more real over time, and what would that imply for sociology? Should we discard the notion of a national society altogether, or should we retain it because world society is a mere chimera? What would we stand to gain from a global sociology, and at what price? Is such a sociology feasible anyway? If not, what future is there for a discipline whose scope cannot match that of (growing parts of) its subject matter? And which, if any, of the available proposals to conceptualize a world society should (a global) sociology draw upon? Are they mutually exclusive or can they be meaningfully integrated, supplement each other? What are their strengths and weaknesses – both generally and comparatively speaking? And so forth.

The session invites contributions addressing some of these issues. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

Volker H. Schmidt, National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology. Email: socvhs@nus.edu.sg

Session 2

Convergence and Divergence: A False Dichotomy? Organizer: Volker H. Schmidt

Much social science literature either explicitly claims or indirectly suggests (by presenting evidence that shows) the world, or at any rate its modern parts, is/are becoming more similar over time. At the same time, the very notion of "convergence" is viewed highly critical in some academic circles, especially by those favoring cultural approaches of social analysis, who mostly claim that much diversity persists both within and across world regions.

But does the juxtaposition of convergence and divergence in the form of a mutually exclusive, binary opposition really make sense? Might it be that there is convergence in some respect, while diversity persists in other respects; that there are dimensions of social change that exhibit common developments across regions and cultural zones, while other areas of social life show remarkable resilience against homogenization? And is it possible that our observation of convergence or diversity is less a matter of truth or falsity than an artifact of our preferred methodology? Thus, if we engage in cross-country or -regional comparison, then we are likely to detect (more or less profound) differences between the units of comparison (which need not be states, but can also be provinces, towns or cities, organizations, etc.), for to unravel such differences is precisely the purpose of our analysis – if we want to know what is unique to one case, then we have to find out how and why it differs from others. If, on the other hand, we are interested in long-term, fundamental transformations of entire societal formations (e.g., from pre-modern to modern societies), then we will compare historically and hence see many common trends at work in otherwise quite diverse regions, so that the similarities exhibited by societies which have undergone such a transformation will appear more significant than what distinguishes them from each other, as well as from societies whose structure is not (yet?) fully transformed. In short, the relative weight we place on convergence and/or divergence may be due primarily to the research questions we pursue, in which case the respective findings would not necessarily have to contradict each another, but simply address different reference problems.

If this reasoning is not completely unsound, then it should be clear that the disputes between scholars emphasizing one or the other of the two poles cannot be resolved methodologically or by purely empirical means. What we need instead, is greater conceptual clarity: What do we mean by convergence and divergence, what significance should we accord which kinds of commonality/diversity in which frames of reference, and what is the relevance of findings generated by one type of analysis for (the) other (types of analysis)?

The session invites contributions addressing some of these issues. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

Volker H. Schmidt, National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology. Email: socvhs@nus.edu.sg

Session 3

The Critique of Orientalism and Concept Formation **Organizer: Syed Farid Alatas**

This is a call for papers that addresses the issue of concept formation as a logical consequence of the critique of Orientalism in the social sciences. The fact that the humanities and social sciences in developing societies generally originate in the West had raised the issue of the relevance of the disciplines to the needs and problems of non-Western societies. This questioning of relevance in turn led to calls for alternative discourses in the social science communities in these societies. These calls have come under labels such as the decolonization of knowledge, autonomous social science, the indigenization of social sciences, and others. While there has been a great deal of discussion since the 1950s on the need for alternatives, there has been little practice of alternative discourses in the social sciences. There are few examples of what alternative social science is from the theoretical, methodological and empirical points of view.

The papers of this panel will address the problem of concept formation in the context of the critique of Orientalism. The critique of Orientalism implies that alternative traditions to Euroamerican social science are possible. One aspect of this would be the generation of concepts and theories in the social sciences that are home grown or local. Concept formation in the social sciences is understood as a process in which ideas, information and data collected and reflected upon during various stages of the research process are recast in the form of abstractions. These abstractions are what are known as concepts. But this process does not take place in an historical and cultural vacuum. At the same time, there is a recognition that concepts should be of universal applicability. The process of concept formation in this context seems elusive to most, including the advocates of alternative discourses. What is this process and what are examples of concepts that transcend the problems identified in the critique of Orientalism? These are examples of questions that will be dealt with in this panel.

The session invites contributions addressing some of these issues. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

Syed Farid Alatas, National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology, Email:
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Session 4

The sociological imagination after 1989: How fundamental are the conceptual shifts? Organizer: Chris Armbruster

Several substantial debates surveying the meaning and impact of 1989, cumulatively, suggest substantial shifts in the foundations and parameters of the sociological imagination that 'enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals' (C.W. Mills). Moreover, the social and cultural changes associated with 1989 might lead one to speculate that we are passing through a (new) 'Sattelzeit' (R.W. Koselleck). To be sure, Koselleck and collaborators identified the Sattelzeit ('période charnière') linking the 'before' and 'after' of 1789 only in retrospect, nearly two centuries later. However, the coming 20th anniversary of 1989 would seem a good moment to enquire, which conceptual shifts are occurring and how far-reaching these might be.

Some candidates for further examination are the following debates (other ideas and debates are equally welcome):

1. 1989 has been interpreted in many ways, but one interpretation that stuck is the 'rectifying revolution' (Habermas). It articulated the expectation of overcoming Yalta and returning to Europe, while also captured the prospective Europeanisation of CEE. Yet, the term also 'domesticated' the revolutions. Whereas in the 1970s many confidently anticipated the coming legitimation crisis of late capitalism, by the 1990s all concurred that, to the contrary, socialism had experienced its final legitimation crisis, giving way to democratic capitalism. What are the consequences for the sociological imagination?
2. The 'End of History' was borrowed by Fukuyama from Hegel to designate the ultimate victory of capitalist liberal democracy in the 'realm of ideas'. Perry Anderson summed up: 'What the end of history means, above all, is the end of socialism'. Arigghi, Hopkins and Wallerstein wrote that in "1989, not only Leninism, but national liberation movements, social-democratic, and all the other heirs of post-1789 revolutionary 'liberalism' collapsed ideologically". Western (Post-)Marxists, who had not supported the USSR, seemingly concur with Fukuyama. What is the meaning of this?
3. The 'Third Way' aided leftist electoral recovery (cf. Etzioni, Giddens). By 1989 social democrats had begun to look like the natural opposition party. Some of the concepts adapted from sociology are: embedded market, ensuring state, controlled inequality, critique of social inheritance, citizenship as co-production and managed diversity. What does this tell us about the interrelation between sociology and leftist politics after 1989?
4. 'Varieties of Capitalism' represents a family of economic systems with common features, distinct from socialism (Kornai; Hall/Soskice). The current discourse suggests that after the end of socialism only varieties of capitalism remain?

The session invites contributions addressing some of these issues. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

Chris Armbruster, Research Network 1989, <http://www.cee-socialscience.net/1989/>, Email: Chris.Armbruster@eui.eu

Session 5

'World consciousness': Beyond Globalization and Cosmopolitanism? Organizer: Oliver Kozlarek

It is commonplace in cultural and social sciences to say that ours is a world determined by the forces and dynamics of globalization. But it is just as clear that 'globalization' is an ambiguous word. While some see in it a fancy make-up for what once was called 'imperialism', others understand it simply as an increase of interaction between human beings around the globe. In order to come to terms with the normative and political horizon of globalization, another term has had an important comeback: 'cosmopolitanism'. But 'cosmopolitanism' too is a complex and ambivalent notion. Maybe one of its most important achievements for sociology has been that it permits us to overcome 'methodological nationalism' (Beck) and to think beyond the boundaries it sets. However, the term also has a tendency of being too abstract, not taking into account local and cultural differences.

In this somehow problematic terminological terrain, the question is whether there are terminological traditions that we have overlooked; traditions that would allow to go beyond the problems of the categories that determine the way we been thinking about our global realities thus far. It is with this question in mind that this session will try to evaluate a proposal that goes back to Alexander von Humboldt and condenses in the term 'world consciousness'. 'World consciousness' expresses the awareness of the plurality of the natural and human world, without losing sight of its unity. Instead of understanding the unity of the world through abstract principals, Humboldtian 'world consciousness' is committed to getting to know the real world. The production of 'world knowledge'—another Humboldtian term—is the result of a permanent process of learning from the world as it really exists. It refers to a process that can only be understood as an intercultural and transdisciplinary research program, operating on a global scale through networks of researchers in all world regions. Such a pluri-topical, yet dialogical, program contains its own ethical and political horizon: it aims to achieve a better understanding of the world, and it produces a relationship to 'the other' (be it the other human being or the other of the human being, the 'natural' world) that is informed by respect and recognition, not by the will of domination.

The session wishes to explore whether 'world consciousness' could provide an orientation for a sociological research agenda. Examples of some of the more specific questions that might be addresses are: Which sociological traditions could be reactivated in order to develop a 'world consciousness' in sociology? What are the limits of a research agenda that is tied to a more conventional conceptual framework (for instance to globalization and cosmopolitanism)? How could a transdisciplinary and intercultural research program be brought to life? What are the political and normative challenges?

If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

Oliver Kozlarek, Department of Philosophy Universidad Michoacana in Morelia, Mexico.
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Session 6

Conceptualizing Reflexivity: Reframing the Problem of Order for the Global Era Organizer: David Strecker

It is a commonplace in sociology that the problem of order is at the heart of the discipline. Sociology originated at a time when it became obvious that society's integration is precarious. At a time when tradition had apparently lost its grip on the individuals and society had turned dynamic it became evident that one could not simply assume the uncoordinated actions of diverse individuals to be synchronized and to allow for the stable reproduction of social structures. To this day the problem of how to understand the relation of structure and action remains unsolved. If one excludes simplistic answers which conceive of society's members as cultural or social dopes or which, in contrast, make social structures the sole result of intentional action, then the question becomes one of degrees of autonomy: How autonomous are social actors in the process of societal reproduction? Which degree of freedom and coercion is involved here?

These questions today usually centre around an inquiry into the concept of reflexivity: How much reflexivity is involved in the process of social reproduction? At least three sets of research questions seem important to this problem:

1) *Conceptual* issues: What does it mean that actors reflexively monitor their action? Do routine action and reflexive action contrast? What is the role of habit with regard to reflexive faculties? Can only individuals be reflexive or does it make sense to talk of institutional or systemic reflexivity? Should one distinguish between private and public reflexivity? Are there different levels of reflexivity? Can one identify varying types or forms of reflexivity? What is the role of socialization, experience and context with regard to these?

2) *Historical* analyses: Are we currently witnessing a situation comparable to the dynamism and insecurity of the time when sociology was born as a discipline? Is the genesis of world society taking place and is this transformation producing dynamics and insecurities that change the role and function of reflexivity in the process of social reproduction? Can we understand this as reflexive modernity?

3) *Empirical* studies: What can we observe when actors reflect in varying ways? What do they take into account in their decisions and which factors remain unconsidered? How do individuals reason? Have technical innovations and the new media changed the ways actors employ their reflexive faculties?

The session invites contributions addressing these or related topics. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer:

David Strecker, Department of Sociology, Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena, Email: David.Strecker@uni-jena.de

Session 7

Levels of Authenticity – Conceptual Clarifications Organizer: Joern Lamla

Taking advantage of the concept of authenticity in sociological analysis has become difficult after its deconstruction as a romantic myth of the modern subject by poststructuralists. It is no longer possible to refer to it sociologically in the same way as in ordinary language because authenticity is massively influenced by social structures like consumer culture, individualization, psychological discourses, the acceleration of social change and so on. But does this really mean we have to give up this concept as an analytical tool for the sociological reconstruction of social and cultural practices? Or is it possible – perhaps even necessary – to distinguish levels of authenticity to make sense of its different forms and deformations in the history of social life and its subjects? While such questions are broadly discussed by social philosophers like Charles Taylor, Alessandro Ferrara and others and have become a major issue in debates on modern vs. postmodern or postcolonial theories of identity, an open minded methodological consideration and thorough reflection from the perspective of more general social theories is missing, yet. In our session on the concept of authenticity we want to highlight some of these aspects.

There are many structural levels of authenticity which may have to be distinguished, e.g. the emotional or even neurological basis of behavior and self-security; biographical traces and patterns in the course of life, in the body, character or habitus of each individual; rules or strategies of performing an authentic self which are discussed by theorists of communication, dramaturgic action or performativity; historical discourses on identity and the modern subject; practices of consuming authenticity in the commercial sphere like tourism or “religion” and, last but not least, the normative level of authenticity as a resource of social critique as well as an object for the sociological analysis of critique. It would be especially helpful to have papers that do not only address one but discuss the relation between two or more of such levels. While our focus lies on methodological and theoretical questions, this does not exclude papers with insights from empirical research. On the contrary, it would be very useful to start developing arguments from qualitative case studies about the relation between different levels of authenticity.

Therefore, it might be promising to have a closer look at empirical constellations in which social and cultural practices turn increasingly paradoxical. Today we can find a lot of issues concerning something like an authenticity trap (e.g. in flexible labor markets), contradictions and conflicts between market-culture and culture-markets in the sphere of consumption or the performance of inauthenticity as a postmodern lifestyle in more or less authentic ways.

If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page and no later than 31.12.2007 to the organizer.

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Composition of the Board for the Period 2006-2010

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