

# NEWSLETTER OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE ON CONCEPTUAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

International Sociological Association – Research Committee 35

June 2009

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## COCTA-News

Dear members and friends of COCTA,

this issue of our newsletter brings you the latest information on our upcoming conference at the next ISA World Congress. The **XVII ISA World Congress** is entitled ***Sociology on the Move*** and will take place in **Gothenburg, Sweden, 11-17 July 2010**.

Our activities at this event will be on ***Sociological Concepts on the Move***, directly following up on the theme of our conference at the ISA World Forum in Barcelona 2008 which dealt with *Conceptual Change in a Global Era*. As we continue to grow, our programme is also expanding. We have been allocated ten time slots and, accordingly, will conduct nine sessions on conceptual and terminological analysis plus our regular **business meeting**. Information on the latter will follow in due course, but please do not hesitate to let us know in case you would like to place an issue on the agenda.

Many of you, members old and new, have responded to our call, published in the previous newsletter, to organize a COCTA session in Gothenburg. We are sorry that we were unable to accept all proposals. Yet, we confess to also being pleased about seeing our RC becoming ever more active. You will find the **nine calls for papers** for our sessions on conceptual and terminological issues below. The **deadline** to submit abstracts for paper proposals is **31 October, 2009**. Please do so directly to the respective session organizer(s).

We trust you will find our programme as interesting as we do, encourage you to participate in the sessions, and look forward to your paper proposals. Finally, we would like to ask you to pass the calls on to anyone you feel might be interested in and capable of providing input to our sessions.

Our last meeting before the 2010 congress will take place in just a few days at the **IIS World Congress in Yerevan, Armenia (June 11-14, 2009)** where Boris Holzer and Tobias Werron are organizing a COCTA session on "Mechanisms of Globalization: The Making of a World Society". We wish everyone participating in this event lively debates, and an enjoyable and successful session.

In closing, as usual, I would like to ask you to spread the word on COCTA and let your colleagues know that everyone interested in our current and future activities is cordially invited to take part. Do not hesitate to present your ideas in case you would like to propose or organize a COCTA conference or session. We are looking forward to be meeting you (again) rather sooner than later!

On behalf of the board,

cordially yours,

David Strecker

# **Sociological Concepts on the Move**

**COCTA (ISA RC35) Conference  
at the  
XVII ISA World Congress in Gothenburg  
11-17 July, 2010**

Session 1:

Contingency and Directionality

Session 2:

The Concept, Use and Theory of Networks

Session 3:

Lack of Resonance? The Concept of Alienation Revisited

Session 4:

Slavery: Institutional Continuity or Conceptual Confusion?

Session 5:

Global Sociology: Conditions of Possibility

Session 6:

Comparative Social Theory. The Diversity of Experiences with Modernity and Globalization

Session 7:

Translation and the Problem of (Methodological) Difference

Session 8:

Concept Formation and Theory Building: Drawing upon Indigenous Intellectual Traditions

Session 9:

Concept Formation in Asian Sociologies

Session 10:

Business Meeting

# General Information

on the

## XVII ISA World Congress in Gothenburg 11-17 July, 2010

Any individual may participate on up to two sessions. Once your presentation is approved by the session chair, you must then submit an abstract of your paper online (instructions will be made available in due course). Abstracts are only accepted by the system from those who are already registered for the Congress. The deadline for submission of approved abstracts is May 1, 2010.

The programme coordinators for the COCTA (ISA RC35) conference on *Sociological Concepts on the Move* are Volker H. Schmidt, National University of Singapore, [socvhs@edu.nus.sg](mailto:socvhs@edu.nus.sg), and David Strecker, University of Jena, Germany, [David.Strecker@uni-jena.de](mailto:David.Strecker@uni-jena.de). If you wish to participate in one of COCTA's sessions, please send your abstract directly to the session organizer(s) no later than **31 October, 2009**.

Below is a preliminary time table of the RC sessions at the congress:

2010				
July, 12		15:30-17:30	17:45-19:45	20:00-22:00
July, 13	10:45-12:45	15:30-17:30	17:45-19:45	20:00-22:00
July, 14	10:45-12:45	15:30-17:30	17:45-19:45	20:00-22:00
July, 15	10:45-12:45	15:30-17:30	17:45-19:45	20:00-22:00
July, 16	10:45-12:45	15:30-17:30	17:45-19:45	20:00-22:00
July, 17		13:45-15:45	16:00-18:00	

Detailed information on the congress (programme, general schedule, deadlines, registration, accommodation etc.) is provided on the congress website: <http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2010/>

## Session 1

### Contingency and Directionality

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

This session will concern itself with a puzzling observation. On the one hand, every social phenomenon, institution, structure, is contingent in the sense that nothing forces them upon us, that there is choice in both individual and collective action, that alternate paths of development are possible (and often realized), that nobody can predict the future with absolute certainty – in short, that it is open rather than being fixed and determined by the past. On the other hand, when adopting a long term perspective and a historical viewpoint, we can also discern powerful trends that seem to reflect a directed rather than purely erratic course of social change. We warn against extrapolating past experience into the future, but we also embrace concepts of path dependency that appear to be doing precisely that – and we have good reasons for taking such notions seriously because complete breaks with the past, dramatic breakthroughs to something radically new and unexpected, are rare events. We know things could and would have taken a different turn had some “x” not happened, yet in hindsight “y” would not have seemed feasible, sustainable, a realistic possibility anyway. We observe enormous social and cultural diversity, yet it is hard to ignore common global developments that seem far from arbitrary.

Contingency and directionality, though logically seemingly contradictory concepts, are thus apparently not factually incompatible occurrences. The purpose of this session is to discuss proposals that aim to dissolve the puzzle, that take both concepts (and their underlying observations) seriously and try to integrate them in a meaningful way. If you wish to present a paper, please send an abstract of no more than one page to the organizer.

## Session 2

### The Concept, Use and Theory of Networks

Organizers: *Jan Fuhse*, University of Stuttgart, Germany, Email: jan@fuhse.net & *Boris Holzer*, University of Luzern, Switzerland, Email: boris.holzer@unilu.ch

More than four decades ago J. Clyde Mitchell made an early effort to determine the 'concept and use of networks'. Social network analysis has since grown into a productive international research program. Despite important conceptual advances and innovations social network analysis remains a mainly empirical endeavour, with methodological concerns driving research interests and the formulation of new concepts. Yet there is growing interest in assembling the various concepts and integrating them into some kind of theoretical framework. This session aims to contribute to the ongoing debate about the theoretical underpinnings and methodological implications of social network analysis by discussing and elaborating central concepts such as ties, social capital, structural equivalence, or the very term 'network'.

Critical of the so-called variables paradigm (which focuses on statistical co-variations and implied causalities between variables such as gender, race, and income), certain tropes have become common-place in network research: *Social networks* are assumed to exist as relatively stable patterns of relations between actors within a given domain (such as a firm, a school class, or a specific market) which can be reduced to a numerical representation; actors are seen as using networks as *social capital* in order to increase their capacity for action; *centrality* and *brokerage roles* determine the positions and influence of individual actors within a network. The network perspective thus consists of a set of arguments that often derive from the exigencies of data collection and analysis rather than from theoretical and conceptual elaboration.

Session participants are encouraged to reflect on the conceptual, pragmatic and theoretical relevance of social networks. Presentations may, for instance, discuss a particular concept such as tie, social capital, structural equivalence or centrality; they should focus on fresh theoretical or methodological perspectives rather than on the history of concepts or on full-fledged theoretical expositions. We particularly welcome papers that combine the critical and provocative interpretation of conceptual issues with empirical applications.

### Session 3

#### Lack of Resonance? The Concept of Alienation Revisited

Organizer: *Hartmut Rosa*, University of Jena, Email: [Hartmut.Rosa@uni-jena.de](mailto:Hartmut.Rosa@uni-jena.de)

For a long time, the concept of social alienation used to be a key-concept in critical sociology, both for theorists and social philosophers as well as for empirically minded sociologists exploring degrees of alienation from society among, e.g., youth or workers. Today, however, this concept is largely disrespected as a critical tool, mainly for two reasons: First, as Richard Schacht and others have observed, the meaning of alienation was too broad and too vague: One could be alienated from almost anything (nature, work, friends, politics, self etc.), and in the end, alienation was used (or misused) as a mere indicator of something unpleasant. Second, those who tried to give more flesh to the concept appeared to depend on some pre-defined notion of a (human) essence or 'nature' one could be alienated from – and contemporary sociology, obviously, has lost trust in any such notion of human essence.

In this session, therefore, we will scrutinize promising contemporary meanings and uses of alienation for social theory and seek to clarify a 'core-structure' of alienation. Such a structure might become visible if we re-interpret the state of alienation as a distortion in the relationship between self and world. This distortion can be interpreted as a 'lack of resonance', and it can be identified in specifiable relationships (political, personal, religious, aesthetic, intra-personal etc.) or in the overall-structure of the self-world relationship. Thus, we invite contributions from a broad range of disciplines which seek to clarify the concept of alienation. In particular, we would like to bring out the connections between 'alienation' and other diagnoses of potential social pathologies such as reification, instrumentalization, disenchantment etc.

## Session 4

### Slavery: Institutional Continuity or Conceptual Confusion?

Organizer: *David Strecker*, University of Jena, Email: [David.Strecker@uni-jena.de](mailto:David.Strecker@uni-jena.de)

Slavery is commonly held to be an institution of the past. Its moral justification, legal foundations, and even, as some have argued, its economic bases have crumbled. Yet, the claim is advanced that there are more slaves today than at any other time in history; also, slaves are said to be cheaper today than ever before. Do such claims rest on the misleading extension of the concept of slavery to all kinds of demeaning labor relations or does so-called contemporary slavery share its central characteristics with the chattel slavery of former times? Is it legitimate to subsume child soldiers, forced prostitution, plantation slaves and rural and domestic slavery in ancient Rome under one single category? What about bondsmen and serfs? What about cases of contractual labor in which the worker has no effective choice but to accept or to starve? Where should the line be drawn? How much force and coercion does slavery necessarily include? Which kinds of freedom does it allow for?

The session invites papers addressing these issues from different perspectives. Conceptual analyses may be predominantly sociological, anthropological, juridical, or philosophical in nature. Discussions can focus on types of slavery and/or slave societies. Comparisons between these or with other forms of (unfree) labor are welcome, as are considerations on the explanation of the establishment, persistence, organization, and decline of instances of slavery. Further possible topics include discourses on the justification and abolition of slavery as well as on metaphorical usages of the term. This also touches on the question in which contexts the term is avoided and which alternative notions are employed. The session aims to reduce conceptual confusion and is open to all contributions on the study of slavery relevant to this task.

## Session 5

### Global Sociology: Conditions of Possibility

Organizer: *Misha Petrovic*, National University of Singapore, Email:  
socpm@nus.edu.sg

This session will address the possibility of creating a global sociology. Global sociology is seen as a universalizing, inclusive project that attempts to identify and overcome various forms of local biases in problem selection, styles of theorizing and research methods, while at the same time resisting the tendency of fragmentation into 'indigenous' traditions and incompatible, mutually hostile schools of thought. This project does not have ambitions to dominate existing sociological production, theoretically or empirically, but rather to establish itself as a self-consciously global approach to studying (world) society.

Is such a project feasible? If so, what would be the main features of such a global sociology? And what would be the institutional and organizational preconditions for its realization? The session invites contributions that address the desirability and possibility of creating global sociology and try to delineate its emerging forms. Topics might range from the analysis of existing theoretical and methodological traditions to the comparison of various national/regional styles of doing sociology, and from the rise of sociological production in the developing world to the features of the global system of higher education and academic publishing. Contributions that attempt to link the intellectual projects of global sociology to the practical – institutional, professional, organizational – conditions of their realization are especially encouraged.

## Session 6

### Comparative Social Theory The Diversity of Experiences with Modernity and Globalization

Organizer: *Oliver Kozlarek*, Universidad Michoacana, Mexico, Email:  
okozlarek@yahoo.com

Hitherto the debate about 'multiple modernities' has motivated comparison of different institutional patterns as well as comparison of different cultural paths towards modernity. However, relatively little effort has been made in order to understand the multiple 'experiences' that different societies or social groups have accumulated during the processes of modernization and globalization. Perhaps other debates can help to bridge this gap. Under the headline of 'entangled modernities' the idea has been put forward that modernization and globalization have led to the 'entanglement' of histories. But although this general idea has been discussed for years now, very little work has been done on the comparison of these different histories and stories. Postcolonialism, finally, criticizes eurocentrism, and emphasizes that also social thought belongs to certain places. However, it does not tell us much about the kind of thought that is generated at places that do not belong to the global centers of theory production.

The workshop proposes to take a step into this direction. It pretends to compare theories but also non-academic reflections – as can be found for instance in literature – that express the 'experiences' made with and within global modernity in different parts of the world. Special attention shall be given to the question: What kind of concepts of modernity and globalization do these different theories and reflections express? The objective of this workshop is thus to show that modernities are not only different in terms of their institutional reality or in terms of their cultural genealogy. Just as significant are differences in the ways different societies and/or social groups give meaning to 'modernity' and 'globalization'.

Papers are welcome that discuss theories and non-academic reflections about modernization(s) and globalization(s) from different parts of the world – especially from what has been called the 'periphery'.

## Session 7

### Translation and the Problem of (Methodological) Difference

Organizer: *Gurminder K. Bhambra*, University of Warwick, UK, Email:

G.K.Bhambra@warwick.ac.uk

This session will address a specific research problem – that of global interconnections – in light of postcolonial critiques of the ‘Eurocentrism’ of dominant approaches. It does so in the context of specific epistemological and methodological challenges associated with interdisciplinary research undertaken in an international and cross-cultural context. Indeed, these substantive and methodological issues can be seen as integrally related. For example, while the focus of social science research has historically been delimited by national boundaries, it is now increasingly international and cross-cultural. This is, in part, as a consequence of increasing recognition that the issues that affect us within national communities are international in their nature and source. Further, such issues are rarely of concern simply to one discipline and are taken up within different disciplines, but often without common dialogue across the boundaries of those disciplines. There is frequently no address of the unique methodological issues raised by interdisciplinary research, nor reflection on the challenges of building knowledge systematically across disciplinary boundaries.

This session will address fundamental questions of interdisciplinarity in the context of thinking and rethinking globalisation and the social scientific categories it produces and which also produce it as an object of research. If general approaches to interdisciplinarity seem to run into the problem of incommensurability, the approach of this session would be to introduce incommensurability in terms of cross-cultural (and other) forms of location. However, *it would invert this problem and say that incommensurability is not a problem for interdisciplinarity, but it is its condition*. Difference is integral to learning; it is only if the ‘other’ has something different to offer that learning from others could be possible. It is moreover only if that difference made a difference to our previous understandings that we could say that we have learnt from another. In this context, interdisciplinarity is approached as *a form of translation across differences*. A ‘mutual’ language evolves in the process of translation, but this language will not be a universalistic set of categories (as analytic approaches to interdisciplinarity propose), or a common agreed problem (as applied interdisciplinarity proposes), it will be closer to what has been called a form of ‘pidgin’ alongside the familiar languages of disciplines and interacting with them.

## Session 8

### Concept Formation and Theory Building: Drawing upon Indigenous Intellectual Traditions

Organizers: *Syed Farid Alatas*, National University of Singapore, Email: [alatas@nus.edu.sg](mailto:alatas@nus.edu.sg) & *Ishwar Modi*, India International Institute of Social Sciences, Email: [iiiss2005modi@yahoo.co.in](mailto:iiiss2005modi@yahoo.co.in)

Sociology and the other social sciences may be of recent origin, comparatively speaking, but understanding the social reality has been an old vocation of all indigenous intellectual traditions both in the so-called Orient as well as the West. Any social reality or a social phenomenon is a complex one. Viewed from different perspectives, different aspects of the same reality may come to fore.

For several decades sociologists throughout Asia have been claiming that theories and concepts developed in Europe and North America are often less relevant or irrelevant when applied to Asian contexts. This had prompted many to call for alternative sociologies in the form of indigenization, decolonization, nationalization, or an autonomous social science tradition in Asian academia. While these calls have frequently been heard, less common is the actual practice of alternative theorizing or conceptualization. Non-Western intellectual traditions have produced many thinkers who significantly contributed to understanding society in their respective cultures. Their writings are to be considered as sources of concepts and theories for the social sciences.

Following are some examples. There is Fe Hsiao-t'ung's concept of the "gradated network" which he developed to explain the prevalence of selfishness among peasants in pre-revolutionary China. There is also the Korean concept of *min-joong*, a term that bears some resemblance to the Gramscian idea of *subaltern*. Other examples of deriving theories from local traditions come from Asian communication studies.

The purpose of this session is to document and critically assess such examples of alternative concept formation and theory building in different parts of Asia. Asia is defined as consisting of Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia.

## Session 9

### Concept Formation in Asian Sociologies

Organizers: *Yoshimichi Sato*, Tohoku University, Japan, Email: ysato@sal.tohoku.ac.jp & *Syed Farid Alatas*, National University of Singapore, Email: alatas@nus.edu.sg

Most of the sociological concepts were invented by Western sociologists. This puts Asian sociologists in a difficult situation. If they can properly describe and explain local social phenomena in their societies by the Western-born concepts, that is fine. However, if they find contradictions between the local phenomena and the Western-born concepts, they have three alternatives. First, they would slightly modify the concepts so that they can describe and explain the phenomena by the modified ones. Second, they would add new assumptions to the concepts keeping the core of the concepts intact. Third, they would invent new concepts that are different from the Western-born concepts. Asian sociologists, under the same pressure to publish as their Western counterparts have on them, tend to choose the first or second alternative. This would prevent concept formation in Asian sociologies.

Then what if Asian sociologists choose the third alternative? If they invent *thin* concepts—concepts not loaded with local meanings, culture, and history—, the concepts would be acceptable to their Western counterparts. However, if they create *thick* concepts—concepts loaded with localities—, they would not quickly diffuse among the Western sociologists. This is because *thick* concepts put heavier cognitive burdens on their receivers than *thin* concepts do. However, empirically, it seems that Asian sociologists tend to emphasize peculiarity and particularity of their societies and, therefore, to create *thick* concepts. For example, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean scholars have been looking at indigenous concepts such as *bao* (Chin. reciprocity), *guanxi* (Chin. interrelation), *amae* (Jap. message expanding and message accepting needs), and *uye-ri* (Kor. complementary and obligatory reciprocity). If we go to West Asia, some Arab scholars have been looking at Ibn Khaldun's concept of *asabiyya* as a means to discuss state formation and stability in certain countries.

In sum, the difficult situation Asian sociologists face is twofold. On the supply side of sociological concepts, they tend not to create new concepts thanks to the pressure to publish on them. On the demand side, new *thick* concepts they create would not easily diffuse among their Western counterparts. With this theoretical background, this session invites papers that study concept formation in Asian sociologies. In particular, papers that deal with concrete concepts such as social capital, religion, and justice are welcome.

## **Composition of the Board for the Period 2006-2010**

### **President:**

Volker H. Schmidt  
Department of Sociology  
National University of Singapore  
11 Arts Link  
Singapore 117570  
Email: socvhs@edu.nus.sg

### **Vice-President:**

Hartmut Rosa  
Department of Sociology  
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena  
Postfach  
07737 Jena  
Germany  
Email: Hartmut.Rosa@uni-jena.de

### **Secretary:**

David Strecker  
Department of Sociology  
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena  
Postfach  
07737 Jena  
Germany  
Email: David.Strecker@uni-jena.de

### **Board member without specific function:**

Boris Holzer  
Sociology Seminar  
University of Lucerne  
Kasernenplatz 3  
Postfach 7455  
6000 Lucerne 7  
Switzerland  
Email: boris.holzer@unilu.ch