

International Sociological Association
RC 20
Comparative Sociology

June 2013 Newsletter

Strasbourg: 28 June, 2013

Dear colleagues,

You will find hereunder the list of the RC 20 sessions intended for the next World Congress - to be held in Japan next year. I would like to thank those of you who have made interesting propositions at this stage and remind everyone that the deadline to submit abstracts is September 30, 2013!

Please go to: <https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2014/cfp.cgi>

Hoping that many of you will be willing to go to Yokohama, I wish you all a pleasant summer.

Jean-Pascal Daloz
RC 20 Chair

XVIII World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama (13-19 July 2014)

Proposed sessions

You may also go at:

<http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2014/rc/rc.php?n=RC20>

1/ Sociological Schools of Thought and Comparative Analysis

(organiser: Jean-Pascal DALOZ, CNRS/SAGE University of Strasbourg, France)

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The aim of this session is to discuss comparative analysis in relation to the positions taken by different schools of thought. We know that each social theoretician must have a starting point from somewhere and, in this respect, an awareness of the field experiences that have most

influenced their scholarly work is always instructive. Quite often, however, there is clearly a tendency to rely on the material from the monographic publications which have given these sociologists prominence. In reaction to this, the task of the comparativist is to caution against dogmatic one-sidedness and the risk of undue extrapolation. Papers synthesising the point of view of a particular (classical or more recent) theoretical tradition or, on the contrary, insist on the limits of certain traditions from a comparative perspective would be most welcome.

2 Comparative Sociology: Present Status and Future Directions

(organiser: Masamichi SASAKI, Chuo University, Japan)

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Sociology's founding fathers were all comparative researchers, firmly committed to the comparative method, whether studying roles, institutions, societies, nations, cultures, groups, or organizations. As the major aim of comparative sociology is to identify similarities and differences between social entities, this session seeks to compare and contrast nations, cultures, societies, and institutions, as well as develop concepts and generalizations based upon identified similarities and differences among the social entities being compared, especially in their characteristic ways of thinking and acting, in their characteristic attitudes, values and ideologies, and in the intrinsic elements of their social structures, which in turn all serve as a means to enhance understanding and awareness of other social entities. While the purposes of comparative sociology are many, one key task is to support and contribute to theory formation. While theoretical frameworks drive the construction of comparative research endeavors, the results of such research often drive theory re-formation. Another key task is to support policymaking, and yet another is to ascertain whether the same dimension of a given concept (e.g., religious commitment) can be used as a common social indicator. Does a given concept generalize to all nations (or other social entities)? As the world becomes ever more globalized, the need for such understanding should be clear: national policies need to consider the needs of all global partners. Why are nations different on some characteristic parameters, while they are the same on others? The same question can be asked of other sets of socio-cultural groupings, both across regional boundaries and within national or ethnic boundaries.

3/ Rethinking Comparison in a Global Age: Methodological Issues

(organisers: Vincenzo CICCHELLI, University of Paris Descartes & Sylvie OCTOBRE, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, France)

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Comparative research is as old as the discipline of sociology itself. We still witness works that seem to assume that social phenomena are nationally determined, culturally homogenous and relatively stable in the countries being compared. We know that the current process of globalisation definitely challenges such a vision. For we social scientists, however, the question also arises to what extent our comparative methods should be revised accordingly.

This session looks for papers dealing with methodological issues raised by the challenge of globalisation. Approaches may be theoretical (e.g. on the limits of grand theories with universalistic ambitions) as well as empirical (e.g. case studies emphasising the complexities of interactions between societies and how this questions the validity of consecrated methods).

4/ Changing Global Values

(organisers: Marita CARBALLO, Catholic University of Argentina and Frederick C. TURNER, University of Connecticut, USA)

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Papers should be based on survey data on values, either in one nation or among several nations. The emphasis should be on how values have changed over the past decade and what the implications of these changes in values may be.

5/ Culture and the Media in a Long-Term Perspective

(organisers: Robert van KRIEKEN, University of Sydney, Australia & Stephen VERTIGANS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK)

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Cultural forms of behaviour, glorification of celebrity and standards of media reporting are increasingly of cause for political and civil concern. Conversely apologists for the freedom of the press are often the most fervent opponents to shifting forms of cultural and sexual expression. In this session emergent facets of cultural norms and values and the evolution or regression of media reporting are explored through historical developments. Part of the session will be allocated to analysis of the apparent contradictions between demands for personal freedom and attempts to restrain the cultural opportunities of others.

6/ The Rise of Top Incomes: Comparative Perspectives

(organiser: David WEAKLIEM, University of Connecticut, USA)

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In the past few decades, income inequality - specifically, the concentration of income at the top - has grown in many, although not all, advanced capitalist nations. The proposed session would include papers about the causes and consequences of this development. Both empirical and theoretical papers would be welcome.

7/ Round Table: Rethinking Social Distinction?

(organiser: Jean-Pascal DALOZ, CNRS/SAGE University of Strasbourg, France)

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The analysis of social distinction cannot indefinitely remain confined to logics of reasoning that are markedly ethnocentric. To understand 21st-century Dubai, China, Russia, or settings of the past, we need to do more than just apply the consecrated schemes of Veblen or Bourdieu. Further to the publication of *The Sociology of Elite Distinction* (2010) and *Rethinking Social Distinction* (2013)

which aim to provide new foundations for the comparative study of this important subject, Jean-Pascal Daloz would like to invite commentators willing to discuss his challenging theoretical, epistemological and methodological views.

8/9 Trust: Comparative Perspectives (2 sessions)

(organiser: Masamichi SASAKI, Chuo University, Japan)

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No one denies the importance of trust in social relationships. Many scholars view trust as extraordinarily important because of its influence on interpersonal and group relationships. Our economic system is in many ways entirely dependent upon trust because if there were no trust there would be no economic transactions. Thus trust has profound implications for interpersonal and social cooperation. Without trust, societies really could not exist. As we all know, social systems are becoming increasingly complex and confounded, meaning that trust plays an ever-increasingly important role. Trust in interpersonal and social cooperation implies commitment, which is intimately tied to obligation, which brings into play basic norms and values at individual and group levels. Norms and values speak to expectations.

Expectations are implicit in trust because past and present individual and social behaviors dictate how future actions will unfold. Trust becomes a coping mechanism for societal complexity as it helps to overcome the accompanying uncertainty characteristic of a mushrooming globalized social system. This session will focus on cross-national perspectives of social trust from micro to macro levels of analysis.

10/ Civilising and Decivilising Processes in the Financial Crisis

(organisers: Robert van KRIEKEN, University of Sydney, Australia & Stephen VERTIGANS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK)

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Although periods of recession tend to be mostly associated with economic downturns, their legacies extend way beyond financial impacts. Deep and global recessions contribute to long term shifts in civilising and decivilising processes as access to resources narrows, parameters of the established and outsiders shift, tensions that financial upturns help to contain become reignited and forms of cultural and political expression become more imaginative and challenging. Therefore this session will explore some of the changing processes which the financial crisis has instigated and will identify local, national and global consequences.

11/ Environmental and Energy Shifts in Time and Place

(organisers: Robert van KRIEKEN, University of Sydney, Australia & Stephen VERTIGANS, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK)

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Session will explore how perceptions of the environment and energy have shifted and the concomitant impact on ways of thinking and behaving across different societies. Papers on a range of issues are invited, including global warming, 'peak oil', carbon footprints, risk and desertification that discuss state, NGO, TNCs, civilian and international agency actions and reactions. Contributors could examine what the fundamental arguments mean in terms of decivilising and civilising processes and the consequences for longer-term forms of human interrelationships.

12/ Current Research in Comparative Sociology (I)

(organiser: Hanno SCHOLTZ, University of Fribourg, Switzerland)

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This session welcomes original papers in the field of Comparative Sociology.

13/ Current Research in Comparative Sociology (II)

(organiser: Frederick C. TURNER, University of Connecticut, USA)

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This session welcomes original papers in the field of Comparative Sociology.

14/ Expatriates: Comparative Perspectives

(organiser: Jean-Pascal DALOZ, CNRS/SAGE University of Strasbourg, France)

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There are many social scientists to convey a deductive vision in terms of supranational elites exceeding parochial solidarities whereas the bulk of the people is understood as being lured by local identifications. Despite the picture, readily conjured up in the literature on 'expatriates', of transnational groups endowed with a cosmopolitan culture overriding all parochial differences, and ostensibly at ease everywhere, the question arises to what extent

'expatriates' with various national background differ in terms of attitudes. This session aims at gathering sociologists with expertise on such populations with a view to generate discussions of a comparative nature.

15/ **Business meeting**

16/ RC04/RC20 Joint Session

The Comparative Sociology of Examinations

(organisers: Fumiya ONAKA, Japan Women's University & Shinichi AIZAWA, Chukyo University, Japan).

Examinations have been functioning as a crucial mechanism for producing, reproducing and legitimizing *inequalities*. From another viewpoint, however, they have also constituted a tool for social promotion. It is important to analyze carefully the way they work in order to understand inequalities in present-day societies. Obviously enough, modes of examination differ greatly from one society to the next (in Japan we used to talk of 'examination hell'). What we would like to encourage is a 'Comparative Sociology of examinations'. This, in some way, can equally be seen as a comparative analysis of our discipline because the topic can be treated in a very different way by various schools of thought (e.g. Marxian theories of inequality, Durkheimian theories of socialization, Weberian theories of modernization, and Eliasian theories of civilization). We welcome case studies that would contribute to the international comparison of examinations.

Symposium on Sociological Schools of thought and Comparative Analysis

Further to my suggestions made in the previous newsletters (NB: there are all available on our website), I am happy to confirm that the Symposium on 'Sociological Schools of Thought and Comparative Analysis' will be taking place in Strasbourg in March 2014. Let me express my thanks to those of our colleagues who accepted to participate in this event co-organised by the RC. We are still looking for someone who could discuss the Weberian tradition. Anyone interested can write to me at the following address. (As you can see, we have also planned a session in Yokohama on this topic).

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Recent and forthcoming publications by RC 20 members (alphabetic order)

Mahmoud DHAOUADI, *Cultural Sociology within Innovative Treatise: Islamic Insights on Human Symbols* University Press of America, Lanham: September 2013.

Fumiya ONAKA (ed.) “Focus II : Aspects of Process Theories and Process-Oriented Methodologies in Historical and Comparative Sociology”, *Historical Social Research*, 38 (2): 2013, pp.159-267, including one introduction by the editor and one article entitled: “Relating Socio-Cultural Network Concepts to Process-Oriented Methodology”.

Arpad SZAKOLCZAI (2013), *Comedy and the Public Sphere: The Re-birth of Theatre as Comedy and the Genealogy of the Modern Public Arena*, London: Routledge.

Cas WOUTERS (2013), “‘No sex under my roof’: Teenage sexuality in the USA and in the Netherlands since the 1880s”. *Política y Sociedad*, Vol.50 Núm 2, pp. 421-452.

Abstract

The oneliner ‘No sex under my roof’ is used to reinforce the rule of premarital abstinence of sexuality until teenage children marry or move from home. In the USA, most parents still stick to this norm, whereas in the Netherlands since the late 1960s, a new rule developed, allowing teenage children to have sex, provided they ‘feel strongly for each other’ and feel ‘ready’ for it. This paper describes and compares developments in the USA and in the Netherlands since the 1880s, focusing on the social regulation of teenage sexuality, and based mainly upon such sources as reference books and sexology studies. The paper proposes an explanation of the two trajectories from national differences in the functioning of good societies, particularly in the regulation of social competition and social mobility. The rise in the USA of a highly competitive dating system and a complicated sexual morality indicates a smaller decline of power differences between classes, genders and generations, which partly explains the persistence of the old rule. Further explanation is found in America’s lower level of social integration and more open competition between various centres of power and good societies. The build up to the rise of a new rule among Dutch parents was an informalization of ‘getting engaged’, the diffusion of *verkering* (going steady) and of parental policies to stay ‘in the scene’, indicating higher levels of social integration and larger declines of power differences between classes, genders and generations. Yet, the long preservation of a homogeneous good society created a widening gap between a facade of decency and backstage realities. When this gap was washed away in the 1960s Expressive and Sexual Revolutions, it also washed away the old rule, and increasing numbers of parents allowed their teenagers openly to have sex, even at home..

Key words: teenage sexuality, status competition, USA, Netherlands, informalization

Cas WOUTERS (2013), ‘Discussing Civilisation and Informalisation: Criteriology’, *Política y Sociedad*, Vol.50 Núm. 2, pp. 553-579

Abstract

Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes has been received only marginally in the USA, one of the obstacles being the absence of figurational or process studies of American society. In the first decade of this century this situation was changed by the publication of Stephen Mennell's *The American Civilizing Process* (2007) and Cas Wouters' *Sex and Manners* (2004) and *Informalization* (2007). By 2012, Randall Collins had reviewed the first and the third books in two essays (2009, 2011).

His claims and criticism of civilising and informalisation theory are discussed in this paper by placing them in the context of the reception history of Elias's work since the 1960s, when a first round of discussion centred on criteria to be used for determining the direction of civilising processes. A second round was in the 1990s, and in this paper we contribute to a new round by presenting a summary of earlier critical discussions in an attempt to establish a more solid and subtler body of criteria for studying civilising processes. We use this in critically discussing Collins's contributions, linking them to symbolic interactionism, American National Ideology, and blind spots in American sociology.

Keywords: civilising processes; informalisation; Norbert Elias; Randall Collins; American National Ideology; American sociology