



To the Members
of the ISA Research Committee 54
“THE BODY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
Newsletter December 2013

EMBODIMENT IS CULTURE
“Let’s Re-invent an Embodied Sociology”

Rome, 2014-1-18

Dear Colleagues,

first of all, a big thanks to the ISA President, Professor Michael Burawoy, to the ISA Vice-President, Research, Professor Margaret Abraham, to the ISA Executive Secretary, Doctor Izabela Barlinska, to the Secretariat Staff and, finally, last but not least, to the ISACONFEX [isaconf@confex.com].

Thanks to these Friends, our presence at the XVIII World Congress of Sociology [Yokohama, Japan, 13-19 July] has been realized, at least, until the “fatal date” of next April 10th.

It seems most opportune, therefore, to synthesize, during this “interval”, the last year’s activities of our RC 54 in the aim of sketching up our “new deal” after the World Congress of Sociology as follows:

1. *The Past*

In last July 2013, we have published the collective book *Body&Time: Bodily Rhythms and Social Synchronism in the Digital Media Society* [Eds. Bianca Maria Pirani, Thomas S. Smith, 2013: New Castle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing].

Thanks to the efforts of the Authors, this book brings together a unique collection of readings which focus on the ways in which biologically experienced time in a technologically shrinking world interacts with cultural traditions, with social systems, social innovations, new technologies, embodied memory, human dyadic and community bonds. The social and behavioral sciences, cautious about traditional academic disciplinary boundaries, have tended to label and shelve all these issues under the heading of postmodernity. By a truly creative approach to the analysis of time, this book introduces the topic “Embodiment” as “Embodied Methodology”, vided to draw up a dynamic conception of culture taking into account the mutual cultural adaptation that actually takes place in multicultural societies over time.

2. *The Present*

The call for abstracts at the XVIII World Congress has produced at least 103 abstracts. All the arrived abstracts have been accepted, apart from the eight that have been rejected by the Organizers of the current Session 3, “Facing Unequal Bodies. On the Construction of Social Inequality in the Body”.

I will clearly explain this overwhelming acceptance, except the quoted exclusion.

Embodiment is, in Western Culture – above all in sociology – the critical zone of social interaction. For the body has been always there and will always be. However, a clear neglect of the real body can be seen everywhere: in therapeutic action, food intake, health care, care for the youngsters (no body but instead kids buried in verbal admonitions and verbose action with no focus whatsoever on bodily practices).

Culture is at play whenever people act together. Nevertheless, the notion of “culture” itself is often applied so thoughtlessly that is not very helpful in understanding why and how people do what they do, within a community of others who perform things in similar manner. Consequently, embodiment has become the crossroad of the core dichotomies of man/woman, public/private, and nature/culture, as the literature on the body has developed in a largely theoretical vein, largely neglecting the experimental and the empirical. The high level of conflictuality of the topic *per se* is responsible, therefore, for the equivalent level of desynchronization among actors, as characterized by the first steps of our 16 Sessions. The remarkable number of the abstracts that have been sent in from everywhere around the world indicates, by the way, a strong will to find new solutions to the named conflictuality. This has been rewarded by an almost full acceptance of the abstracts [both, oral or distributes], that are of an overall good quality.

Getting to the point, the aim of the RC54 at the XVIII World Congress of Sociology will be to open new paths toward a *Global Project on Embodiment*.

A big welcome, finally, to all the “bold” social students – both old and new ones – the full engagement of which has built the “embodied result” that is – up to the current moment – the RC54 Programme. Thank you very much to everybody.

3. *The “New Deal”: Embodiment: the Vector of Social Equilibrium*

The next focus of RC54 will be on the best practices on cultural diversity in the domain of the sociological research as well as in social work, healthcare, wellness, sexual orientation, gender issues, ethnicity and all intercultural trainings.

What the sciences of brain, mind, affect, and cognition make clear is that the social sciences have to deal with how becoming part of a modern world works, how it operates on the plane of everyday experience. It is clear that it involves more than just propositions and texts. It involves practices and training. Insights in every automaticities, the cognitive unconscious, affect and cognition what group life entails and how the styling of behavior proceeds is indispensable for the creation of a world in which differences do not produce turmoil, aggression and violence. In order to create bonds between different groups of people also at the level of existing nations, we have to understand how the incorporation of individuals in groups proceeds on the basis of embodied practices.

Thus, “embodiment” is a keyword for intercultural competence and communication, which denotes the ability – and willingness – to enhance human contact and interaction across the diversity of traditions, experiences, values and cultural identities. This approach will guide our methodology on our next *Global Project on Embodiment* to which each of you is warmly invited to participate.

Warm regards

Bianca Maria Pirani

Program Coordinator and President of the RC54 “The Body in the Social Sciences”