



Historical  
Sociology

# NEWSLETTER

Summer 2019

## Welcome!

Welcome to our Summer 2019 newsletter! The most pressing news is the imminent deadline for submitting abstracts to our RC56 sessions at the ISA Forum of Sociology at Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14–18 July 2020. The call for abstracts closes on 30 September 2019. The session titles are detailed below, and abstracts can be submitted online:

<https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/forum2020/webprogrampreliminary/Symposium622.html>

The newsletter also contains news of recent publications of RC56 members, online resources, as well as other news and events of note.

# IV ISA Forum of Sociology

Porto Alegre, Brazil • July 14-18, 2020 • Events Center PUCRS



**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**  
**April 25 – September 30, 2019**



[www.isa-sociology.org](http://www.isa-sociology.org)

## RC56 Sessions

Program Coordinators: Manuela BOATCA (University of Freiburg, Germany) and Paddy DOLAN (Technological University Dublin, Ireland)

### **Authors Meet Critics: National Habitus Revisited**

Session Organizers: Dieter REICHER and Marta BUCHOLC

The session deals with a special issue of *Historical Social Research* entitled “Emotion, Authority and National Character: Historical–Processual Perspectives” which will be published at the end of 2019. Authors will have the opportunity to discuss their contributions to the special issue.

### **Critical Sociology for the Twenty-First Century**

Session Organizers: Fatma GOCEK

The focus will be on developing a critical approach to sociological theory and practice by merging the standpoints of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and coloniality.

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## **De-Linking – a Counterstrategy to De-Westernization, De-Colonization, De-Globalization? (with RC05)**

Session Organizer: Manuela BOATCA and Vilna BASHI TREITLER

Delinking as a counterstrategy in a structurally unequal world has featured prominently in different social science approaches to radical emancipatory politics, from dependency theory and world-systems analysis to decolonial thought. Delinking has been commonly envisaged as a strategy in the fight for equality and recognition of colonized and marginalized (groups of) people; however, the question remains how these concepts take shape and how they can be implemented in critical sociological thought. At the same time, critics point to the fact that the result of core and semi-peripheral states' delinking, de-westernizing, or deglobalizing has brought about growing populism, a retreat into nationalism, and a revival of racist, xenophobic, and anti-gender tactics, as current politics in the USA, UK, Brazil, Hungary or India vividly illustrate.

In this panel we scrutinize these (causal) connections and invite papers that take critical stock of these developments in both the short and the long term.

## **Decolonizing Social Science Methodology – Overcoming Positivism and Constructivism (with RC33, host)**

Session Organizers: Nina BAUR, Manuela BOATCA, Fraya FREHSE and Johanna HOERNING

Epistemological approaches in the tradition of, for example, constructivism, relativism, postmodernism or postcolonialism stress that empirical findings are strongly influenced both by the researcher's social position and positioning in the world- system and by the social organization of doing science. The sociology of science has provided strong empirical evidence for this position. This means that, if researchers find (dis)similarities between different social contexts, it is not clear, if these (dis)similarities result from actual substantial differences or rather from diverging theoretical perspectives, research styles, ways of doing methods or different reactions of the field to social science research.

This session aims at addressing the underlying deeper epistemological and methodological issues which remain mainly unresolved: how to overcome the divide between positivism and constructivism, address historical and present power relations and truly decolonize social science methodology? We invite papers that deal with these methodological questions stemming both from theoretical and empirical considerations.

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## **Historical Sociology – Biographical Research – Multigenerational Research**

Session Organizers: Hendrik HINRICHSSEN and Gabriele ROSENTHAL

In this session we will look at the parallels and diverse links between biographical research and historical sociology. It will provide a forum for discussing the advantages, chances and limitations of combining biographical research, including its continuous trend towards multigenerational studies, with historical sociology, for example with figurational sociology. While there may be limitations with regard to capturing extremely extended long-term processes, multigenerational research offers benefits for the reconstruction of so-called micro or meso processes, or so-called bottom-up processes of social change. In other words, multigenerational biographical research looks at the intertwining of changes at various levels (and/or timescales) of observation, and tries to reconstruct "subjective" experiences in the past, especially the experiences and perspectives of outsiders, in the sense proposed by Elias, which are not part of the hegemonic discourses.

For this session we invite papers that aim at analysing long-term *social processes* and making a thorough reconstruction of *socio-historical and cultural contexts* as a part of their method of analysis.

## **Knowledge, Inequality, and the "Paradox" of Working-Class Support for Exclusionary Political Projects**

Session Organizer: Jose Esteban CASTRO and Edna MULERAS

There is growing support for right-wing, even extreme neo-fascist projects among fractions of the urban and rural working classes, broadly speaking, in traditionally liberal democracies, in the US, Europe, Latin America, etc., as in Argentina (2016), Brazil (2018), Chile (2018) and Colombia (2018). Although support for right-wing, exclusionary projects by the working classes is not new, the fact that this happens in countries where progressive political projects reduced extreme poverty, expanded access to essential services, and strengthened citizenship rights, as in South America between 2003 and 2015 invites further reflection. What are the factors and processes that may help to better understand the cultural, emotional, and cognitive aspects underpinning the moral judgements, empirical evaluations, and political decisions characterizing the support for exclusionary political projects among social sectors objectively threatened by them? What is the level of awareness of such contradictions among these sectors? What meanings they associate with the ideals of "equality", "social justice", and "inclusion"? Do they object the existence of social inequalities or believe that certain inequalities are acceptable? Are "equality", "inclusion", and "justice" relevant political objectives for these sectors? What are the conditions, factors and processes relevant for understanding the emergence of highly-unequal and undemocratic social orders? How can we involve these sectors in the coproduction of this understanding? The proposal draws from the works of Norbert Elias, Karl Marx, Max Weber on the long-term development of social orders, and Jean Piaget's

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contributions on the development of “consciousness” and “moral judgements”. The session welcomes papers from all theoretical traditions.

### **Law and Constitutions in the Civilizing Process(es): Reassessing the Multiple Evolutions of Legal Fields in Light of Eliasian Theory**

Session Organizer: Christophe MAJASTRE, Hugo CANIHAC and Marta BUCHOLC

The topics of law, legal orders and rights, on the one hand, and civilization on the other have been variously approached by the sociological and historical literatures. The differences between these approaches partly reflect the various understandings of the term “civilization” itself. Recently, some authors (Moyn, 2012; Koskenniemi, 2002) made the point that the increasing prominence of “rights” in national and international politics since the 19th century is tightly connected to the promotion of a Western definition of civilization. Accordingly, phenomena such as the emergence of Human Rights, European Law, as well as processes of constitutionalization (both at the national and transnational levels) should be understood as by-products of a Western ideological project.

This latter approach stands at odds with an understanding of “civilization” as the result of an unplanned process, as defined in the works of Elias. Research that relies on this theoretical approach, however, has so far dedicated very little attention to “the law”, especially in its political dimension (Bucholc, Van Krieken 2018). The session aims at going beyond the mutual ignorance between these two approaches: how can we integrate “law” to the sociological research on the civilizing processes? The session is open to researchers dealing with law, lawyers and legal discourse generally, in a socio-historical perspective.

### **Memory of Migrations and Diasporas**

Session Organizer: Ilan LEW and Deniz Günce DEMIRHISAR

Even though migrations are widely studied by sociologists, the temporality of the studies often depend on current public debates such as integration, while they are solicited by policy makers' and research funds' agenda. In this session, we will try to go beyond presentism, while considering the “common” feeling of belonging to foreign countries and continents, as well as to diasporic communities. We would like to question the changing collective representations of the origins, the continuities and ruptures in the way memories of the migration shape subjectivities, cultural practices and aspirations for future, after one or several generations.

This session invites researchers to use conceptual tools of memory studies in order to discuss migrations and diasporic experiences over the long term.

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### **Open Session: Historical Sociology**

Session Organizer: Paddy DOLAN

The open session is at the same time an open invitation for papers with a historical sociology bent that do not fit the thematic focus of the other sessions of RC56, but nevertheless deal with topics of interest to historical sociologists or such that seldom find their way into historical sociological debates.

### **RC56 Poster Session**

Session Organizer: Paddy DOLAN

### **Remembering of What Happened to My (Fore-)Father or Mother. Family Memories of Mass Violence and Slavery**

Session Organizer: Ilan LEW and Deniz Günce DEMIRHISAR

This session invites researchers from a wide range of fields and geographical areas to highlight and discuss the remaining presence of History in family memories and the way it still affects further generations. The focus of the study can also be broadened to local communities' memories, that are connected to a neighborhood (or topos), which contributes the form of remembrance, by contrast with a large-scale and more homogeneous collective memory of events. Jan Assman (1992) considers social memory as "the connective structure of societies". As such, memory is a privileged object for historical sociology. And social memory is elaborated at many different levels, from the family to the State.

### **Revisiting Sociological Research and Monograph in the Past**

Session Organizer: Chie SAKAI

This session examines how we use historical sociological research to understand social change in the past and the authors' perspectives on understanding realities of their own. We also analyze the sociological methodology of the past.

### **Social Progress: Present Trends and Future Scenarios (with RC07, host)**

Session Organizers: Elisa REIS

In recent decades, a gloomy mood seems to discredit the notion of "social progress", be it automatic or contingent. Concerns about the future mount, involving ethical and environmental problems as well as cultural, social and security-related issues. Questions have been raised about the future of democracy as rightwing politics, financialization, neo-nationalism and neo-populism gain momentum. The perception of the global economy as governable is weakening, and, the economic and social performance of the world

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economy spread doubts about the future of capitalism. Swimming against these currents, one emerging discourse has reintroduced the classic social science issue of social progress. A handful of publications critically examine what have been the positive gains humankind experienced say since the 1950s, looking at persisting problems and mounting risks.

The session invites papers on the meaning of social progress, its dimensions and indicators, criticisms of the concept and its measurements, assessments of current trends and projections for the future, major economic and social challenges in general terms or with regards to specific contexts.

### **Unequal Democracies and Socio-Ecological Orders**

Session Organizer: Jose Esteban CASTRO and Sérgio PORTELLA

The second decade of the 21st Century is marked by unprecedented structural inequalities and the emergence of extreme right-wing, exclusionary political projects, even in the traditionally liberal Western democracies. In this context, developing an enhanced understanding of the complex, multidimensional and long-term development of socio-ecological inequalities, broadly understood as the unequal access to common goods and services and also the unequal impacts of environmental hazards and threats on human wellbeing and life more generally, has increasing centrality. A crucial task for social scientists is examining the mechanisms and factors that may help in making observable the interweaving of social – broadly speaking to include cultural, economic, political, and other dimensions – and ecological processes in the production and reproduction of structural, intersected -class, gender, ethnic, etc. – inequalities, and in the emergence and consolidation of social orders.

### **Women's Careers and the Process of Civilization (with RC20, host, RC32 & RC33)**

Session Organizers: Akiko NAGAI and Fumiya ONAKA

This joint session examines gender inequality by suggesting an approach from the viewpoint of the process of civilization. Among various lines of inquiry in comparative and historical sociology, this viewpoint – be that of Elias or not – is essential. Although women's issues have not been centered in the employment of this perspective, its key terms such as violence, manners, established-outsiders relations, power relations, network, location, system of relationships, environmental challenges, and ungendering are both significant and effective in analyzing career-based gender inequalities. The questions could facilitate a research path to address these issues: How will the process of civilization transform gender inequality in the future? How can present gender equality be understood in the process of civilization? How has the process of civilization invented gender inequality in the past? Research responding to these questions will highlight methods by which we can overcome current obstacles of inequality.

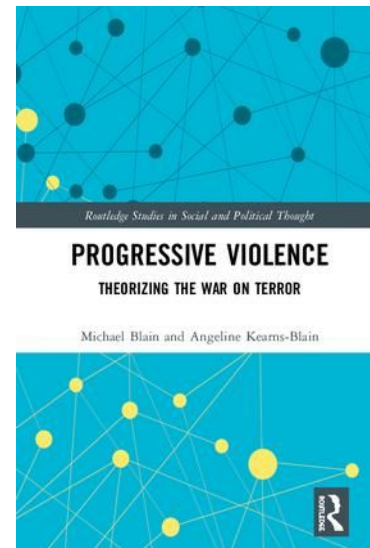
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## Recent publications by RC56 members

### Books

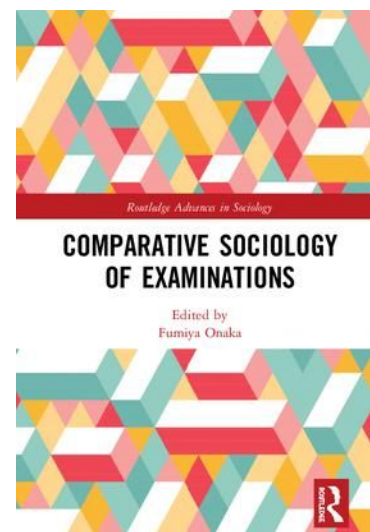
Blain, Michael and Kearns-Blain, Angeline Blain (2018) [\*Progressive Violence: Theorizing the War on Terror\*](#). New York: Routledge.

This book examines the role of collective violence in the achievement of solidarity, shedding light on the difficulty faced by sociology in theorizing violence and warfare as a result of the discipline's tendency to idealize society in an attempt to legitimize the idea of progressive social change. Using the global War on Terror as a focal point, the authors develop this argument through the related issues of power, knowledge, and ethics, explaining the War on Terror in terms of the Anglo-American tradition of imperial power and domination. Exploring the victimage rituals through which society is brought together in the ritual domination and destruction of a constructed "villain," *Progressive Violence: Theorizing the War on Terror* also considers the price of the liberal moral values in terms of which the global war on terror is frequently justified, and the volume of "progressive violence" involved in advancing the cause of freedom. The authors use this case to theorize the general role of vicarious victimage ritual in the social genesis of political violence and sadism, and its calculated use by politicians to achieve their imperial aims. As such, it will appeal to scholars of sociology and social theory with interests in terrorism, violence, and geopolitics.



Onaka, Fumiya (ed) (2017) [\*Comparative Sociology of Examinations\*](#). Routledge.

Contemporary societies are constructed, constricted, and constrained by various series of examinations. Governments of both Western and non-Western countries tend to conduct detailed, multi-layered and continuous systems of tests or examinations. International tests, such as PISA and TIMSS, have also been introduced to compare the relative performances of learners within diverse educational institutions across different countries. Examinations therefore provide a methodological pivot for comparing a range of societies. They enable us to contrast the West and the East; the North and the South; tribal and mass society; ancient and postmodern civilization; and so on.





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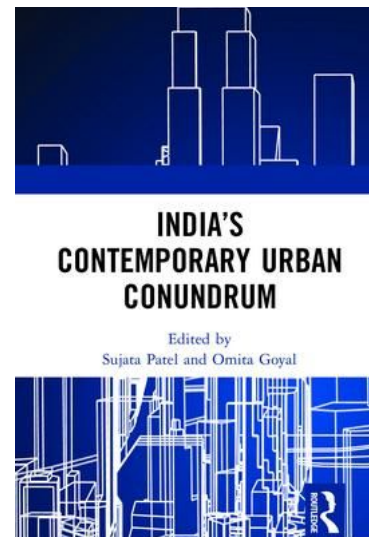
Comparing parallel societies from across Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and North America, this book proposes fundamental transitions in sociological research from system to process and from communication to composition through intensive studies on examinations. It uses ethnographies, interviews, questionnaires, documents, statistics, and big-data analyses to make comparisons on broad scales of time and space. In so doing, it suggests hypotheses encompassing different kinds of societies in human history, including those in the Axial Age and the Modern Ages.

Pape, Walter and Šubrt, Jiří (eds) (2018) *Mitteleuropa denken: Intellektuelle, Identitäten und Ideen*. De Gruyter.

Patel, Sujata and Goyal, Omita (eds) (2018) *India's Contemporary Urban Conundrum*. Routledge.

This book lays out the different and complex dimensions of urbanisation in India. It brings together contributors with expertise in fields as varied as demography, geography, economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, architecture, planning and land use, environmental sciences, creative writing, filmmaking and grassroots activism to reflect on and examine India's urban experience. It discusses various dimensions of city life—how to define the urban; the conditions generating work, living and (in)security; the nature of contemporary cities; the dilemmas of creating and executing urban policy, planning and governance; and the issues concerning ecology and environment. The volume also articulates and evaluates the way Indian urbanism promotes and organises aspirations and utopias of the people, whilst simultaneously endorsing disparities, depravities and conflicts.

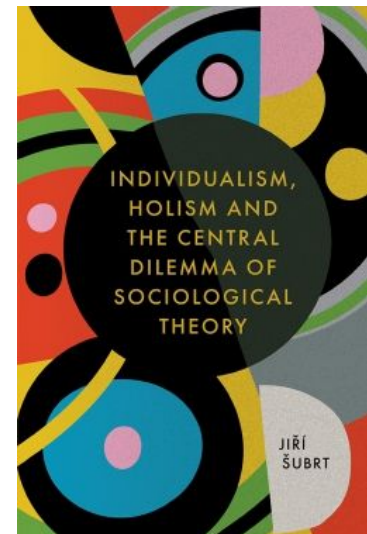
The volume includes interventions that shape contemporary debates. Comprehensive, accessible and topical, it will be useful to scholars and researchers of urban studies, urban sociology, development studies, public policy, economics, political studies, gender studies, city studies, planning and governance. It will also interest practitioners, think tanks and NGOs working on urban issues.



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Šubrt, Jiří (2019) [\*Individualism, Holism and the Central Dilemma of Sociological Theory\*](#). Emerald.

Individualism and holism, the concepts embedded in the title of this book, represent two key theoretical perspectives that have for many decades steered and shaped sociological thought. For over a century these two interpretative perspectives have also divided sociological theory into two camps, accompanied by a band of scholars trying to bridge this dualism. According to American sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander, individualist theories derive their appeal and strength from their underlying assumption that humans make decisions as individual, free, autonomous, and rationally and morally consistent beings. A related belief is that they are able to express these qualities in their actions regardless of the situation in society or what economic or moral conditions prevail.



Holistic, or collectivist, theories, unlike individualism, assign primacy to social entities. This perspective is important because it creates the basic precondition through which entities can become the subject of deliberate sociological analysis. However, there is a price for fulfilling this precondition. The emphasis it places on the collective, and on larger entities, logically means that the individual will and free human decision-making tends to be lost from the field of view.

This book argues that these two perspectives, individualist and holistic, form the central dilemma of sociological thought. It provides an extensive review and critique of contemporary sociological approaches to this antinomy and examines attempts that have been made to overcome it and unite them. Moreover, the book proposes a new approach to solving this dilemma via the concept of 'critical reconfigurationism', arguing that the resolution of this dilemma is vital not just for sociological theory but also for empirical social research.

## **Reviews of recent books from RC56 newsletter**

In the last newsletter we included information on a new edited book from Mirjam Künkler, John Madeley and Shylashri Shankar: [\*A Secular Age Beyond the West. Religion, Law and the State in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa\*](#). Here are some links to recent reviews of the book:

Damon Mayrl review in [\*Sociology of Religion\*](#)

Marian Burchardt review in [\*Oxford Journal of Law and Religion\*](#)

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## Journal articles and special issues

Coles, R and Susen, S (2018) The Pragmatic Vision of Visionary Pragmatism: The Challenge of Radical Democracy in a Neoliberal World Order. *Contemporary Political Theory* 17(2): 250–262.

Connolly, J (2019) Generational conflict and the sociology of generations: Mannheim and Elias reconsidered. *Theory, Culture & Society*, online first.

Connolly, J and Dolan, P (2019) Habitus, social elevation, and the channel of shame-fear: The decision to expand Guinness advertising. *Journal of Historical Sociology* 32(2): 232–43.

Patel, S (2019) Introduction: Revisiting Urban India. In: Patel, S and Goyal, O (eds) [\*India's Contemporary Urban Conundrum\*](#). Routledge, 1–14.

Patel, S (2019) Sociology through the 'South' Prism. In: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E and Daley, P (eds.) [\*Routledge Handbook of South-South Relations\*](#). London: Routledge, 31–47.

Patel, S (2018) Legacies and Challenges of Sociological Traditions in South Asia. In: Kumar, R, Nath Pathak, D and Perera, S (eds) [\*Sociology and Social Anthropology in South Asia: Histories and Practices\*](#). Delhi: Orient Longman.

Patel, S (2018) Rethinking Urban Studies Today. *Sociological Bulletin* 67(1): 1–19.

Susen, S (2019) The Resonance of Resonance: Critical Theory as a Sociology of World-Relations? *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, online first.

Susen, S (2018) The Economy of Enrichment: Towards a New Form of Capitalism? *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* 2(2): 5–98.

Susen, S (2018) The Seductive Force of "Noumenal Power": A New Path (or Impasse) for Critical Theory? *Journal of Political Power* 11(1): 4–45.

Onaka, Fumiya and Nagai, Akiko (eds) (forthcoming) Comparative and Historical Sociology of Women's Careers, special issue of *Comparative Sociology* 18(3)

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## Future publications

### *Handbook of History of Human Sciences*

Springer Nature is currently preparing a large-scale *Handbook of History of Human Sciences* as part of the Springer Reference Works series. The handbook is intended to be a useful reference source for a large and diverse audience. The Reference Works are heavily downloaded and used, and reference content is peer-reviewed, making each chapter fully citable. The editor of the handbook is David McCallum. He has invited Marta Bucholc (University of Bonn/University of Warsaw) and Stephen Mennell to edit the section of the handbook dedicated to Historical Sociology.

This section alone will be on a substantial scale. It will contain about ten chapters each of between 10,000 and 12,000 words, dealing with among other things: war and violence, emotions, inequalities and the welfare state, sport, postcolonial dependencies and law. The editors will write a theoretical–methodological introduction authored by the two editors. The chapters will have unique DOIs that make them easily accessible electronically and in print. Publication is anticipated to be in early 2021.

## Online resources

### [Documents on History of Sociology](#)

The documents presented here are divided into two. The first is on the History of Sociology of India and the second is on the History of Sociology of the rest of the world. These have been collected by Sujata Patel and Sharmila Rege, faculty members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Pune for projects titled *Formation of Sociology in India: Scholars, Institutions and Practices* and *Teaching Sociology: Feminist and Dalit Perspectives* respectively.

Also included are unpublished and published papers of the late Professor Y. B. Damle donated by him to the Department, and documents by Professor Neeraben Desai on the life of Professor A. R. Desai. Additional documents are included which are part of Professor Manorama Savur's project titled 'Bombay School of Sociology'.

### [Open access online Masters level courses](#)

In order to democratize learning, the Government of India initiated a project in 2012 called E-Pathshala and created open access online Masters level courses in various disciplines. Sujata Patel coordinated the sociology part and there are 15 courses with learning resources.

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## News & Events

### [International Conference: Exile – Flight – Persecution](#)

Center of Methods in Social Sciences, University of Göttingen, 28–30 November 2019

The current public discussions on migration which are being carried on in Europe but also in North America, are also characterized by a very striking homogenization of refugees and illegalized migrants. Thus, their individual or collective experiences of persecution or other forms of violence and courses of migration are not taken into account; instead, migration is often classified, labelled and discussed as being exclusively economically motivated.

This conference will draw attention to the above-described phenomena, which have been incompletely studied in sociology and related sciences, and examine them from the perspective of sociological biographical research and in dialogue with colleagues from other research traditions and other nations (the plenary talks will be given by colleagues from Brazil, Ghana and Austria).

### [New Collaborative Research Centre on “Re-Figuration of Spaces” in Berlin, Germany](#)

The German Science Foundation (DFG) has just funded a new Collaborative Research Centre on the “Re-Figuration of Spaces” (CRC 1265) for a first funding period of four years (2018–2021). The CRC aims at investigating the comprehensive processes of spatial reorganisation caused by digitalization, the intensifying transnationalisation of the economy, radical changes in the global political geography, and the increasing global circulation of people and goods since the late 1960s. The CRC’s basic assumption is that as a result of the social transformations usually referred to as globalization, the relationship between people and spaces is being renegotiated, rearranged and transformed in complex ways. We start from the programmatic assumption that complementary to the chronological acceleration of communicative action also spatial processes of mediatization, polycontextualisation and translocalisation play a central role in these processes.

Concerning social theory, the CRC “Re-Figuration of Spaces” combines Norbert Elias’ figurational sociology with Martina Löw’s spatial theory and Hubert Knoblauch’s theory on the communicative construction of reality and is thus intrinsically historical and comparative. The overall architecture and research design aims at empirically analysing these spatial transformation processes in order to contribute to a better understanding of current social conflicts and uncertainties that threaten to destabilise societies. Research is organised into three major project areas: “Knowledge of Space”, “Spaces of Communication” and “Circulation and Order”, each of which addresses different angles and aspects of the key question how the current re-figurations unfold.

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In order to achieve this goal, multiple specialized fields such as sociology, geography, architecture, media and communication studies, the arts, and planning cooperate which also opens up excellent opportunities to develop innovative methodologies in the study of space, and joint research will hopefully help to flesh out the profile of future transdisciplinary spatial research. By including architecture and planning issues into the analysis, the CRC hopes to be able to advance alternative models for the development of public spaces.

The CRC's [Methods Lab](#) aims at advancing spatial methods. The Lab currently focusses on mapping and visual methods; de-colonizing social science methodology; and methodology of comparative historical research.

Amongst other activities, the CRC organizes an annual International Conference each February. For further details, please contact CRC's Academic Coordinator and Managing Director, Dr. Nina Elsemann ([nina.elsemann@tu-berlin.de](mailto:nina.elsemann@tu-berlin.de)).

There is also a **fellowship programme for international guest researchers** which funds travelling and accommodation costs. Due to the nature of the research topic, we particularly invite researchers from Non-European countries to consider to apply for a fellowship. During their stay, fellows are expected to work with at least one of the CRC members and to give a workshop or lecture on a topic relevant to the CRC. Before application, aspiring fellows should contact the CRC's Academic Coordinator and Managing Director, Dr. Nina Elsemann (Tel: +49 30 314 73787, [nina.elsemann@tu-berlin.de](mailto:nina.elsemann@tu-berlin.de)) for details on the application process. It is also recommended to contact a suitable member of the CRC (see <http://www.sfb1265.de/en/> for an overview) in order to discuss a possible collaboration and working plan for the stay. In addition, please consider to apply for a longer research stay at the CRC via other funding agencies (see <https://www.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-scholarship-database/> for an overview).

Nina Baur

(Board Member of the CRC "Re-Figuration of Spaces", Berlin, Germany)

## Conference report: Re-figuration of spaces and cross-cultural comparison

Author: Martin Schinagl ([martin.schinagl@leibniz-irs.de](mailto:martin.schinagl@leibniz-irs.de)), Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (Erkner)

1st Conference and Opening Event of the [Collaborative Research Center 1265 "Re-Figuration of Spaces"](#)

14-15 June 2018, Technical University of Berlin

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On 1st January 2018, the German Research Foundation (DFG) set up the Collaborative Research Centre "Re-figuration of Spaces" (CRC 1265) at the Technical University of Berlin. More than 50 scientists from various disciplines such as sociology, architecture, urban and regional planning, art, geography as well as media and communication sciences work together in 15 sub-projects at the TU Berlin, the FU Berlin, the HU Berlin, the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster and the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS). On the 14th and 15th of June 2018 the CRC 1265 was officially opened with the opening conference under the topic "The Re-figuration of Spaces and the Cross-Cultural Comparison". Scholars from seven different disciplines were invited to speak on practices of comparison.

The Collaborative Research Centre understands re-figuration to be the processual and often conflict-related transformation of spatial arrangements and interdependencies. Over the last 50 years, the processes and dynamics of mediatization, translocation and polycontextuality have intensified. As Hubert Knoblauch (Berlin), the spokesman for the CRC, put it, that the term re-figuration is confusing yet thought-provoking. The term is to be empirically explored and qualitatively determined through the CRC's sub-projects as they act as empirical diagnoses of our times, which are of central importance in developing a social theory. During the solemn opening, Martina Löw (Berlin), the spokeswoman of the CRC, spurred thinking about complex spatial constructions. Society, she says, must also be understood through space. The aim of the CRC is thus to develop a spatial theory that is capable of analysing the changed conditions of the constitution of the social in space, in and through which power relations are expressed.

The first annual conference included a total of four planned sessions involving perspectives from different disciplines on theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches.

From a critical architectural-theoretical perspective, Nina Gribat (Darmstadt) understands "re-figuration" as a contested field within which a triad of space, conflict and society unfolds. Architecture represents and structures social relations within this relational field, as a result, both constantly undergoing changes. Karina Pallagst (Kaiserslautern) compares planning cultures across the northern hemisphere. Her research suggests that understandings of territoriality, spatiality and linearity of planning stages do differ, which leads to a need of rethinking planning's core categories.

Closing the first day of the conference, historian Angelika Epple (Bielefeld) highlighted in her talk the impact that the spatial turn had on Historical Sciences. Increasingly efforts were made to overcome methodological nationalism and turn towards an understanding of entangled history instead. The emphasis on translocal interdependencies and relationships changed practices of comparison dramatically.

The second day of the conference began with a lecture by Lech Suwala (Berlin) on "Spatial Concepts, Re-figuration of Spaces and Comparative Research from the Perspective of Economic Geography and Regional Economics". Although geography has been updated several times over different turns it has

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undergone, nevertheless economic geography and regional economics still stick to the idea of absolute or relative space. He expanded possible approaches to a relational and topical space.

Jan Polívka (Aachen) introduced further perspectives of planning sciences. Three levels of a hierarchical structure – places and cultures, rules and norms, as well as practices – that shaped planning action each possess their own rates of contingency. These levels are subject to examination of their different dynamics among them, between them and different cultures. Herein culture proves to be less flexible than situations and rational logics. For example the deployment of the land-use plan, which has found worldwide application, but in practice is applied differently depending upon local planning cultures, sometimes far from the original intention of its use.

Johannes Becker (Göttingen) introduced the perspective of biography research using the example of "Life and Family Histories in the Context of Escape and Narrowing Borders in the Middle East". The re-figuration of spaces is tangible in the everyday dimension and is reflected in biographical situatedness and family relationships. Also, formal legal and state constriction and the effectiveness of state boundaries may be reflected in mentality change and diffusion of families.

Wolfgang Aschauer (Salzburg) completed the second day with the perspective of quantitative comparative social. In order to obtain differentiated insights, he pleaded for a mix of methods and an interdisciplinary and theory-oriented cross-cultural social research. The understanding of space, he criticizes, continues to be a central problem in classical comparative national research. Social-scientific methodology today should begin where the big-data analysis ends.

The conference ended with a round table discussion in which the diversity of disciplinary approaches to the topic of comparison and the practices of comparison in the disciplines were recognized as stimulating. The question of whether the multiplicity of perspectives stands as thought-provoking quality, or whether a common language should be found will certainly only be answered in the course of the years ahead.

Variables themselves used in comparison – such as time, space, territory – should be made the unit of investigation. These variables may be closely interwoven as illustrated by the juxtaposition of planned space and built space, the first one representing future space and the latter something that carries past projections of the future.

Together with other critical reflections on the relationship between re-figuration of spaces and cultural comparison, the results of this conference will be published in a Thematic Issue on "The Re-Figuration of Spaces and Cross-Cultural Comparison" by Nina Baur (Berlin), Stephen Mennell (Dublin) and Angela Million (Berlin) and is expected to be published in the peer-reviewed open access journal *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (FQS) in 2020.



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## Contact

For inclusion in future issues of the newsletter, please email Paddy Dolan ([paddy.dolan@tudublin.ie](mailto:paddy.dolan@tudublin.ie)) information on the following topics:

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