

International Sociological Association
RC 20
Comparative Sociology

June 2011 Newsletter

Oxford: 30 June, 2011

Dear colleagues,

This is an unusually short newsletter.

I just would like to confirm that our RC will be participating in the next ISA forum (Buenos Aires, 2012). You will find hereunder a list of planned sessions for this event, as well as some information about recent publications by RC members.

I am still expecting confirmations regarding other intended activities (including our RC conference/book project mentioned in the last newsletter). More on this soon, I hope.

Best wishes,

*Jean-Pascal Daloz
RC 20 Chair*

Second ISA forum of Sociology Buenos Aires (August 2012)
List of sessions

Trust: Comparative Perspectives

Convenor: Masamichi Sasaki (Chuo University, Tokyo, Japan)

No one denies the importance of trust in social relationships. Indeed, Blau (1964) said that trust is “essential for stable social relationships,” while Weber (1968; also cf. Talcott Parsons) emphasized its essential role in the exchange of goods. Many other scholars have elevated trust to an extraordinarily important position in terms of its influence on interpersonal relationships as well as 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.

Niklas Luhmann comes to mind as perhaps one of the best scholars to have considered the role of trust in social systems, or in sociology for that matter. To Luhmann (1980), trust “reduces [social system] complexity.” As we all know, social systems are becoming increasingly complex and confounded, and to Luhmann this means that trust plays an ever-increasingly important role. And Luhmann’s emphasis on commitment contributes to interpersonal and social cooperation. Commitment is intimately tied up with obligation, which in turn implies a relationship to 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.

Cultural Changes and Values in Comparative Perspective

Convenors: Marita Carballo (Kantar Latin America) and Fred Turner (Connecticut University)

This session will gather Academics whose research focus on the empirical study of cultural values using the World Value Survey data. The main goal is to present papers which showcase values in comparative perspective. We expect the collaboration of scholars whose expertise evolve around democracy and justice, political participation, happiness and life-satisfaction, religion, social capital, interpersonal and institutional trust in Latin America. Much empirical evidence from different social sciences’ perspectives attempted to show that trust is associated with well-being and it mobilizes pro-social actions, which in turn generates important changes in terms of civic participation, democracy and economic development. This panel will help understand different aspects of Latin American change in values over time in a worldwide context. These changes allow explaining social dynamics, as well as the political and economic development of the region. Empirical comparative analysis of cultural factors can facilitate the understanding of democratization and modernization processes in the region.

Qualitative Interviews in Comparative Sociology

Convenor: Fumiya Onaka (Japan’s Women University)

Though large N quantitative survey method has long been considered to be most effective in comparative sociology since 1950’s, qualitative methods have gradually gained importance, influenced by the emphasis on ‘constant comparison’ in grounded theory approach by B. G. Glaser and A. Strauss in 1960’s, the introduction of ‘qualitative comparative analysis(QCA)’ by C. C. Ragin in 1980’s, or the suggestion of ‘thick comparisons’ by L. Mjøset in 2000’s. Following this tendency, qualitative interview method has been paid attention by a large number of comparative researchers. Also in RC20 of XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology in Göteborg, Sweden, various projects utilized it in their research. However, it seems that there is hardly any consensus on how to select cases and collect data for comparison, how to analyze and interpret data by comparison, or the extent of applicability to comparison in using this method. This panel welcomes papers on original studies based on qualitative interviews for discussing these topics.

Social Distinction and Globalization

Convenor: Jean-Pascal Daloz (University of Oxford)

Undeniably, the current globalization process widens horizons more than ever before. As far as status markers are concerned, this involves a growing awareness of various patterns of distinction as well as an increasing acuteness of comparison. Social groups in the highest echelons of societies all over the world may show an interest in a variety of signs of superiority that perhaps help give them the impression that they belong to international superior circles beyond their respective origins. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how the possible introduction of globalized means of distinction is actually perceived, understood and evaluated. This panel welcomes theoretical and empirical papers dealing with such issues.

Comparative studies of historical and contemporary civilising and decivilising shifts in politics, culture and morality

Session convenors: Robert van Krieken, University of Sydney, robertvk@usyd.edu.au and Stephen Vertigans, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, s.vertigans@rgu.ac.uk

This session will include comparative sociological research in the following areas:

- a) The interrelationships between social justice and levels of pacification and, conversely, injustice and forms of violence;
- b) Civilising processes and democratisation: comparative studies of civilisation in relation to democratic transformations around the world;
- c) The rise of cross-boundary NGOs such as those associated with environmental, human rights and anti-capitalist movements and concomitant changing power relations;
- d) Cultural comparators which are indicative of dynamics of civilising processes. Possible examples include emotions, literature, media, sexuality and sport.

Other topics which fit under the general heading will also be considered.

Death and Politics: socio-historical and comparative approaches

Convenors: Gabriel Kessler (Conicet/Universidad Nacional de La Plata, Argentina) and Sandra Gayol (Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Argentina)

The last decades have witnessed various types of violence both in the North and the South: "preventive" wars in the East carried out by industrialized countries, fratricidal conflicts in

Balkan and African nations, urban violence and crime in Latin America, among many others, are some of the events that have brought death to the center of international public space. In turn, individual deaths of major public figures, and of ordinary citizens whose death become a public issue, have political impact both at the local and global scale. The purpose of the session is to present and discuss comparative studies on the political uses and impacts of individual or collective deaths in various countries and different historical periods. The papers should address the comparative dimension, focussing on cases that occurred in different places and/or in different moments. Works that analyze the impact of death on the public space will be encouraged, as well as those that focuss on rituals and discourses, collective emotions, and political and social changes that arise from such deaths. The session, in short, intends to compare the various political dimensions of death in the present and the past.

Current Research in Comparative Sociology

Convenor: Jean-Pascal Daloz (University of Oxford)

This session welcomes original, high-quality papers in the field of Comparative Sociology.

For deadlines regarding abstract submission, please refer to the website :
<http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/rc/rc.php?n=RC20>

Recent publications by RC 20 members

Nikolai Genov and Tessa Sawidis (eds), *Transboundary Migration in the Post-Soviet Space*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011.

The collective monograph contains the results of an empirical project conducted in Armenia and Georgia as well as in Moscow (as the favourite destination of migrants from the South Caucasus) from 2008 to 2010. The book is the first contribution to comparative research in the migration-intense post-Soviet space, and covers the complete cycle before, during and after migration. The survey focused on such relevant issues as national migration profiles including age and gender composition, «brain drain» and «brain waste», return potentials, remittances, child separation, migration perception, and personal experiences in Moscow and other destinations. As results the field studies confirm the international trend of feminization in migration and a high awareness of the ambivalent nature of migration among two cohorts of migrants from Armenia and Georgia in Moscow and six cohorts of returnees in the respective countries of origin.

Elke Winter, *Us, Them and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011.

The book does two things: 1) it develops a sociology of pluralist group formation, 2) it examines the relations between the claims and accommodations of different types of ethnic/national groups. The empirical case study deals mainly with Canada; one chapter is

dedicated to comparative studies.

Kwandi Kondlo and Chinenyengozi Ejiogu (eds), *Africa in Focus: Governance in the 21st Century*, Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2011.

And a review...

Sociologists interested in Max Weber can count themselves fortunate these days with the recent appearance of the second revised edition of Stephen Kalberg's new translation of Weber's work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Oxford University Press, 2011). Kalberg's volume gives us not only a complete and more precise translation of Weber's revised 1920 text, containing his mature views of a thesis originally broached in two lengthy journal articles of 1904-05, but supplements this classic work with new translations of Weber's closely related essay on —Church and Sect in America || , excerpts from his —last word || of re-sponse to his critic Rachfahl, an important selection on Protestantism and capitalism from Weber's final lectures on —General Eco-nomic History || , and Weber's —Prefatory Remarks to the Collected Essays on the Sociology of Religion || . Readers interested in going further and placing Weber's —Protestant Ethic Thesis || in the context of his other writings may consult Kalberg's collection, *Max Weber: Readings and Commentary on Modernity* (Blackwell, 2005).

In addition, Kalberg provides a revised and expanded, and very illuminating, introduction to these texts, along with a sub-stantial bibliography of writings about the —Weber thesis || and a glossary of key ideas used by Weber. Readers, especially students, will find this glossary particularly valuable. It helps to define the central reference points for understanding Weber's overall theoreti-cal framework and method of analysis. As an aid to the twenty-first century reader, Kalberg has also inserted many footnotes to We-ber's text. These identify and explain terms, events, persons and other items mentioned in passing by Weber, things which Weber could expect his readers to know, but which are largely inaccessible to current audiences.

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