EDITOR’S MESSAGE

As editor of this newsletter I have witnessed the hard work that our Executive Committee (EC) and President put into running our Association, and I have had the pleasure of getting to know the members of the current Executive and those who served in the previous term (2011-2013). All of those whom I have come to know have dedicated a great deal of their time, tirelessly promoting the interests of ESA’s members and the discipline of sociology at large. This is no small task!

Plans are now well underway for ESA’s 12th Conference, which will take place in Prague in late-August 2015. In May the EC met with the local organizing committee and their partner, a professional conference organizer. As a part of this meeting, the EC made a site visit to the locations at which the conference will be held. A call of workshops, special sessions, et cetera, will be announced shortly. This will be followed by a call for paper proposals of the year. If the success of the Turin conference is anything to go by, we can expect a fantastic time in Prague also!

Unfortunately, due to pressing personal reasons, Vincenzo Cicchelli has been forced to resign from the EC. Vincenzo served as ESA’s General Secretary between 2011 and 2013. His hard work, insights and affable personality will be keenly missed as the EC continues its activities. Although Vincenzo has left ESA’s EC, he continues to be and active member and will continue serving as a member of the steering committee of Research Network 15: Global, Transnational and Cosmopolitan Sociology. We wish to thank Vincenzo for all of his hard work as ESA’s General Secretary over the past two years.

Replacing Vincenzo, we welcome Luis Baptista’s return to the EC for his 2nd term. Luis was selected as Vincenzo’s replacement on the basis of the number of votes he received at the ESA elections, which took place in Turin during our conference. Welcome back Luis!

Turning to this issue of European Sociologist, we continue to develop this newsletter with an array of content. We begin with Carmen Leccardi’s President’s Message. Following this, our regular segments include: Mary Mellor’s Viewpoint, which highlights the sociological importance of money and its relationship to the global financial crisis; Massimiliano Vaira’s Perspective, which discusses the changes taking place in the Italian university sector and the impact of neoliberal reforms; and an overview and history of the Association Française de Sociologie by Bruno Cousin and Didier Demazière, its Vice-President and President respectively.

In addition to these regular features, this issue also includes: a reflection on his career and research on cosmopolitanism by Vincenzo Cicchelli; an interview with Finland’s Professor of the Year 2014, Pertti Alasuutari; a discussion regarding the proposed revisions to ESA’s Statutes by Pekka Sulkunen; an overview of the new BENELEX project; a call for abstracts for a postgraduate student conference to be held at the University of Cambridge on September 26th and 27th, 2014; and, sadly, obituaries for Willfried Spohn and Ernesto Laclau.

Finally, I would like to remind our members that the first issue of ESA’s new journal, the European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology, has now been published by Routledge. Click here to access this journal.

If you would like to advertise in European Sociologist or contribute an article to the next issue, please email european-sociologist@helsinki.fi. We also welcome your suggestions and feedback.

Peter Holley
July 2014

FEATURE ARTICLE

Money in Crisis: The Neglected Critique.

Many aspects of the current crisis have been debated: globalization, financialisation, deregulation, privatisation, inequality, austerity and many more, but rarely is it discussed as a crisis of money itself.

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The elections for the European Parliament that took place at the end of May were characterised not only by increasing abstention, but also by the rise of Eurosceptic populism, combined with the strong resurgence of nationalism. These are not the warmongering nationalist movements of the twentieth century, yet the threat they represent is no less worrying: they stand for a form of closure – first and foremost to migrants, identified as the prime enemies to combat. As Habermas recently underlined, they are based on a false transposition of social problems into national problems. The harsh recession that has dominated Europe since 2008, and its dramatic consequences - above all in southern European countries - undoubtedly contributes to the spread of these tendencies.

In this difficult economic and political period we must necessarily call attention to Europe’s intrinsic identity as a land of differences, a political and social space open to hybridisation and cultural inventiveness. These two aspects appear to be closely intertwined. As the Portuguese philosopher and writer Eduardo Lourenço – a staunch Europeanist – also underlined, European culture is by definition a panorama of multiple identities. To actively resist the processes of potential de-democratization that are under way, it now appears vital to “democratize democracy”, as asserted among others by Étienne Balibar. Practices of cultural inventiveness and active citizenship can contribute to this aim. At the same time, they can help combat those forms of separation and exclusion that have been institutionalized in the name of democracy – for example with regard to women (in 2014, women MPs in Europe amount to only 25.3% of those elected) and foreigners.

Shutting borders, and preventing economic migrants and refugees from reaching Europe, appears to be one of the main objectives of the Union today. 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, new walls are being built to defend ‘Fortress Europe’ from the threat of ‘foreigners’. On the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, for example, there is a 30 kilometre wall of steel, concrete and barbed wire in place of the iron curtain which stopped the people of Eastern European state from escaping Communist regimes a quarter of a century ago. Nowadays that wall ‘protects’ Europe above all from those who in increasing numbers are fleeing the civil war in Syria overland. Under European law, the Syrian refugees are to all intents and purposes illegal migrants – the same as the hundreds of boat people who continue to perish in the Mediterranean in the attempt to reach our continent. The Bulgarian wall is the third wall in Europe specifically designed to keep out migrants, after the Spanish barrier built in 1998 around Ceuta and Melilla, and the border wall between Greece and Turkey completed in 2012. In this scenario, extending democratic rights and introducing new ones would not only safeguard and reinforce existing rights, but also be a way to call ‘Fortress Europe’ into question.

So what role does sociological knowledge play in this context? How is sociology called upon to confront this deep-rooted European crisis? As the Italian sociologist Franco Crespi recently highlighted, we know that the technocratic ideology of neoliberal capitalism is trying to reduce sociological knowledge to the mere empirical recording of quantitative data, denying the importance of theoretical reflections and in-depth, qualitative analyses of the political, social and cultural dynamics sparked by the crisis. The recent, significant reduction of the budget allocated to social and human sciences in the Horizon 2020 European research programme is direct evidence of this trend.

Yet there is another, more positive side to the coin: For sociology the European crisis could represent an opportunity to redefine priorities and rethink issues and problems: from the dramatic rise in inequalities to the new forms of solidarity; from a redefinition of the very concept of individualism to the framing of contemporary environmental issues, not to mention the dynamics of innovation, now a by-word for all EU funded research programmes. Last but not least, an opportunity to redefine our methods of analysis.

To conclude, the difficult economic, social and political situation we are experiencing in Europe can become a key opportunity for the sociological community to put its knowledge and research experience at the service of an open Europe, capable of looking beyond its borders, committed in the front line to defending human dignity and freedom. The sociological imagination referred to in “Differences, Inequalities and Sociological Imagination”, the topic of the next ESA conference in Prague from August 25th to 28th, 2015, is the power to transform limitations into a resource. A strategic ability that our discipline has been developing and building into a solid tradition since the mid twentieth century.

Carmen Leccardi
July 2014
Many aspects of the current crisis have been debated: globalisation, financialisation, deregulation, privatisation, inequality, austerity and many more, but rarely is it discussed as a crisis of money itself. In fact, money is very much an orphaned topic. Like a foundling it lies on the doorstep of both economics and sociology. It is too ‘economic’ for sociologists and too ephemeral for economists. Yet money is arguably the most potent symbol of our age as Simmel argued more than a century ago. Money was also important to the analysis of modern economies for Weber and Marx. Interest in it faded with the marginalisation of economic sociology. I want to argue that money should not only be rescued from the doorstep, it should be taken to the heart of sociological analysis. Modern money is a social phenomenon sine qua non. It has no intrinsic value, it is largely intangible – in the UK 97% of money is represented only through figures in bank accounts. As the money form itself has no value, people accept it through a mixture of trust and authority. They trust that people in the future will accept their money and this trust is backed by public authorisation of the money form. Although the capitalist market system proclaims its naturalistic foundations and commercial independence, it could not function without the social construct, money. Money is central to the functioning of the capitalist system as it is an essential mechanism in capital accumulation and the realisation of profit. That social construct is now in crisis.

Money in Crisis

The crisis in money is a crisis of debt. The main cause is a money system that has become pivoted on a rising volume of debt. The unsustainability of this debt became clear when defaults in subprime mortgage lending triggered a credit crunch. Debt had become a commodity. Banks were making money by bundling up mortgage debts and selling them as assets to investors. The more vulnerable the borrower, the more profitable the asset as interest rates were higher. It is sociologically not without relevance that it was the poor who brought down the whole shaky structure after they were tricked and cajoled into reckless borrowing by commission hungry mortgage touts. While exploitative debt, and over-borrowing generally, have been widely discussed as a major cause of the crisis, another aspect of debt in the money system has been largely ignored. The toxic debt crisis is only a symptom of the wider problem that the whole money supply in bank-dominated economies has been collapsed into the credit supply, that is, bank lending. This is a largely unrecognised and unanalysed outcome of a combination of technological changes and neoliberal economics that has created a major contradiction for bank-led monetary systems.

The main technological change is the shift to electronic monetary transactions. Unlike previous eras where physical money circulated (notes and coin), most transactions are now mainly informational via bank accounts and credit cards. Whereas notes and coin were mainly created and circulated by public monetary authorities, most electronic transfers occur in the commercial banking sector. While banks are generally prohibited from creating national currency as notes and coin, they are able to create new money by making loans through adding figures to bank accounts. It is well recognised that banks have always created this ‘credit money’ but what is important is that it is now designated as public currency. When borrowers take out a loan they do not see it as Barclays, Citibank or Deutsche Bank money, but dollars, euros or pounds. In this way new bank lending creates new electronic currency. Banking theory argues that central banks can ultimately control this process, but history shows that monetary authorities have not had great success in controlling booms in bank lending or in making banks lend when they do not wish to do so (Keynes described this as being like pushing on a string).

Creating the money supply as bank debt means that control of the money supply moves from the public sector to the private sector. The money supply is effectively privatised. The dilemma when
bank-created credit money becomes the main source of currency creation and circulation, is that it is based on debt. The contradiction for a debt-based money supply is that it must grow or die.

**Banking on Good Times**

When times are good a debt-based money supply is buoyant. Banks are willing to lend and there are eager borrowers. However when things get difficult the supply can quickly shrink as no new loans are taken out and existing loans are repaid. Even in the good times there is a fundamental weakness in a debt-based money supply. As all loans have to be repaid with interest the money supply constantly needs to expand. Banks always want more money returned than they lent out. This is the heart of the contradiction. If the money system is collapsed into the credit system there is no source for the money needed to pay the additional interest. The system as a whole is seeking more money than is generated. Where is this additional money to come from? The obvious answer is from the state/central bank, that is, the creation of public money.

This is what has happened in response to the crisis, monetary authorities have poured trillions into the banking sectors directly and indirectly. Most of it they do not expect to get back. Unlike banks, the state/central bank can issue money free of debt, that is, public money need not be treated as a commercial commodity. However, neoliberalism has an ideological trick up its sleeve to avoid the obvious public response that public money could be created and circulated to the people (as for example a Citizen Income or as expenditure on public infrastructure/services), or at least that control of the national currency should not lie in commercial debt. This neoliberal ideology I have described as handbag economics.

**Handbag Economics**

Handbag economics has become the common sense of our age. It divides societies into two broad sectors, the market-provider and the supplicant housewife-public. The dependent housewife-public must live within ‘her’ allocated means, pay her way, most definitely not overspend or borrow.

Central to handbag economics is the ideology of market-as-economy with no role for an independent public economy. Markets are seen as efficient and the sole creators of wealth. States are seen as inefficient competitors for scarce resources, particularly money. Handbag economics constantly reiterates a public-as-household analogy that sees all public activity as a drain on the ‘wealth creators’, taken to mean the private economic sector, or the ‘taxpayer’ taken to be a purely private individual. Public money is assumed to mean money for public expenditure extracted from the private sector.

The ideology of handbag economics has become so hegemonic that it is virtually unchallenged by mainstream political groups, with the idea of a public economy as unthinkable. This was aided by the dominance of market fundamentalist neoclassical views in economic thinking that drove other economic perspectives out of universities and excluded them from key economic publications. Handbag economics became a Kuhnian normal science paradigm that excluded all dissent. Governments of all colours accepted the dominance of the microeconomics of individual choice and commercial decision-making over the macroeconomic views developed by Keynesians. The language of opposition was lost as governments competed to restructure the labour market and restrict worker rights, free up companies from ‘red tape’, cut taxation and create ‘incentives’ for commercial expansion and privatisation.

Under the ideology of market fundamentalism all aspects of the economy have been passed to the market, including the money supply. The idea of creating and issuing public money is dismissed as ‘printing money’ and issued with the hyperinflationary examples of Zimbabwe and Weimar Germany hovering in the background. While it is true that uncontrolled creation of money is highly inflationary, this applies equally to commercially created money as the unstable inflation of stock prices and housing in boom times shows.

How then did handbag economics respond to the huge outpourings of newly created public money from central banks in the face of the 2007–8 financial crisis? It relied on false (but still largely unchallenged) views about money, banking and the monetary role of states. It represented the trillions spent on bank rescue as either public debt to the private sector, or as a technical creation of money to deal with the specifics of the banking crisis (quantitative easing). As a result, the trillions poured into the banking sector were construed as unsustainable sovereign debt reflected in rapidly rising public deficits as economies contracted. Rather than grateful thanks for public rescue, handbag economics maintained that the private, particularly the financial sector, was still the source of all money.
and wealth. This led to the contorted view that the public was borrowing the money it was using from the self-same ‘money markets’ it was rescuing. The public sector was to be punished for this profligacy by being subjected to austerity with the assets and institutions of the public sector stripped bare.

**Deficit Hysteria**

Handbag economics has whipped up hysteria about public debts and deficits, even though most states have had both most of the time with little ill effect. The most explicit application of handbag economics is the Maastricht Rules limiting public debts and deficits and setting out a purely commercial role for the central bank. As a result, the European Central Bank has not yet been able to adopt the more flexible measures of the US Federal Reserve or the Bank of England leading to the Eurozone hovering on the edge of deflation following a triple dip recession. Some support for the deficit hawks seemed to come from academics who plotted a link between high levels of state debt and declining growth, but the figures were later successfully challenged.*

Other aspects of deficit hysteria are also open to challenge. For example, the public-as-household analogy does not make sense as real households do take on debt. The only question is whether the repayments can be met. Rather than reflecting a real analogy (which would be more the Keynesian model of borrowing when necessary) it seems the real aim of handbag economics’ household analogy is to shrink the public sector. By claiming that the public bailout money is ‘borrowed’ handbag ideology presents the rescue as a burden on the privatised conception of the public as taxpayer. The public as taxpayer is thereby set against the public as facing austerity. Seeing the bailout money as a loan implies that the new money is being created by the financial sector rather than by public monetary authorities. Handbag economics was able to construct such a contradictory world view through its myth of the ‘natural’ origin of money in trade.

**The Myth of Commodity Money**

The assumption that money is an economic (read market) phenomenon rests on the myth of commodity money. The story goes that people bartered goods until some bright spark invented precious metal coinage. This made things much more convenient as the coins could act as a medium of exchange. Two things (at least) are wrong with this story. It is historically inaccurate. There were no barter economies pre-coin and coinage was used mainly by rulers rather than traders (mainly to pay mercenaries to fight their wars). Second, money has taken many tangible and intangible forms of which precious metal coinage is just one. Forms of money have ranged from stones and wood to barley and beads. For this reason, social theorists of money see all forms of money as a representation of abstract value, which may occasionally be represented by a money form that has use or exchange value in itself. All money is therefore a promise to honour that rests on a mixture of social and political trust. Money is a social phenomenon.

**Money as a Social Phenomenon**

As money is a socially constructed phenomenon it cannot be seen as a ‘natural’ aspect of human societies. It does not just appear. Social phenomena have social foundations. What sociologists need to ask is ‘who owns and controls money?’ ‘how is money created and circulated?’ Strangely these questions are rarely asked by sociologists, economists, or anyone else for that matter. That is perhaps because these are not easy questions to answer. A distinction needs to be made between money as a yardstick for establishing relative values (the universal equivalent) and the money thing that represents that value (the currency or money form). For example, the literal pound sterling did not circulate as money, only coins and records representing that value. In modern societies readily accepted abstract value is represented by cash (notes and coins) and bank records. All these are designated as national currency. New cash or new bank accounts add to the supply of national (or cross-national) currency.
Making Money

Only two organisations in modern societies can create new national money, banks (as new loans) and monetary authorities (states and central banks). Modern banking systems are a hybrid of public and private money creating powers. In the early stages of coinage imperial power was dominant, most notably in the Greek and Roman eras. With the advent of modern banking, power within the money system became a contest between rulers and bankers. The rather confusing and contested situation around the creation of new money reflects a complex history. Sovereigns have traditionally dominated the production of coinage (particularly precious metal). Banks historically developed their own ways of representing and transferring abstract value often in the form of records or notes of various types (bills of exchange, promissory notes). In doing this banks were acting mostly as intermediaries between traders.

From the earliest days, modern commercial banks’ total commitments in terms of the total traffic in various forms of ‘bank notes’ far outstripped the actual wealth of the bank owners. What banks offered was a clearing mechanism for traders. Banks ‘stood credit’ for traders until trades were fully completed and the total networks of trades were cleared. There was relatively little actual exchange of money. This inherent weakness of banking exists to this day. All the money in the banking system is really structures of credit designated as national currency. No bank can ever withstand a ‘run’ because there is little ‘real’ money there, only systems of trust. Banks do have capital and reserves, but this is a small proportion of the total flow of money in its various forms. It has been calculated that in the pre-2008 boom US banks’ ratio was as low as 0.1%.

Many banks have, of course, gone bust. For this reason contemporary banks are generally prevented from issuing their own notes. However, through a regulatory loophole, they are not prevented from creating new public currency as bank account records. The contradiction of modern privatised money lies in this conflation of the issue of commercial loans with their designation as public currency (pounds, dollars, euros). This is why, despite their inherently unstable structure, banks cannot be allowed to fail. In a crisis central banks have to make unlimited new public money available to the banks to stop the money system imploding. In the end, what backs the banks is the public capacity to create trusted public money. We have reached a situation where the supply of money is mainly in the hands of the commercial banking sector, but responsibility if that fails, lies entirely with the state/central bank, behind which stands the people. All money designated in the national currency, whatever its origin, is therefore public in its implications. While the responsibility for the integrity of all money rests with the public in contemporary economies, the supply of money has become a resource mainly for the private sector and particularly the financial sector, the notorious ‘leverage’.

The Myth of Banking

The ambivalence and contradiction in handbag economic thinking is reflected in confusion around the role of banks. Often banks are presented as merely acting as a link between savers and borrowers. People deposit money and the banks lend it on. It is acknowledged that banks also create ‘credit money’ through loans but this is not seen as ‘real money’. The problem then becomes what is ‘real money’? If the banks are not issuing real money, then some other body must be the source of new deposits. As there are only two sources for new national (or cross-national) money, the public money system or bank-issued debt, the only source of ‘real money’ must be the public sector. Despite the restrictions of handbag economics on the right of the public sector to create and spend money, its theory of banking needs the public sector as a source of bank deposits. The contradiction therefore goes to the heart of handbag economics.

The state must be totally dependent on privately circulated money, but must also be the source of new bank deposits. The only other possible explanation of new deposits is that they are the result of new loans. That is, all new money originates in bank debt, which as has already been argued is unsustainable. Privatisation of the national money supply as bank-created debt must end in crisis, requiring bailout by new public money. Both the theory and practice of handbag economics denies the political reality of public money, yet it is dependent upon it.

Two Circuits of Money

The identification of public and private mechanisms for the creation and circulation of money reveals two distinct monetary circuits. One is the issue of bank credits (debts) which are circulated as money before being repaid with interest to the originating bank. This circuit always requires more money to be repaid than was created. The other circuit is publicly created money that is spent, lent or allocated into circulation. This money is then claimed through fees and taxation, but rarely at 100% or more. Taxation in this context no longer relates to the extraction of privately generated money, that is, as a fiscal instrument. Instead, taxation is used to manage the money supply by retrieving public money from circulation, that is, it is a monetary instrument.

From Critique to Change

All sovereign money systems have the capacity to create public money free of debt at the point of creation. How this money is circulated after that is a matter of policy – it can be lent, spent or allocated. The social and public nature of money needs to be reclaimed – particularly by Sociology. As maintaining the integrity of the money supply is ultimately a public responsibility as revealed by the bailout, money should be seen as a public resource with the creation and circulation of new money subject to democratic governance. The capacity to create loans as public currency should be removed from the banking sector or at least be made subject to democratic debate.


In the last two decades the Italian university system has witnessed a wide and deep process of change enacted by two waves of reform policies, after a prolonged period of inertia. Those two waves are based on two different kinds of logics, underpinning two different policy and political goal. The first wave can be labelled as modernizing reformism, the second one as hyper-reformism.

After having briefly discussed the two reform waves, I will focus on the hyper-reformism phase, characterizing the last decade of reform policies carried out by the centre-right government, and their disruptive effects on system and institutions.

**From inertia to hyper-reformism**

Between the end of Second World War and the late ‘80s the Italian university system was characterized by inertia. University policy-making was unable to produce structural reform to match the changes occurring in wider society, except piecemeal changes introduced on the wave of emergencies and de-coupled from any organic and structural design. Although Italy belonged to the European continental centralistic model of governance, the political centre was very weak because of a high instability of governments based on rather heterogeneous and litigious political coalitions. This, in turn produced that peculiar model of university system governance highlighted by Burton Clark: a weak centralization with a strong academic oligarchy. This twofold feature prevented change in the system for a long time.

In 1989 the Ministry of University and Scientific and Technical Research was instituted as a separate and autonomous ministry from the one of Public Education and universities were granted wider autonomy. In 1990 the first curricular differentiation was introduced: short 3-year vocational courses flanked the traditional longer 4-year academic ones. The reform was elaborated, pursued and implemented in a very centralistic fashion with a very little involvement of the academic community.

The result was that the main actors towards which the reform was addressed (academics and students) reacted negatively: on the one hand, students opposed the reform and argued that university autonomy would have opened up to economic interests and the new vocational courses were designed to maintain social inequalities; on the other, academics partly shared those arguments, but in particular feared that the reform would have modified the running of universities as well as their work. Thus, academics enacted a strategy of passive resistance. The reform, therefore, had been implemented very slowly and largely in a formalistic fashion, with very scant substantial change.

In spring of 1996 the centre-left coalition won the general election and a policy window for university reform opened up based on the awareness that the previous reform didn’t produce the expected outcomes. Between 1996 and 2000 a new university reform was elaborated and approved, and the formal structure of the system completely transformed:

- institutional autonomy was widened to cover finance, study programs and curricula, academic recruitment and personnel policies, and doctoral courses;
- the centre’s regulative role was significantly reduced;
- the curricular structure was subjected to the Bologna Process;
- a new evaluation structure was devised with the task of guiding public funding with reliable data on university performance;
- new and more favourable regulations for entrepreneurial activities with universities and academics were made.

Although resistance, struggles, domestication and adaption did occur, changes started to take place inside the university field. The seeds of change and innovation needed to be cultivated and supported. Instead, what happened was a process of disruption brought about by a new policy that can be labelled hyper-reformism and a different kind of State-university relationships characterized by dirigisme and a high degree of conflict.
When in 2001 the centre-right government came to power, the universities were in the early stages of reform implementation. Since then, the university policy-making entered the hyper-reformism stage.

This stage was characterized by two reform waves, the first one occurred between 2001 and 2005 and the second one, more radical and disruptive, between 2008 and 2010.

In 2001 the centre-right government announced the purpose to do away with the reform and go back to the old system. In this destabilizing situation, the role of the Italian Conference of Rectors assumed strength and centrality, acting as an institutional bulwark, which immediately stopped any intention to reform the reform.

But the Ministry and Government’s withdrawal was not without consequences. The 2002 Financial Bill cut 10% from public funding for the university, which brought Rectors to a sensational and unprecedented initiative – they threatened to resign en masse. Thus the funding was restored to the 2001 level.

The government’s intention to reform the reform had been realized since the second half of the legislature. In 2003 a partial reform of study cycles was approved. Though it did not change the curricular framework based on Bachelor/Master scheme, it reduced university autonomy in opening courses by introducing stricter controls and limitations to be exerted by the Ministry of Economy and Finance to reduce the funding cuts. Paradoxically rectors supported the reform, exchanging the promise was never fulfilled. On the contrary the funding cut worsened with the axing of other expenditure voices, like the financial support for students and research funds. The reform partly followed the 2003 and 2005 decrees, but strengthened centralization and dirigisme. It escalated limitations and controls over course offers; made the national evaluation agency a tool of control and rationalization for the whole system; institutional governance inspired by New Public Management was made mandatory for all public institutions. The 2005 reform concerning academic recruitment and careers was reinstated, all to be highly, tightly and centrally regulated by norms and regulations. Institutional autonomy simply evaporated and the system went back to its centralized origins. Further, all that and the implementation of the reform were, and still are, embedded in conditions of university underfunding.

Legitimating disruption

The social sciences generally view institutions, and in particular those special institutions which are the political ones, as producers and bringers of stability and order in the social world. With the rise and the hegemonic achievement of neoliberal agenda, political institutions acted as disruptors of order in the political, economic and social spheres, creating a high degree of instability which definitively burst out and become manifest with the financial-economic crisis.

This disruptive role is particularly manifest in the hyper-reformism affecting the Italian university policy-making in the last decade which produced a high degree of instability in the field and, above all, it had a peculiarity: it wasn’t linked to any rational-economic crisis. The social sciences generally view the university underfunding.

and academics’ salary increases blocked (as they still are).

The government rode the waves and in 2009 announced an overall university reform, which was approved in December 2010. Paradoxically rectors supported the reform, exchanging their support for the promise of the Ministry of Economy and Finance to reduce the funding cuts. If we assume that the promise was never fulfilled. On the contrary the funding cut worsened with the axing of other expenditure voices, like the financial support for students and research funds.
2. there are too many study programs, more than any other European higher education system
3. there are too many academics and they are largely idler, familistic, corporative and conservative
4. universities are over-financed and money is badly or ineffectively managed and used. Further, tuition fees are very low, so that university is almost free of charge for students and their families
5. formative supply is de-coupled from the real economy and labor market needs, following more academics’ interests than societal and economic ones. Graduates are too many and mainly unusable by employers because their grounding is largely inadequate and scant. Further, young people enrolled in universities’ courses are too many for both the country and its economic sector which doesn’t need them
6. university research is largely irrelevant at international level, of low quality and carried out on strange, useless and eccentric topics
7. on the whole the Italian university system is of a low quality, as indicated by the poor assessment of Italian universities in both national and international rankings.

This delegitimizing rhetoric, made of anti-cultural ideology, false data, half truths, ignorance and reality distortions, soon became a self-sustaining process, commonsense, a reality false data, half truths, ignorance and reality distortions, soon became a self-sustaining process, commonsense, a reality false data, half truths, ignorance and reality distortions, soon became a self-sustaining process, commonsense, a reality false data, half truths, ignorance and reality distortions, soon became a self-sustaining process, commonsense, a reality

Effects of hyper-reformism and neoliberal policies on the university

Let’s turn our attention to hyper reformism and neoliberal policies effects on the university system.

The ordinary funding (resources provided directly by the State for the system’s functioning) between 2001 and 2008 grew by 19% in nominal value but remained rather stable in real value; but since 2008 it decreased dramatically both in nominal and real value. The ordinary funding in 2012 was almost the same as that of 2005. More importantly between 2000 and 2012 the ordinary funding quota on the total university revenues, dropped from 61% to 53% (-8%). Public funding for Research Projects of National Interest dropped by 72% between 2003 and 2012; in 2013 this funding stream was equal to zero. The National University Council calculated that between 2009 and 2013 the ordinary funding decrease was equal to 20%. If other expenditure cuts are summed, the public university lost between 25% and 30% of its State provided financial resources.

At the same time, university revenues from tuition fees increased by 80% between 2000 and 2012. Currently, tuition fees average cost is 1,004 Euros per year, but in the northern part of the country the average is 1,346 Euros while in the southern part is 686 Euros. On the whole, Italy ranked third of the countries characterized by heavy funding cuts to education and higher education. Eurostat ranks Italy at the penultimate place, before Turkey, for the percentage of 25–34 years old individuals holding a higher education degree. Both OECD and Eurostat data show Italy is lagging behind other developed countries for funding and expenditure in higher education and research. Italian graduates are increasingly emigrating abroad because of a lack of job opportunities, lower salaries and the highly diffused short-term contracts offered in the domestic labor market.

These data (there are many more examples I could also use) suggest that in the last ten years or so, policies for (or better, against) the university, have purposefully disrupted the system based on an ideological furor against all that is public and all that concerns culture and education. Currently this furor has appeased, even if the current government has cut another 50 million Euros from university funding.

The Italian University is now severely damaged and it will take years and completely different policies for it to recover its strength.

Conclusions

The last issue of OECD Education at a Glance published in 2013 shows how Italy is the one-off among the most developed countries characterized by heavy funding cuts to education and higher education. Eurostat ranks Italy at the penultimate place, before Turkey, for the percentage of 25–34 years old individuals holding a higher education degree. Both OECD and Eurostat data show Italy is lagging behind other developed countries for funding and expenditure in higher education and research. Italian graduates are increasingly emigrating abroad because of a lack of job opportunities, lower salaries and the highly diffused short-term contracts offered in the domestic labor market.

These data (there are many more examples I could also use) suggest that in the last ten years or so, policies for (or better, against) the university, have purposefully disrupted the system based on an ideological furor against all that is public and all that concerns culture and education. Currently this furor has appeased, even if the current government has cut another 50 million Euros from university funding.

The Italian University is now severely damaged and it will take years and completely different policies for it to recover its strength.

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L’Association Française de Sociologie: A Young and Rallying Organization

The Association française de sociologie (AFS) was founded in 2002, as a replacement for the Société française de sociologie (SFS, 1962-2002), which was itself the successor of the Institut français de sociologie (IFS, 1924-1962), a small scholarly society whose activity was purely scientific. If the IFS was not concerned with the institutionalization of sociology, the SFS had from the outset broader ambitions: it also intended to strengthen the scientific status of the discipline, to increase its visibility, and to study the issues faced by the sociological ‘profession’, including the training of young researchers, the relations between social actors and sociologists, and ethical dilemmas faced by the latter. Unfortunately, disagreements grew quickly between the proponents of sociology as a practice of expertise for policymakers and the advocates of a more militant and emancipatory design based on critical sociology. In 1965, the latter left the SFS, denouncing its takeover by those who wanted to be advisers to the power elite. The divergence then deepened with the May 1968 events, and lasted for several decades. During these times when theoretical oppositions were also particularly marked, the SFS was unable to bring French sociologists together, and became in fact an honorary learned society whose activities came down to the organization of episodic workshops. In 2001, before its dissolution, it had barely fifty members.

However, this situation was not the only reason that drove the last president of the SFS – Claude Dubar – to transform it into an open, inclusive and pluralistic association. Quite paradoxically, the need for a large national organization for sociologists became pressing in relation with a necessity to draw more clearly the boundaries of the discipline. When in 2001 the most famous French astrologer obtained a PhD in sociology at the Sorbonne (Paris Descartes University) with a thesis pleading for the explanatory superiority of astrology over the social sciences, which caused a general outrage among academics. The almost unanimous reaction showed that the wide majority of sociologists in the country shared at least a minimal definition of their discipline – as, for instance, based on empirical research – and that it could be useful to gather all the scholars and professionals accepting these basic requirements within a national association representing sociology.

The foundation of the AFS in 2002 was therefore a turning point. In 2004, its first conference brought together more than 1,100 participants, and the association has currently 1,500 members: including academics with permanent positions (54%), PhD students and postdoctoral fellows (41%), and professional sociologists working for the public administration, companies, associations, etc. (about 5%). The scientific activities of the AFS are largely decentralized in nearly fifty thematic research networks, each of which covers a specific area of sociology: urban sociology, political sociology, economic sociology, labor, education, family, aging and the life course, health, religion, methodology, social policy, etc. These networks are meant to facilitate relationships, work and scientific debate among members sharing a common interest, across theoretical and methodological approaches. But the AFS also promotes collaborations between networks, aiming to avoid that the necessary specializations would lead to a fragmentation of the discipline.

Every two years, the association holds a national congress. It usually takes place at the beginning or at the end of the summer, each time on a different university campus. The sociology department and research centers of the hosting institution largely help in the organization. The congresses are central events in the life of the AFS. Not only because they are the occasion to elect half of the executive committee (which has 22 members, including doctoral candidates) and the new president of the association. But especially because each congress offers a unique overview of the sociological research ongoing in France: all thematic networks organize several sessions, and the program is complemented by plenary, semi-plenary sessions and roundtables. In addition, congresses are also a key moment for the professional socialization of hundreds of PhD students, who often give there their first important scientific presentation. The last one was held in Nantes during four days in September 2013. It focused on the theme of the multiple forms of domination, which is of course both topical (related with the rise of inequality, the lasting effects of the Great Recession, the collapse of political regimes previously deemed solid, the fragility of the European institutions, the destabilization of consolidated bodies of knowledge and expertise, the inconclusiveness of many social movements) and a classical
sociological subject. More than 280 sessions were organized, including 12 (semi-)plenary ones and an inaugural keynote lecture of Luc Boltanski on sociology and social critique, which were video-recorded and can be viewed on AFS’ website (www.afs-socio.fr).

In addition to fostering the scientific and professional socialization of young sociologists within the national field of the discipline, the Association also acts as a pressure group that promotes academic employment and monitors its conditions. In the past years, along with the Association des sociologues enseignant-e-s du supérieur (ASES, a sister association which represents the university teachers of sociology), the AFS has been a key player in pushing toward more transparency and procedural justice within the French job market. The two associations do not have any official prerogative over the Sociology section of the National Council of Universities (CNU), which delivers the authorizations to apply to assistant and full professor positions, nor over the selection committees of the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), that hire permanent full-time researchers and supervise their careers. However, they pay close attention to their functioning, denounce when necessary their dysfunctions, and – every four years, when these committees are renewed through elections and/or nominations – the AFS campaigns and lobbies the Ministry to push the candidates that seem to favor the most fairness, good practices and scientific excellence.

With the labor unions and several other disciplinary and multidisciplinary associations, the AFS also took part in the many mobilizations of the last years against the gradual downsizing of public research, the pauperization of its universities, the almost total shift towards project-based funding, and the precarization of academic careers: an evolution that is affecting everybody (including the students) in a negative way, but especially “young” doctors, which often end up being forced to abandon all scientific activities. These mobilizations were not very effective in stopping what appears now clearly as the implementation of an austerity plan in French academia, but occasionally some demands were heard and were able to inflect the process.

Finally, the association has been actively involved in public debates about scientific and academic freedom, both in France and in other countries. Since 2011, it has fully supported Pınar Selek, a Turkish colleague now exiled in France that was tortured during days by the police of her country (because she refused to reveal the identities of Kurdish activists she had interviewed for her research), and subsequently charged with made up terrorism accusations and sentenced to life in prison. In 2013-14, on a less tragic matter, the AFS also participated in the response to a vast disinformation campaign orchestrated by a coalition of Catholic movements and by the right-wing political parties to delegitimize the study of gender inequality. In this case and in others, the association had to answer and debunk false assertions – sometimes coming from the government itself… – about the purpose, the actual professional uses, and the social utility of social sciences. During the last couple of years, a half dozen of op-ed signed by the AFS were published in major media outlets such as Le Monde, Libération and Mediapart.

Several of these questions, concerning the intellectual and institutional life of the French sociology community and the ways social sciences are perceived in the public sphere, will be addressed in the next issues of Socio-logos: the peer-reviewed journal published online by the AFS (http://socio-logos.revues.org), which has been recently rebooted to increase the visibility of the scientific activities of the Association’s research networks, to encourage more data-based analysis and reflexivity about our work conditions, and to engage more consistently in international comparisons with other (changing) academic systems. The latter is a task for which the help of our European colleagues is definitely most welcome!

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Vincenzo Cicchelli
A Cosmopolitan Perspective on Globalization

Vincenzo had to resign from the ESA Executive Committee for pressing personal reasons. We very much regret his departure from the EC, but he remains active in the ESA especially through RN15 Global, Transnational and Cosmopolitan Sociology. He has kindly agreed to write the article that follows on his involvement in this area.

When I was adolescent I was extremely interested in cultural diversity, language and history. I remember being deeply impressed by Levi Strauss’ book Race and History and I decided to move from Italy, where I was born, to Paris. Other great French thinkers of that period inspired me, such as Fernand Braudel, Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, Jean-Pierre Vernant. It was quite natural to me to embrace a science-based understanding of societies. Indeed, since this period, I have believed that sociology needs to be nourished by history, anthropology and geography.

After several years of working on comparisons of youth conditions in Euromediterranean area, I am now strongly involved in enhancing post-national perspectives. The current globalization process widens horizons more than ever before and undermines the centrality of Nation-State (Cicchelli and Dufoix, forthcoming). The intensification of tendencies to globalization – as manifest in growing autonomy of world capitalist forces, intense movements of international migration, and the concomitant development of social problems on an international scale – reduces the control of the Nation-State over its own economic and political affairs (Eisenstadt, 2003).

Recent worldwide changes require the development of existing sociological methods in order to understand increasingly transnational and global levels of social reality. Transnational processes impact on the way in which comparison can be made (Giraud, 2012). Especially in the case of international comparisons, there is a general tendency to assume that to establish an accurate comparability between the societies that are observed, social phenomena are supposed to be culturally homogenous, relatively stable and nationally determined in each of countries compared. According to H. Patrick Glenn (2013), the Romantic idea of the nation-state, which has been widespread for over two centuries in public discourse and in academia, is in fact a failed concept. It implies that the population of a state should be homogenous in terms of language, religion, and ethnicity on one hand and that the nation and the state should coincide on the other hand. Since human diversity happens in states of all sizes, locations and origins, “the truth is, there never has been, and there never will be, a nation-state”. One of the main aims of international research should be, in my view, to deal with the new challenges for comparative methods posed by globalization and transnational processes. Since classical comparison does not seem able anymore to catch the cultural diversity, scholars are now aware other tools are necessary to assess what is particular to a human group and what is shared between communities.

Another perspective I am working from is focused on understanding how people engage with globalization (Cicchelli, 2014). The impact of globalization on biographical trajectories, lifestyles and everyday life address several challenging issues for social scientists: What are the links between the feelings of national, transnational, local and global belonging? What remains unknown in this new injunction of accepting cultural differences in the construction of one’s own identity? Above all, what characterizes the learning experience regarding this relationship between the Self and the Other in a plural world? I think that to answer these questions it is necessary to take into account the narratives of ordinary people as well as archetypal cosmopolitans such as global business elites, refugees and expatriates. In other words, the question I address in my recent (and forthcoming) books is both general and specific. It is general because it inevitably covers a number of commonalities that are shared by authors who are actively engaged in promoting a cosmopolitan perspective (Delanty, Fine, Chernilo, Beck, Cotesta, Woodward, Pendenza, Inglis, Rumford). It is specific because I am concerned with the operationalization of this “big idea” (Skrbis and Woodward, 2013).

As an engaged project, cosmopolitanism pits itself against all iteratively regenerated forces of exclusion, including those that re-appear under the aegis of ‘respect for difference’ (Fine, 2003).

There is a revived interest in cosmopolitanism today. Powerful and compelling as it is, cosmopolitanism should be approached with care, lest it turns into an autopoietic narrative, separated from empirical evidence. Cosmopolitanism invites more controversy than consensus. And, even for sympathetic souls, it poses a congeries of paradoxes (Appiah, 2005). And yet, despite scholarly debates surrounding it, the now well-established current interest in the cosmopolitan perspective in sociology occurs along with the expansion in the global movement of capital, commodities, people, ideas, and images that is moulding the cosmopolitan world. A cosmopolitan outlook for studying the dynamics of globalization of contemporary societies is justified by two interrelated arguments: on one hand, the intermingling of cultures and identities (Beck, 2006) that are shaping the lives of contemporary individuals as people are being confronted with cultural differences, and on the other hand, the need for a global response to global risks that international organisms of regulation should make. In this sense, the cosmopolitan approach is both analytical and normative, a statement and an aspiration, a fact and a moral concern.

The usefulness of a cosmopolitan outlook is to take advantage of the global interconnectedness, and to go beyond global studies, by approaching it in a specific way. As “the ‘global
other’ is in our midst” (Beck and Grande, 2010: 417), it is consequently crucial that a cosmopolitan approach be based on how otherness and plurality are handled by individuals, human groups and institutions. What is the specificity of cosmopolitanism in comparison with other approaches related to cultural differences? It is of paramount importance to be aware of the complexity of the intercultural dynamics as three dimensions are embedded in the interplay between cultures (Todorov, 1982): an epistemological dimension (how to identify and interpret alterity in its peculiar and even odd manifestations, especially when compared to one’s own cultural code); an axiological dimension (to what extent to appreciate or reject the values of the others, to consider them as equal or unequal); and a praxeological dimension (how to coexist with alterity, how to bridge-gap with others). Among these three dimensions, the axiological one has unmistakably played a great role in the way in which Western societies has interacted with otherness - this can particularly be stated in the history of colonialism since the great geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries - by considering it from a universalistic or particularistic stance. The question is therefore to what extent a cosmopolitan approach can contribute to go far beyond this historical antinomy.

As an engaged project, cosmopolitanism pits itself against all iteratively regenerated forces of exclusion, including those that re-appear under the aegis of ‘respect for difference’ (Fine, 2003). In contrast to traditional universalistic approaches, cosmopolitanism conveys universal concern and respect for legitimate difference, an attitude of openness and responsibility towards the plurality of humanity, and a fundamental tension between moral obligations to one’s local origins and/or group membership and to the rest of the world. Insofar as the basic presupposition of a cosmopolitan perspective is that “the human species can be understood only if it is treated as a single subject, within which all forms of difference are recognized and respected but conceptualized as internal to the substantive unity of all human beings” (Fine, 2007: X), combining the universal and the particular is uncontroversially the task of a cosmopolitan analysis (Cotesta, 2012). Plurality and common humanity are thought together, as the two faces of the same coin. A defence of cosmopolitanism entails both a recognition of otherness and the non-dissolution of difference into universality (Beck, 2006). Appiah (2005 sees cosmopolitanism as “universalis plus difference,” our shared humanity plus the specific habits, objects, sounds, and creations of people in different locations.

Cosmopolitan theories aim on moving away from the rather reductive universalism-particularism aporia and on going beyond the basic recognition of the existence of a common humanity and the call for respect of different cultures (however worthy these can be). Two avenues of research are proposed, both of them understood as a specific way in which cosmopolitanism provides a framework that challenges globalization (Cicchelli, 2014). The first one is related to the dynamic of glocalization. The expression of a particular culture and of a particular identity can only take place through the use of a shared code and when this expression is part of culture pursuing a universalistic aim. As paradoxical as it may seem, “the choice of a common yardstick such as Coca-Cola today, the Bible and the Koran in the past, represents the price different cultures must pay to break into the world market of identities” (Arnaud, 2001: 24-25). This means that to be able to express themselves and to reflect on themselves, cultures need to have a common reference and their identities are always defined within a larger framework. Cultural expressions can be idiosyncratic, as long as globalized patterns are transformed into particular signs, and particular signs are translated into universal signs. It is possible to believe that “far from constraining the existence of differences, universalism is the best way of expressing them. Today, as in the past, different identities are formed by shunts and connections through global signifiers” (idem: 49). Correctly understood, universalism plays the role of an intellectual resource which, “far from being opposed to the identification of specificities and particularities, creates the very framework that makes such recognition acceptable and possible” (Chernilo, 2012: 57).

The second approach involves following the way in which boundaries are being reframed by globalization processes. One of most striking paradoxes of the cosmopolitan world is that the boundaries that separate and bind cultural identities, social groups, communities are becoming increasingly open, permeable, blurred and porous in one hand and more closed, rigid, bright, and firm on the other hand. In the field of international relations, far from generating an easy understanding and transnationalization of ideas, globalization “seems to have highlighted what it is that people do not have in common and find dislikeable about each other” (Held, 2010: 93). Self-determination, secure borders, geopolitical and geoecomic advantage are the contemporary drivers of nationalism that place “an emphasis on the pursuit of the national interest above concerns with what it is that humans might have in common” (Held, 2010: 94). Therefore, in a global society what is at stake is not hybridity, cross-pollination, global mélange, which is common throughout history, but “boundaries and the social proclivity to boundary fetishism” (Pieterse, 2009: 4). Rather than being eroded, boundaries are transformed by transnational processes.

In my view it is worthwhile to consider in which way and to what extent cosmopolitanism could become a valuable perspective in the social sciences. More generally, in my books I attempt to show there is some credence to the view that the cosmopolitan sociology is a heuristic way to understand how human communities, individuals, and institutions relate to globality and its outcomes (Cotesta, Cicchelli and Nocenzi, 2013).

I endeavour to address a consistent operationalization of this perspective by exploring what a framework of cosmopolitan socialization would entail. In a forthcoming book (Soutien stationnaire du cosmopolitisme), I take a distinctive position in the analysis of lived cosmopolitanism: I consider it as a spirit or a mind that people acquire through actual, virtual, or imagined contact with alterity, rather than as a substantive property or reified disposition. Cosmopolitan socialization is meant to follow the long, tangled, and reversible paths that lead people to produce or not universalistic accounts and cosmopolitan repertoires, to perform or not cosmopolitan cultures. Four pillars of cosmopolitan socialization are distinguished: aesthetic (Cicchelli and Octobre, 2013), cultural (Cicchelli, 2012), political and ethical. They are conceived as distinctive ways of handling otherness and as distinctive expressions of the cosmopolitan spirit in a world where boundaries are paradoxically more porous and more rigid.
Cosmopolitan socialization is a learning process, experienced by individuals regarding the transnational facets of the world that surround them, during which people learn – or refuse - to include the various forms of socio-cultural proximity with the Other. This means we must use the appropriate methodological tools in order to determine at which point the cultural distance between the Ego and the Other becomes relevant, as well as to establish the mechanisms to measure how boundaries between groups of people become more porous or more rigid. More precisely, the process of building a cosmopolitan relationship with the world necessitates studying: 1) the place of the Other in contemporary identities and the management of plurality and cultural diversity; 2) the inscription of one’s own belonging into a broader horizon and the recognition of the self in a common humanity.

And last but not least, let me evoke a recent work (with Massimo Pendenza) on a possible convergence between Europe and Cosmopolitanism. If cosmopolitan sociology can be considered as an attempt to understand how individuals, social groups and institutions deal with the challenges of ever more transnational social processes, then the European issue can be fully inserted within such an approach. On the two distinct planes of socialization of individuals and of their governance, Europe represents in miniature a field of observation of the ways in which citizens and institutions are dealing with situations that require conceptual frameworks and analyses of social reality that go beyond the traditional sociology of Nation-States.

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Finland’s Professor of the Year: An Interview with Pertti Alasuutari

Pertti Alasuutari was born on January 18th, 1956 in the rural municipality of Rovaniemi, Finland. He grew up there with his parents and two sisters. His father worked as a carver in a local fish factory while his mother served in several different occupations. Like both his sisters, Pertti went to the school in Rovaniemi. He graduated from the Rovaniemi upper secondary school in 1975, and then went into military service. In 1976 Pertti applied for admission in the Technical University of Oulu, where he wanted to study to become a civil engineer. However, his plans soon changed. After the first year of his engineering studies Pertti quit and moved to Tampere. In autumn 1978, he started his studies at the University of Tampere, this time in journalism. However, he was attracted by sociology and political science. In 1983, he graduated in sociology from the University of Tampere. Besides that he did MA's in journalism and mass communication studies. Three years later Pertti became a licentiate in social sciences. In 1990 he defended his doctoral thesis in sociology, also at the University of Tampere.

Pertti’s research career started very early. His Master's thesis was the first ever awarded by the Finnish Westermark Society as the best thesis of the year. This scientific recognition guaranteed him a good position in the Finnish academia. Before graduating he already had a job waiting for him as a researcher. The Finnish Foundation for Alcohol research had granted him a scholarship for postgraduate studies. This resulted in a doctoral thesis on drinking culture, which was also awarded by the University of Tampere as the best doctoral thesis of the year. After defending his thesis Pertti worked in different teaching and research positions at the Department of Sociology, University of Tampere. In 2007, Pertti was appointed to the post of Professor of Sociology at Tampere. During 2009-2013 he served as the prestigious Academy Professor, the highest academic award and grant given in Finland.

When Pertti is asked about sociology - about its role in his life and the way sociology as a discipline has changed since he started his career - he becomes thoughtful. He admits that sociology was not his first choice and that he ended up working in this field almost by accident. However, he says, “sociological research is very rewarding … It goes hand in hand with the society and aims to answer the questions that are relevant in time. This means that old themes can come back over and over again on the discipline’s agenda”. Yet, he claims, this does not mean that sociology does not follow any trends. Like any discipline, Pertti stresses, sociology also follows fashions and trends in research.

Pertti takes qualitative research as an example and says that when he started his research career there was hardly, if any, knowledge of qualitative research available. He tells how he was asked after he finished his doctoral thesis to give a course on qualitative research methods at the University of Tampere. “For me this course served as an excellent tool for self-education”, he remembers. “Since there was not any literature available how to do qualitative research, I needed to find out about it by myself”. This resulted among other things in a book on qualitative research that has been widely used as textbook in Finnish universities. However, Pertti says, his fascination with qualitative research and methods was not an accident. It took place with the so called ‘linguistic turn’ or the turn from the predominant realism to structuralism and post-structuralism that had already begun in the social sciences in the 1970s.

When Pertti is asked where sociology is at its best he grins and says that sociology is at its best in explaining truisms. According to him, a social scientist has done good work when she has made her audience aware of the phenomena that it has previously only taken for granted. Pertti also claims that sociology is very much needed as a critical voice when questioning what is going on in society. To do this sociology cannot be disconnected from society, “if anything, it needs to be very much interlinked with it”, he stresses. Pertti takes politics and economy as examples and says that sociology can offer a lot to politicians and economists in seeing how society works. This knowledge can help decision-makers and experts in finding better answers to societal problems. However, Pertti claims, sociological research is in danger if it takes place under the conditions set by decision-makers. If anything, sociological inquiry, like any other research, should be free from politics. “Only in that way and through interdisciplinary collaboration can research produce true innovations”, he remarks.

In January this year Pertti was selected as Finland’s Professor of the Year. He says that he is very grateful for the recognition he has received for his work. When asked what it means to him, he says that when he is awarded, his research team is awarded. “It is this collaboration that I have with my research team members through which I have learned a lot and that has led to this prize.” Pertti claims that he is fortunate in many other ways, too. “For the last ten years I have been able to concentrate on the research themes I myself find fascinating.” Epistemic governance, the dynamics and interplay between nation-states, and the spread of international policy ideas are few of these. Pertti says that when he wrote his book ‘Second Republic' (Toinen Tasavallalta) in the 1990s many questions were left unanswered. These are the questions I have been working on during the past ten years. “Luckily I have met gifted scholars who have helped me with this work”, he says.

Finally I asked Pertti about his most valuable book or work. He says that it is still to come. “My aim is to write some sort of ‘invitation’ in social research.” However, it will not be a typical textbook. “I want to make it as a synthesis of detective novel and social scientific research and I have already started drafting it”, he reveals.

Pertti has published numerous books and journal articles both in Finnish and internationally. He lives in Lempäläälä together with his wife Maarit. They have three grown-up sons.

Marjana Rautalin is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Tampere, Finland. Her research interests include world polity and domestication research and in particular, the role of international governmental organisations in spreading global policy models. She has addressed these topics in her PhD dissertation titled Domestication of international comparisons: The role of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in Finnish Education Policy (2013). From August 2014 she will be a fixed-term postdoctoral fellow at the University of Tampere’s Institute for Advanced Social Research in Finland, conducting research on the synchronization of national education policies. Rautalin has worked together with Pertti Alasuutari for more than ten years.
President Carmen Leccardi has opened a membership consultation on the Statutes and Bylaws of the European Sociological Association. The proposal is the same as the previous Executive Committee, under my Presidency, proposed to the General Assembly in Turin in August 2014. The General Assembly was not then willing to discuss the matter, but decided to live on with the version last submitted to the authorities in 2005.

ESA has grown from a handful of enthusiasts since it was founded about 25 years ago, to one of the biggest and liveliest international sociological associations in the world, with about 2,500 members, 36 RNs, and almost 3,000 participants attending its conferences every two years. This number was reached last year in Turin, Italy. With two journals and a book series, major conferences, interim Research Network meetings, an active role in European Science policy consultations as member of the Initiative for Science in Europe (a consortium scientific associations from all fields, now led by the sociologist Helga Nowotny who was previously President of the European Research Council), ESA is a very important player in the field. Its structure has grown to be complex. ESA has a President, an Executive Committee, two Councils, one for the National Associations (NAs) and another for Research Networks (RNs), with coordinators and a board serving each Network also. All of these bodies have not only academic and organizational responsibilities, but financial and legal ones also. The financial scale of ESA’s operations is impressive. Its two-year budget including the conference and membership fees is well over a million Euros. The returns from these cover the salary of one full-time secretary in Paris, Gisèle Tchinda, the expenses of the Executive Committee, PhD workshops and Summer Schools, and contributions to RN activities, including their mid-term conferences that often attract more than one hundred participants, too.

Every two years ESA’s members are invited to participate in four different elections for the President; the Members of the Executive Committee, which is elected directly by ESA members; and Chairs of the two Councils, who now become full members of the Executive Committee. In addition, each Research Network must elect its Coordinators and Boards for the next two years.

This structure has grown by piecemeal amendments made to the first set of Statutes approved by the General Assembly in Helsinki on August 30th, 2001. When the amendments were made, nobody had an overview of how the electoral procedures matched, how clear they were, who is to compose the lists of candidates and to do this, how the voting is carried out (the General Assembly usually attracts well under than 10 percent of the Association’s members), and what are the requirements and mandates of the elected officials.

When the past Executive Committee started its work in 2011 under my Presidency, members were frustrated about the need to discuss very small managerial and administrative details that should have simple routine rules. This confirmed my experience from the two years of service as Member in the previous Executive Committees: things such as the reimbursement of travel expenses, communication with the RNs and the NAs, organizing the work between different officials in the organization etc. took most of the time of the Executive Committee meetings, leaving very little room for discussions on the actualities of the EU research funding policy that has been going through another turning point with the Horizon 2020, the role of sociology in the academia and in society, the diversity of the field, teaching sociology and adapting it to the Bologna system and so on. There was no way of having discussions on the different views on sociology and its role in the contemporary world held by the Members themselves. These, we felt, should be the responsibility of elected officials in the Executive Committee, not managerial routines.

So we decided to go back to what already had been decided, and having mapped it out, we could decide what we think is the right way of running the organization, to make room for more substantive issues. We also decided to have the Statutes, as they now stand, checked by an English-speaking French lawyer, to make sure that we have a proper legal basis for the activities. All officials acting on behalf of the organization must have a clear mandate to make contracts, and therefore their status should be well defined in the Statutes.

Both decisions turned out to be challenging. The lawyer’s view was that as the Statutes now stood, they had too many inconsistencies especially about the elections and the functions of the elected officials. His view was that whatever these people do, or think they do, in the name of the organization, the consequences and responsibility fall upon the President alone, whether she or he knows about the activities or not. As the Statutes are not clear, also as regards the purpose clause, there is a legal risk that someone – for example a tax office – might attack the organization with financial or other claims. As to managerial practices, our secretary Gisèle Tchinda carefully went through all discussion notes from previous Executive Committee meetings since 2005 when she has been working with us.

This was a very big job; the notes were not always clear with regard to what the decision had been on each issue. The same things had been discussed many times with different ideas but no previous decisions had been thereby cancelled. The next step was that Anne Ryen
undertook the task of summarising the material Gisèle had put together, and made proposals for house rules that then came to be called Bylaws. But as we went along, we realised that some of the house rules, like electoral procedures, need to be incorporated in the Statutes for reasons explained above.

So, after several discussions in the Executive Committee we finally came to a proposal for Statutes that formalise the current structure of the Association, and a set of house-rules called Bylaws. These were presented to the Lawyer's office in Paris, and once we got their comments, we submitted this for a consultation to ESA members in July 2013, about two weeks later than intended because as the Lawyer's comments came late and needed discussion among members of the office, the General Secretary Vincenzo Cicchelli, myself, and above all our then secretary Judith Bellemin-Noël, who was crucial in making sure that the English and French versions were compatible, and in other substantial issues as well.

From the membership we received about 60 proposals for changes, which were each considered in detail by the Executive Committee before the final version was brought to the General Assembly in Turin in August 2013. All the proposals for changes were discussed and settled with the proposers and those most immediately concerned, especially experienced Research Network leaders. The proposal of the Executive Committee to the General Assembly was unanimous, but we were prepared to discuss and hoped to have a vote in the GA on five issues:

1. the formulation of the Objectives clause;
2. the definition of Honorary Members;
3. whether new RNs should require that founding members represent at least three nations or a “sufficient national variety”;
4. how to assure gender equality in the elections; and
5. the rules for changing the Statutes (these are very ambiguous in the current version).

The Executive Committee’s proposals on these issues were presented with alternatives, in all cases except in regard to point five where the alternative was the 2005 formulation (i.e. no change).

This time the General Assembly was not willing to discuss the proposals, although their purpose was to maintain the ESA structures as it has evolved in the course of years, not to change it. This is normal: changing Statutes in associations if always difficult. But sometimes it is also necessary, not least in our situation where the original Statutes were written for an organization that was a fraction of our current size, participation was fully funded from participants’ own resources (for example the Executive Committee members had to pay for their expenses when they attended the meetings), and the number of people with organisational responsibilities were a handful and most of them members of the Executive Committee anyway. Now we have a large-scale organization where people in operative positions can no longer know each other personally, where they use public funding collected from members, and engage in the extremely complex business of organising conferences, workshops, sessions, publications and elections.

The French Law on Associations of 1905 is probably the most liberal of its kind in the world. Associations, free communities of citizens with common beliefs, values and interests, are an essential part of liberal representative democracy, and the French law has in this regard become a model for many democracies in Europe and the rest of the world during the past century. This law assures freedom of speech and opinion, it encourages citizen participation, and it grants association privileges that business corporations, co-operatives, public sector bodies and other actors do not have. Therefore it is necessary that associations have Statutes and their officials have mandates that justify these privileges.

Now a year has passed since our proposal was sent to ESA members for consultation. Another year is ahead for the Executive Committee to hear the members again and formulate a solution that they find useful, or at least can live with. It is important that members read the Executive Committee’s proposal NOW, and give the Executive Committee enough time to consider different alternatives before presenting a new version to the next General Assembly that will be held in Prague in 2015.

As we look around, sociology, the science of how orderly societies are possible, is now in greater need in the world than it has been for a long time. I truly hope that the ESA will be able to avoid spending too much energy on itself, and get back to its original business with the full intellectual force of its research tools.
Dear colleagues,

We invite you to visit the new website of the BENELEX project (“Benefit-sharing for an equitable transition to the green economy - the role of law”) at www.benelex.ed.ac.uk.

The BENELEX project explores the promises of benefit-sharing and the role of law in ensuring equity among and within States in addressing global environmental challenges. It investigates the conceptual and practical dimensions of benefit-sharing – a legal tool seeking to equitably allocate among different stakeholders the economic, as well as the socio-cultural and environmental advantages arising from the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and their regulation. The project explores benefit-sharing as an under-theorised approach that can contribute to address inter-related global environmental challenges (such as climate change, biodiversity loss, land degradation and the protection of the marine environment) by accommodating the special circumstances, cultural preferences and vulnerabilities of developing countries and of indigenous peoples and local communities. The green economy provides a frame for evaluating whether benefit-sharing may contribute to realizing equity among and within States in the context of efforts to enhance business development, job creation and public-sector savings related to environmental management.

The BENELEX project combines doctrinal and comparative analysis of international law developments under multilateral environmental, human rights and corporate accountability processes. This analysis is systematically enriched with real-world insights from the multilateral level through: participant observation in selected multilateral environmental negotiating sessions; organisation of international side-events at the margins of selected multilateral negotiations to gather feedback from negotiators from developing and developed countries, as well as NGOs, industry representatives and community-based organisations active at the multilateral level; and involvement of selected UN legal officers and NGOs that are active at the multilateral level in the project’s Advisory Board. In addition, to understand in a pragmatic and contextualised manner the role of benefit-sharing from the local to the global level, the project integrates empirical legal and political sociology research through fieldwork in India, Malaysia, South Africa, the Greek island of Ikaria and a country to be selected in Latin America.

The BENELEX website provides easily-accessible information about the project activities, and updates about its implementation. It features blogposts that discuss topical international law developments that are related to benefit-sharing; and starting from September 2014, a series of working papers to share the project preliminary findings among, and receive feedback from, a variety of stakeholders. In due course, the website will also feature policy briefs targeted to specific stakeholders (international negotiators; the private sector; NGOs advising communities and bilateral development partners) in English, French and Spanish and a training module for indigenous peoples and local communities providing practical guidance on operationalising benefit-sharing and concluding benefit-sharing agreements. The module will be developed by partner NGO Natural Justice and will be made available in English, French and Spanish. In addition, the BENELEX Twitter and Facebook accounts highlight new international documents, events, news and reports of relevance to benefit-sharing.

The BENELEX project is funded through a European Research Council Starting Grant made to Elisa Morgera, School of Law, University of Edinburgh, UK. The BENELEX project runs from November 2013-October 2018.

BENELEX project updates can be obtained through

- the BENELEX newsletters: http://www.benelex.ed.ac.uk/newsletter_archive
- Twitter: @BENELEXedinburg
- Facebook: BENELEX
The Department of Sociology is pleased to announce a call for conference papers on

**CRISIS AND SOCIAL CHANGE**
Towards Alternative Horizons

Keynote speakers
Greg Philo  Göran Therborn  Ted Benton

26-27 September 2014
Human, Social, and Political Science, Free School Lane, Cambridge, CB2 3RQ
towardsalternativehorizons.wordpress.com

Organized by the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge
Date: September 26th-27th, 2014
Venue: Faculty of Human, Social, and Political Sciences, Free School Lane, Cambridge, CB2 3RQ

This conference moves beyond crisis as a category of diagnosis and critique to explore alternative horizons, raising fundamental questions about the nature and extent of ruptures and continuity in the contemporary social world.

We are motivated by the generational need to draw upon the legacies of critique, while shifting toward the production of alternative futures. From diagnosis to treatment. From deconstruction to reconstruction. From negation to vision. From crisis to progress. Such is the responsibility of our Age, from which positive social change might rise.

We welcome contributions from researchers, activists, artists, and professionals from across the world on the following topics, though this list is by no means exhaustive, and we are keen to receive contributions on other topics aligned with the conference theme:

- Critical and Emancipatory Thought and Action
- Social Transformation and Cities
- Alternative Economic Practices
- Work and Life
- Media
- Education
- Revolutions and Social Protest
- (Post) Democracy
- Environment

We have also introduced a soapbox session within the Conference programme and encourage speakers to participate. For the natural orators out there, the soapbox session provides you with the opportunity to stand up for 2 minutes and air your fiery, risky, extravagant and controversial views on the following question: WHAT IS RADICALISM?

The conference is organized by PhD students from the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge. To give attendees time to explore the city’s history and socialise, the conference will be held over two days.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
- Professor Greg Philo (School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow),
- Professor Emeritus Goran Therborn (Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge)
- Professor Ted Benton (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Essex)

PLENARY PANELS:
The conference will also host two plenary panels on the following themes:

Plenary panel 1: The Great Recession and Varieties of Social and Political Responses
Chair: Professor Andrew Gamble
Dr. Rowan Williams (tbc)(Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge), Professor Larry King (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge), Professor John Kelly (Dept. of Management, Birkbeck), and Dr. Jeff Miley (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge)

Plenary panel 2: Mobilisation, Social Change and Revolution
Chair: Barrister Dexter Dias QC
Professor R.G Khondkermanas (Dept. of Applied Psychology, University of Amsterdam), Emeritus Reader in Sociology Dr. David Lane (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge), Professor Jane Wills (Dept. of Geography, Queen Mary University of London) and Dr. Manali Desai (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge)

HOW TO SUBMIT:
- Paper presentation: abstract (300 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)
- Poster presentation: abstract (300 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)
- Soap box presentation: abstract (100 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:
The deadline for the submission of abstracts is Monday, July 21st 2014. There is no registration fee.
All abstracts must be submitted by visiting the Ex Ordo abstract submission system (you will be required to setup an account first): http://csc2014.exordo.com

Successful applicants will be informed by July 31st, 2014.
The selected applicants are expected to submit an outline of their presentation (or the power point slides) by September 1st, 2014.

PUBLICATION AND AWARDS:
Awards will be given for Best Paper, Best Poster and Best Soap Box Presentations at the end of the Conference in recognition of originality and excellence. The Organising Committee also plans to publish selected papers of the highest quality in a special issue of a UK journal or as an edited volume.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
For further details on our distinguished keynote speakers and plenary panelists please visit www.towardsalternativehorizons.wordpress.com, email the organising committee at towardsalternativehorizons@gmail.com or visit our Facebook page www.facebook.com/events/850509748311055
The study of culture is the fastest growing area in both European and North American sociology. After years of mild neglect, political sociology is also re-establishing itself as a central plank of the discipline. The European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology aims to be a forum not so much for these fields of study considered separately, as for any work that explores the relationship between culture and politics through a sound sociological lens.

The journal takes an ecumenical view of 'culture': it welcomes articles that address the political setting, resonance or use of any of the arts (literature, art, music etc.), but it is also open to work that construes political phenomena in terms of a more philosophical or anthropological understanding of culture, where culture refers to the most general problem of meaning-formation. As for work that lies between these poles, it might address the relationship between politics and religion in all its forms, political symbolism past and present, styles of political leadership, political communication, the culture of political parties and movements, cultural policy, artists as political agents, and many other related areas.

The journal is not committed to any particular methodological approach, nor will it restrict itself to European authors or material with a European focus. It will carry articles with an historical as well as a topical flavour.

The journal aims to have a robust book reviews section, and while the language of reviews will be English, we wish to promote reviews of and review articles about significant new work written in other languages. The journal's most general aim is to foster and perhaps rekindle the sort of intellectually urbane sensibility that was once a staple of the sociological tradition.

Please submit your article online via the journals ScholarOne™ Manuscripts site:
http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/recp
Willfried Spohn was a born academic. Luckily for those who knew him, he was also of the right kind one is almost tempted to say, the rare kind: extremely erudite with an insatiable curiosity about and love of knowledge, yet unbelievably modest about the vast knowledge he himself had accumulated; intellectually generous and giving, always open to new ideas, but serious and careful in carrying them out and putting them to paper; a thoughtful and committed teacher and guide to students and younger colleagues, for whom he never grudged time and resources; a concerned and reflective researcher, for whom institutions of higher education were not only places of learning, but also sites of complex power relations in which one should carefully ponder one's own role, impact, and contribution.

Willfried Spohn had obtained his habilitation in Sociology at the Free University of Berlin in 1984. Between 1989 and 2005, he held numerous positions as a Visiting Professor of International and European Studies and of Social and Political Science at several universities in the USA, among which were New York University, the New School for Social Research, the University of Washington, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University, as well as at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany. He was also a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, a Senior Fellow at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, and an Alumnus of the Institute for Advanced Study in Konstanz.

From 2001 to 2004, he was the Research Director of the EU project EURONAT (together with Bo Strath and Anna Triandafyllidou) at the European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder. From 2009 onward, he was Research Coordinator for the project Europeanisation, Multiple Modernities and Collective Identities - Religion, Nation and Ethnicity in an Enlarging Europe at the Georg-August University Göttingen. In 2010, he became Professor of Economic and Social Sciences at the Willy Brandt Centre for German and European Studies of the University of Wrocław.

From the beginning of his career, Willfried Spohn was committed to historical and comparative sociology as one of the most fruitful approaches to social science, and one that he consistently strove to promote both nationally and internationally. Tellingly for this endeavour, Willfried Spohn was a co-founder of the International Sociological Association’s Thematic Group (TG) 02, Historical and Comparative Sociology, and its President from 2007 until 2010. Since the upgrade of TG02 to Working Group (WG) status in 2010, which involved the incorporation of members of the Figurational Sociology Ad Hoc Group, Willfried Spohn had been WG02 Vice-President and an active and enthusiastic member, organiser, and dedicated participant in WG02 activities, in which he promoted the study of Latin America, East Central Europe, and the Middle East, as well as the historical and comparative sociology of religions.

We were looking forward to several sessions Willfried had organised along these lines at the IIS Congress in Delhi in February of this year and at the upcoming ISA Forum in Buenos Aires in August, as well as to several book and research projects that he had started or still wanted to embark upon in his new position at the University of Wrocław.

We deeply mourn the loss of a dear friend and a most accomplished and admirable scholar and colleague, all the while knowing that we are all the richer for the knowledge and the wisdom, the kindness and the generosity, the dedication and the perseverance he bequeathed to his friends and family and to his academic community. As long as we still partake of the intellectual legacy he left to us and impart it to others, he will not have died.

Manuela Boatacă
Free University, Berlin
Secretary/Treasurer
ISA WG02 Historical and Comparative Sociology
Always on the bridge between the Spanish and English-speaking worlds, his native Argentina and expat England, the post-structuralist and post-Marxist political theorist, Professor Ernesto Laclau impacted social theory and political struggles alike. His theory of hegemony inspired generations of activists and shocked traditional Marxists. Democracy and processes of identification and mobilization were at the core of all of his writings. Laclau’s work inspired new social movements and inspired activists and scholars especially in South Africa and Latin America, in their struggle for equality and freedom. Today, his work is read and taught around the globe and his absence is felt among colleagues across disciplines from politics to sociology, art and literary theory to area studies.

Laclau’s poststructuralist theory of hegemony was first outlined with Chantal Mouffe in Marxism Today in 1981 and then developed in Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards Radical Democracy [HSS] (Verso, 1985). In this book Laclau extensively discussed the history of Marxist thought. HSS presents a genealogy of the concept of hegemony while proposing that class was hitherto seen as the privileged agent of social struggle – a position that was a product of articulation. As a Marxist Laclau’s thinking was inspired by Gramsci and Althusser, and he introduced contingency to Marxist thinking.

For Laclau, progressive struggle could be formed through the articulation of any particular demand that takes into account the representation of others. His theory of hegemony did not only address the process of unity but equally focused on the processes in which fixed meanings were revealed as simply contingent choices that can on any given day be restored to the status of a particular demand. Any representation could be maintained through articulation. New social movements may challenge the status quo as well as establish new points of identification.

Laclau and Mouffe offered tools for understanding social and political struggles and mobilizations, chains of equivalences, logics of difference and equivalence and empty and floating signifiers. The final part of the HSS was devoted to the urge for the (impossible) balance of both freedom and equality: the ethos of radical democracy. Chantal Mouffe advanced that in her work on challenging liberal democracy.

For many, the originality in Laclau’s thinking emerges from his ability to (re)articulate into a coherent framework continental poststructuralism, rhetoric and semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis and deconstruction. In the 1990s Laclau discussed ‘empty’ and ‘floating signifiers’, representation and identity, and in the 2000s he returned to reflect, explicitly, on populism and rhetoric. This emphasized the contingent groundings of our concepts, articulations and political projects.

Laclau started his university career in the 1960s in research and teaching positions in his native Argentina. In 1969 he moved to St. Anthony’s College, at University of Oxford, to work on his PhD with Eric Hobsbawm, but in 1973 he ended up teaching at the new progressive University of Essex, where he finished his PhD on in 1977.

At Essex an MA programme on Ideology and Discourse Analysis was established in 1982. Generations of scholars who have passed through the MA and later also PhD programme and ECPR Summer Schools Courses on IDA, producing a loose network of scholars across the globe. The Centre for Theoretical Studies worked as a space for discussion among an interdisciplinary crowd of scholars. Towards and after his retirement, Laclau also taught in the US, at the New School in New York, and later at SUNY, Buffalo, and Northwestern University.

Visiting him in the late 2000s at Northwestern, I told Ernesto that scholars studying populism still refer to Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism (Verso, 1977), he seemed surprised and a bit upset asking why don’t they read his latest work, On Populist Reason (Verso, 2005), adding that it’s much better.

Indeed, OPR clarified Laclau’s earlier theoretical points and became a great companion to the emerging populism in Europe and Latin America. An activist scholar in heart, Laclau became an advisor to Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina and inspired populists in Venezuela and Bolivia.

Populism for Laclau was a mode of articulation, or logic. In Europe, Laclau's
Naming populism as the key political move, if not the key political movement, made some scholars turn away from Laclau’s later works. Yet, his message regarding the fact that there is no given basis for political demands or identification, but that these are articulated in a contingent process, is valid for all political identities and movements. Thinking of current mobilizations, political identities and emancipation(s), this is ever more acute in today’s Europe.

For Laclau and Mouffe the political was always primary. It reveals the contingent foundations of society.

There were the different stages of Laclau’s work – the Marxist of the 1970s, the new social movements of the 1980s, the analytical concepts of the 1990s and the populist Laclau of 2000s – coinciding with an emphasis on different analytical concepts, representation, universalism and particularism in the 1990s, and Laclau of rhetoric and populism in the 2000s. Nevertheless, his theory remained roughly the same a constellation of poststructuralism, semiotics and rhetoric, deconstruction and psychoanalysis, just with different highlights or a different angle.

For the fourteen years I knew him, Ernesto remained ever inspiring, offering regular examples and anecdotes, and always ready to sing the International on social occasions. His unexpected and untimely passing away at a conference trip in Sevilla impedes us from knowing exactly where the emphasis would have been in the 2010s. Yet, The Rhetorical Foundations of Society, published in May 2014 by Verso, includes his intellectual autobiography. His theory of hegemony not only shows the necessity of something that transcends the particular to emerge as a common denominator but also the need to contest a ‘frozen’ hegemony. Laclau’s discourse theory, rather than looking at language, studies the articulation of meanings. It remains crucial for analyzing any system of representation from architecture to literature, from practices to images, speech and writing.

**Emilia Palonen**, PhD, is a researcher in the Academy of Finland project Asymmetries in European Intellectual Space at the University of Helsinki, Finland. She is a graduate from the Essex MA and PhD programmes on Ideology and Discourse Analysis, and is now teaching poststructuralist discourse theory at the University of Helsinki. She supervises PhD students on related themes. Her own work ranges includes research on Hungarian politics, history and memory, urban space and democracy, along with European Capitals of Culture and European identity. She has studied the rhetoric of Ernesto Laclau and Quentin Skinner, and analytically developed Laclau’s concept of populism.