

ESA News of the Day

Welcome to Geneva!

Today, Geneva will be no more the City of Calvin, but the City of Sociology

pn. The Department of Sociology of the University of Geneva, the Swiss Sociological Association and the Local Organizing Committee are proud to welcome you for 4 days of sociological exchanges, meetings, events and – hopefully – successful networking and improvement of the understanding of social relations (in turbulent times).

When you'll read these lines, the organization team will already have been tested by Murphy and the PhD Workshop, which took place Monday and Tuesday. 24 PhD students from all over Europe, selected among 192, have been present to discuss their topics together and get some sociological inputs. Somebody told me that Monday night, most of them went to bed rather late. Be careful, Geneva is a small city, and sociologists all know each other!

More seriously, to date, there are as many as 2'801 registered participants at the ESA Congress 2011, including invited speakers, the local committee and volunteers, who will all play a very important part these next days and whom we'd like to thank for their availability! 2'800 people who will more or less cross the main hall of Uni Mail, hurry to their session at Uni Bastions, ask the volunteers for the location, buy coffees at the Cafeteria, present a paper or two, and – hopefully - dance Friday

evening to the music of "Norient meets motherland Soundsystem" (We Came in Peace - see last page).

The ESA Congress will also be an opportunity to meet people from all over Europe (83.98%), Asia (10.72%), North America (2.4%), Oceania and Africa (0.72% each) and South America (0.61%). (N/A = 0.85%).

Most of them are from the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal, Russia, France, Spain, Finland and Poland. But first of all, the ESA Congress is:

- 4 Plenary sessions, the first one today at Victoria Hall with Jacqueline O'Reilly, John Urry and Martin Kohli
- 12 Semi-Plenary Sessions
- 12 Special Sessions
- 611 RN / RS sessions from 33 Research networks and 21 Research streams. Thanks to their fantastic coordinators who worked very hard to put their programme together and
- 9 Meet the Author sessions

So: enjoy and WELCOME TO GENEVA. You will discover in these days in ESA News of Day useful information about last changes, other ways to read Geneva and the main events. So read us!



"Pour que Genève soit libre, laissez la jeunesse vivre !!!", Geneva 2011, sc

Sociology in turbulent times

An interview with Thomas Eberle, Coordinator of the Research Networks

CCB. What's about going into thoroughly the topic: social relations in turbulent times? Short interview with Thomas S. Eberle, Professor of Sociology at University of Saint-Gall, Co-Director of its Institute and Vice-President of ESA.

CCB : Can we say that in parallel to the "turbulent" context a sociology of "turbulent times" is being born? or does it already exist?

TE: There is no sociology of turbulent times, and there won't be. Sociology studies social phenomena, and they all exist in time. Therefore we chose the topic "social relations" in turbulent times. Social relations consist of actions and interactions, of communication and sometimes emotional attachments, to other persons as well as to institutions and material things. Social relations are the very core of society and therefore can be observed in every social field, public or private, work life or family life, in organizations or spontaneous encounters in the street. Humans relate to many things. With this conference theme we invited all the sociologists to reflect on how the phenomena of their research area are affected by acceleration processes and social change. And indeed, since we chose this theme times have even become more turbulent, think of the financial crisis that has become an economic crises with all its implications to every field of society.

CCB: How do these turbulent times affect you research work? Can you describe it briefly?

TE: Sociology researches the present society, thus it has to deal with accelerated processes of change. A basic problem is that scientific research is a comparatively slow process, studying social phenomena in depth and in a methodologically careful manner.

Thus the actual developments can look quite different by the time the research results are published. An increasing pressure is felt in academia to publish fast and to deliver nevertheless good quality. As an object of my research, acceleration processes are well visible in the changing work-life, which we recently studied.

CCB: The last one is more personal: Could you tell us a situation experienced that reflects "social relations in turbulent times".

TE: In the media I observe the rebellions in the Arab countries, as a tourist a met so many unemployed youth in Southern France and in Spain who seemed pretty disparate, in Switzerland I experience that the trust of people in our banks and pension funds, in our economy and in our future deteriorates, and I am worrying that we will suddenly have many unemployed people around us if part of our export industry collapses because of the high exchange rate of the Swiss Frank. Look at the changes in worklife and how it affects private lives - turbulences are presently everywhere.



*Thomas Eberle
Universität St. Gallen, 2011*

Editorial

sc. Geneva will be, during the next few days, the centre of European sociology, a very special event. There are not a lot of sociologists in Switzerland, a country rather specialised in high technology and services in sectors such as banking and insurance, so it's not so easy for young people here to choose this discipline. There are many stereotypes regarding sociology in Switzerland, and not only positive ones.

The worst one, that we all know, is that studying sociology would be the highway toward unemployment. Some truth there, but the reality is fortunately quite different. First, today's labor market really needs people with methodological competences like the ones we teach in sociology. Furthermore, sociology means to analyse our society in all its dimensions: impossible to grasp its global characteristics without combining the economic, political and social realities.

On the other side, it's also true that if we choose to study sociology, we need to be more flexible and entrepreneurial, because there is no concrete outlet or job waiting for us at the end of the studies as there is in many other disciplines, such as law or medicine.

In fact, thanks to a study made some years ago concerning the career paths of former sociology students, we came to realize that they had dispersed throughout all sectors of the economy (the study is to be found under "La socio et après?" on our website; www.unige.ch/ses/socio) from finance to agriculture. Sociology is a springboard toward life in society; choice and destiny will do the rest!

And this (empirical) knowledge that we have cumulated is even more precious today. In fact, sociologists are not only able to adapt to most situations, to use their methodological thinking in a complex world. They also have this habit to link their observations to something like a concept, a theory or a perspective.

In turbulent times, this is the best thing we can teach our students: "don't forget the perspective!". Problems cannot be solved just by mere pragmatism or a technical intervention. They may be useful, but in order to motivate, set goals, to go beyond the daily contingency, it takes something like a horizon, an orientation for the society of tomorrow.



*Mathilde Bourrier,
photo JB*

Geneva's university sociology department : a busy beehive?

lc. Mathilde Bourrier is a pillar of the quite big (85 members) sociology department. She teaches different branches of sociology: sociology of risk (especially nuclear environment, chemical industries), sociology of work. Besides, she does research and particularly coordinates the different branches of the department. How does the department look like? After a restructuring of the faculty, the department contains varied sections: sociology, gender studies, demography, socioeconomics, mediastudies. This busy department looks like a beehive where everyone has a role to play in defending sociology and in passing on his passion for this rich branche. In this perspective, the 10th ESA Conference gives hope and brings energy to every member to carry on his duty in introducing everywhere sociology.

Is Geneva Heaven on Earth?!?... No Way!

Erik Verkooyen, philosopher and critical observer, tells you what he thinks about Geneva. Not really common stereotypes...

ev. Geneva is an extremely odd and multifaceted town. One distinctive fact is that, proportionally to its size, it's by far the most famous city worldwide. Most people are very surprised to learn that there are only 200'000 inhabitants, even though the larger agglomeration, including the canton, surrounding France and Nyon (canton Vaud), is not far from a million. Less surprisingly – considering that it's the general headquarters of international organisations and NGOs –, we can mention that there are as much as 40% foreigners. If you now consider that I – born Dutch in Stockholm – am not counted among them, as so many other naturalized Swiss citizens, you may get an idea of the local multicultural patchwork.

Most people abroad also know of its financial importance. The birthplace and capital of international asset management has, since centuries, built a reputation of reliability and confidentiality through its private banks. But even the locals themselves generally ignore that it has also become a major centre for commodities, a main so-called hub for oil, cereals, sugar and non-ferrous metals trading. Simultaneously, a pole of competence, a dense network of other financially oriented activities has developed: international lawyers, fiduciaries, auditors, business consultants, (re)insurance companies, inspection and arbitration firms, IT and information security specialists. To complete the economical picture, must be mentioned the chemical and watch industries, as well as the implementation of several multinationals.

On the religious side, the "Cité de Calvin", is not a protestant stronghold anymore. Waves of Italian, Spanish and later Portuguese workers, but also Swiss "migrants" from cantons like Valais have in the last decades leveled up the Catholics. All other religions – even Baha'is e.g. – are represented of course, such as the growing Muslim community, or the Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu minorities. As a matter of fact,

some people even consider Geneva as a spiritual centre of some kind, a New Age pole, and many new spirituality movements have gathered here or are at least represented. The cultural scene is also impressive; numerous museums, concerts, festivals, theaters, the Book fair, and so on.

Well, at this stage you might conclude that a wealthy town, in such a beautiful location, enjoying the Swiss institutional stability, must be heaven on Earth! Nope! From an overall Swiss point of view, Geneva has in recent years become the national bottom of the class, an object of laughter: series of gross political blunders, highest unemployment rate, worst housing crisis, and the most dangerous canton of the country (the hot subject in local medias this summer!). If the little Far West "*république et canton*" used to be seen as the hometown of the "*grandes gueules*" (big yaps), always having something to complain about, its spoilt citizens have increasingly ended up, throughout the last twenty years, finding true reasons to complain!

How have we managed to fall so low, here at the neutral crossroads of a globalizing world? The topic would certainly be worth a case study. The roots of the problem go deep. Geneva seems to have lost its identity, drowned in an endless web of

communities, micro-societies, different shifts of people whose roots and/or projects are too often elsewhere. Imagine Jean-Jacques Rousseau's reaction if he were told that his own town had no social contract, no common ideal, just individualistic citizens, unable to communicate with most of their neighbours!

Yes, this is the capital of individualism. If today's criminality is largely explained by the combination of open borders (Schengen) and attractiveness (wealth, weak laws and security measures), the lack of common values, social cohesiveness, togetherness, the loss of civic consciousness, can all be considered as favourable for its blossoming. Not only the very large political spectrum reflects this situation with a powerful polarity, thus strong extremes, but Geneva is also torn between its Municipal authorities (left) and the Cantonal ones (right), often struggling on the same issues.

The split is omnipresent, ethnic or clanish rivalries, antagonism Geneva vs. France, even Switzerland, internationals ignoring locals, private sector envying the privileges of the public service, the youth separated between public Swiss schools and private international ones. If it succeeds recovering a collective coherence one day, peace on Earth certainly won't be far away...



*Uni-Dufour, one of the three main buildings of the University of Geneva
Capital of individualism; photo: Jacques Erard, UniGe 2009*

Today's Highlights: Opening Ceremony and Plenary

The 10th ESA Congress will begin in the Victoria Hall and at Uni Dufour

sc. The congress opens its doors today. Not at the University but in the Victoria Hall. The Victoria Hall is a concert room at the heart of the cultural centre of Geneva, with the Opera, the Theatre, and museums nearby.

The Victoria Hall was built between 1891 and 1894 to honour the Queen of England. It is known worldwide for its very good acoustics. The building was renewed recently and belongs to the City of Geneva - who has allowed us to use it for the opening.

The Minister of education of the Canton of Geneva and the Major of the City will honour us by their presence. The Rector of the University will also give some welcome words. The organisers of the ESA Conference, the Sociology Department, and the Swiss Sociological association will then open the congress officially. The Presidential Address of Analia Torres will introduce the scientific part of the Congress. Martin Kohli, Jacqueline

O'Reilly and John Urry will give the three keynotes.

After the scientific part we invite you to follow us to the University building called Uni Dufour. As the University presents it itself: "this is certainly the most controversial building of the campus. Uni Dufour, a concrete structure inspired by Le Corbusier, contrasts with the rather classical architecture in the surroundings.

Enclosed between Les Bastions (the historical building) and la Plaine de Plainpalais (the open space on the way from Uni Mail), Uni-Dufour hosts the Rectorship and the central administration". On its facades, you will see hundreds of numbers changing all the time. The rhythm, the pulse, of each of them has been decided by a different person. This creates one unique rhythm. Tatsuo Miyajima installed it, as an artistic intervention in 1996.

I hope you will like the Ceremony and the Reception.



Carrefour, Geneva 2011, sc

Bruno Bieri

pn. An Opening Plenary without a special event is not possible when you work with Professor Sandro Cattacin, the Head of the Local Committee. The challenge was given: looking for something unexpected...

But also something "Swiss made". Does this fit? Yes, it fits. His name is Bruno Bieri and he comes from Bern, the capital of Switzerland, up there where they speak Swiss-german, and also where I grew up.

But please, don't think that anyone is playing horn and hang in the capital, neither that people are able to sing 5 octaves wide...

Just open your ears and let yourself go into the strange world of Mr Bieri.

We Came in Peace

wcp. We Came in Peace are two super intelligent beings with lots of arms and a delicate light blue skin who have just appeared, go figure why, from a Universe strangely requiring 11 Space & Time dimensions to make some sort of sense.

And go figure why they look like average humans with dark suits in our perfectly standard three dimensions world. Furthermore, go figure why here they are doing electronic, ambient music tainted with a tiny bit of savage guitar riffs.

But there are things in life, like Swiss Watches, American Movies or Italian Pizzas you just wish to go about taking pleasure in without so much digging into the details of their inner workings. So for now, please enjoy some of We Came in Peace's delicately crafted live & improvised pieces along with some nice refreshments!

Impressum

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