

IUC

CONFLICTING SYSTEMS

Observed with social systems theory

14 – 18 September 2015 [Send to printer](#)

Conference organizers

Gorm Harste, Aarhus University, Denmark
Steffen Roth, Rennes School of Business, France

Conference description:

Systems do not evolve as unities. They develop their complexities due to differences, and handle complexities due to internal complexities. Modern society is constructed with a manifold of perspectives; its unity and totality is only an aspect, or as Niklas Luhmann states, ‘the whole is less than the sum of its parts’.

A main topic in many studies is about conflicts between differentiated systems. Yet the question of the present conference is: How do systems challenge other systems, and how do systems conflict with themselves?

The conference opens for theoretical and empirical studies in politics, aesthetics, sociology, theology, history, economics, health, psychology, ecology and organization. They call for abductive research. Papers should address questions of differences and conflicts between systems, their structural couplings and emergent hybrids. Conflicts are a challenge to social theory as well as empirical studies; yet they are also occasions for posing new questions and for new developments in forms of knowledge.

Conference offer 5 ECTS: The requirement is presentation of a paper and active participation in the conference

CALL FOR PAPERS

Theme:

Social Systems theory after Luhmann

Systems theory has had a tremendous impact in social science since the 1950s. During the last decades, however, systems theory has been completely transformed. In particular, German sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s system theory has transformed social studies. Luhmann’s “Grand Theory” got its final form with his principal work *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft 1 – 2* (Social Theory Vol. 1-2, Stanford University Press 2013) in 1997, although additional books, articles and interviews have been published, including more than twenty books now in English. Whatever one thinks about the exact form of his analysis, sociological theory has to some extent been transformed by the “Luhmann effect”.

Although Luhmann’s general theory hitherto has seemed very abstract and distant, there is a strong drive towards analyses in empirical studies that make use of Luhmann’s insights. This is evident in his seminal publication *Social Theory*. Luhmann’s systems theory is more an abductive applied theory than a deductively developed theory. Yet it seems that its very abstract character has a fruitful effect.

A recent Dubrovnik conference in applied social systems theory concerned structural couplings between systems and resulted in the publication by Alberto Febbrajo and Gorm Harste (eds.). *Law and Intersystemic Communication. Understanding ‘Structural Coupling’*, London: Ashgate 2013.

Conflicting systems

Systems do not evolve as unities. They develop their complexities due to differences, and handle complexities due to internal complexities. Modern society is constructed with a manifold of perspectives; its unity and totality is only an aspect, or as Niklas Luhmann states, ‘the whole is less than the sum of its parts’. Yet conflicts may have material dimensions, they operate in social dimensions, and they have temporal dimensions, in which conflicts can find solutions at the same time as solutions are postponed. Any formula of unity or consensus is constituted as a paradox – or in an irony of agreements.

As systems theory is empirically open, new semantics, different codes, and changing forms turn out to change and develop structures at different and opposed levels. A main topic in many studies is about conflicts between differentiated systems. Yet the question of the present conference is: How do systems challenge other systems, and how do systems conflict with themselves? Narratives develop according to conflicts in communication forms, but also between communication and in-communication. Risks and blind spots are well known, yet still, they develop. Law has developed as a way to deal with conflicts, transforming one form of conflict, say quarrel or war, into another legal form. Aesthetics redescribe the paradoxes of conflicts and pinpoint ugly or beautiful images. Politics and organization tries to expose solutions, even when conflicts only can be postponed. Politics is a continuation of conflict, but in another medium – or the reverse may be the case: War could be observed as the continuation of politics without possible legal mediation.

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Papers should address questions of differences and conflicts between systems, their structural couplings and emergent hybrids. Günther Teubner has forwarded the idea that new hybrids appear to dissolve conflicts in international law. Others may study problems of health as lifestyle diseases that have to be observed according to medicine, sociology and cultural studies. Still others cope with failed states as conflict systems between segmentary societies and modern functionally differentiated society. A school class may be a conflict system when it concerns education, socialization and, for instance, health politics. All kinds of matters, from pedagogic, art and religion to social research, organization, law, politics and international conflicts are subjects for systemic studies of conflicts. Conflicts may be unstable. Whereas the symbiosis between functional systems and specialized organizational systems seems to be quite clear and subject to studies across a great variety of disciplines, such organizational/functional answers are less obvious as they concern conflicts. Conflicts are a challenge to social theory as well as empirical studies; yet they are also occasions for posing new questions and for new developments in forms of knowledge.

The conference will approach conflicts from Luhmann's theory of social systems and gather scholars who work with theoretical and methodological clarifications as well as empirical studies. Studies that compare system analysis with other forms of analysis are welcome (Foucauldian, Bourdieuan or analysis of discourse or ANT).

The conference language is English (papers in German are accepted since most participants read German but their presentation should be held in English).

Deadline for abstracts to the programme is August 15th, 2015. Short abstracts (10-20 lines) should be sent to the programme coordinator (Gorm Harste, Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Denmark, gha@ps.au.dk). It is not obligatory to send an abstract, or to present a paper, in order to participate in the conference; however in any case, all participants are requested to send a mail well before September the 1st to announce their participation. A list of participants will be distributed and papers (or outlines of papers) should be sent to the coordinator and eventually to the distributed list no later than September 7th.

Organizational background

Every year conferences about the use of Luhmann's system theory have been held in, for example, Munich, Copenhagen, Tromsø, Stuttgart, Montreal, Boston, London or Stockholm. The Scandinavian and British network has developed fruitful discussions to which German, French, Italian, Canadian and Dutch scholars have also contributed. Translations of Luhmann's books are still more numerous, introductions and theoretical contributions are flourishing. The same seems to be the case with empirical studies applying system theory in comparative studies, case studies, historical studies or in concrete practice. Some of the current debates take place at the following websites:

(http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/luhmann_danish/) (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sociocybernetics/>).

In the 1980s, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht and Ludwig Pfeiffer organised a number of great conferences at the Inter-University Centre of post-graduate studies (IUC) in Dubrovnik in the former Yugoslavia, now Croatia. Since 1981, Luhmann attended these conferences. Unfortunately, the Centre was bombed in 1991 and for some years the conferences could not take place. The contributions from those conferences were published in a series of five rather big volumes at the important Suhrkamp Verlag (Der Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte, 1983; Epochenschwellen und Epochenstrukturen im Diskurs der Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte, 1985; Stil, 1986; Materialität der Kommunikation, 1988, Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche, 1991). Quite a number of those studies were dedicated to semantic history and contributions to a system theory of art.

Today, the Centre has been completely restored physically as well as in spirit. The center has nice internet facilities

and a number of rooms for study and possibilities for accommodation. See www.iuc.hr . The center only demands a fee of 40 Euro from each participant.

The Centre is located very close to the famous medieval city of Dubrovnik, about 300 meters northwest. You can find accommodation in one of the many hotels in Dubrovnik (Hotel Imperial is the closest to the centre, but expensive, Hotel Lero is cheaper, and about 1½ kilometer (1 mile) from the Centre. Remember to inform the hotels that you are a participant in an IUC-conference since this will offer you 45 % price reduction. Another form is one of the popular many private accommodations (Room or “Sobe”) which are very cheap and can be found everywhere. When the airport bus stops at the old city main gate, people will come and offer you private accommodation. The IUC also provides cheap accommodation in the building itself. Restaurants and cafés are everywhere. The weather in September is normally sunny and 20-30 C, though rain is not impossible.

The Dubrovnik airport is situated about 20 kilometres South of Dubrovnik. Travel by car and ferryboat is somewhat more complicated, though beautiful.

Other details

- Working language: English
- [Apply for this conference](#)

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