

### Social theory and development sociology at the crossroads

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**Social Theory and Development Sociology**  
**at the Crossroads**

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Introduction: The diagnosis of a contemporary situation - modern capitalist societies as developing societies par excellence.

1. The relationship of general sociological theory and development sociology.
2. Hard Times Ahead: From sociology to social theory.
3. After the “end of the grand theories” - end of development sociology?
4. Social theory and its disadvantages: decorative sociology and the lack of explanatory precision
5. A plea for development sociology at an intermediate level

## Introduction:

One of the most impressive processes of recent years is the very rapid and profound change in the relative positions and hierarchies of the different countries of the world. Beginning with the break-up of the East-West-polarization, followed by the realignment of the East European countries in the Nineties and culminating with the thorough dismembering of the not-more Third World, we are witnessing transformations on a global scale that may well be compared to those experienced in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Nineteenth Century. From the point of view of the “advanced” Western capitalist countries, it is precisely the experience of the relativity of their supposed advantages and the fear of losing their historically privileged positions in a now global competition, including its potential internal consequences, that are at the core of the widespread and diffuse anxiety that so often reflects causes that are subsumed under the catch-all term of “globalization”.

So, and again in a way that may be easily compared to the generalized mood of the last decades of the Nineteenth century, one of the presently dominant public discourses is centred on the “need to change”. It is focused around the theme of the necessary political, social and not least, cultural “reforms” that are deemed indispensable for the respective countries to catch up in a race that actually has no definite aim. Or, more precisely, its aim is to improve the acting capacities of the respective national socio-economies - and that in a time when there actually are no more “national” economies in the strict sense of the term. So, the once “developed” countries since some time are living in a situation that has been the current state-of-affairs for many former Third World countries since the end of World War II: the all-pervading experience of the pressing need to demonstrate the ability to change, not with a concrete aim, but to change for its own sake. In more than one sense then, the “real” developing countries of today are the “advanced” capitalist and allegedly post-industrial socio-economies of the “West”. They are submitted to the same disparaging influences and pressures of world market processes that the former Third-World countries have experienced for generations. The perceived weakening of national sovereignty, the flexibilization of the labour markets, the remote control of economic processes, and the same sense of being in a seemingly defenceless and

precarious situation have been the 'normal' status of colonial and post-colonial societies for generations.

If this appreciation is approximately correct, then on the plane of everyday practical matters we have the possibility that the sociology of development may find a field for the application of its conceptual tool-case and its analytical instruments where it was least to be expected, namely, in the very heartland of "development", where this notion was conceived and from where its political strategies to remedy "underdevelopment" and their implications started their world-transforming endeavour. So it may be of interest to see if there is a chance that the sociology of development may have something to offer in the sense of explanations or of societal diagnosis that other sociological approaches are possibly lacking.

1. The relationship of general sociological theory and development sociology.

Evidently, looking for such a possibility may be disregarded as a somewhat heretical enterprise, as the idea has been firmly entrenched, that the so-called development sociology and related empirical investigations had a more or less marginal position relative to the mainstream of sociological theorizing. The reason for this idea is evidently that, together with for instance rural sociology, the sociology of development came to be defined by the ascription that it could be treated as a kind of social area studies - specialized to analyse social phenomena in parts of the world that didn't come up to the attributes of the societies that had invented sociology as the central social science of modernity: urban, industrialized, highly differentiated societies with national economies of capitalist orientation and located in territories controlled by states where formal authority relied on a legitimacy founded on democratic control procedures. In comparison with the central topics of such mainstream sociology, development sociology frequently came up as its ugly little sister - mostly concerned with those that were too "backward", too "poor", too "simple" and too far away to offer fields of real interest for sociological investigation. Consequently, development sociology found itself forced to cooperate in a broad framework of "development" with bedfellows that either really were at home "out there", as presumed specialists of the "exotic", like social or cultural anthropology, or that saw these areas as test and training ground for the application of recipes of

intervention for “catching up” or for “institution building”, like economics or political science. As long as the non-scientific premises of this cooperation and its underlying division of investigative labour were not called into question, there was no chance that mainstream sociological theorizing could take development sociology seriously in the sense of really considering its results and its ways of investigation as interesting for possible application in the metropolitan areas. Besides this marginalization based on its supposed “exotic” qualities, another factor worked in detriment of a re-centring of development sociology. The cooperative endeavour that I have mentioned before also relied on a logic that couldn’t really foster such a claim for re-centring. It was a logic based on the conceptual antinomies of “modernization” and “underdevelopment”, even when since the Seventies critical investigations increasingly undermined its presuppositions, as far as they assumed “backwardness” or “lack of something” and aimed at “problem mending”. Therefore, mainstream sociological theory building very rarely saw itself in need of taking into account the categories and analytic perspectives of development sociology.

Consequently, the relationship between debates in sociological theory and development sociology can be described as one of estrangement and mutual ignorance. As causes we can summarily name the mistaken ascription of area specialization at the level of empirical focus, and the erroneous reduction of development sociology to the role of an auxiliary science in a multidisciplinary diagnostic and problem-solving enterprise. This critique, obviously, doesn’t take into consideration the occasional attempts to build bridges, to incorporate central topics of development sociology in the main corpus of sociological theory debates, and therefore must be one-sided. It is only acceptable as I here intend to sharpen a specific hypothesis: The deficient or even non-relationship between general sociological theory and development sociology may eventually change in the future - but not because the analytical debates of development sociology have finally been taken into account and its focus and cooperative investigation needs have been accepted. Instead, the relationship may change because both of them, general sociological theory as well as development sociology have come to a crossroads, where a reconsideration of their analytical possibilities may be indicated out of empirical and conceptual reasons.

## 2. Hard Times Ahead: From sociology to social theory

In the aftermath of the radical and generalized critiques of the methodological premises and implications of mainstream (esp. structuralist) sociological theory by the advocates of “post-modern” approaches many other voices have seen an urgent need to reorient sociological theory building. I can not recapitulate here the different aspects and results of these complex critiques, especially as there are many excellent summary accounts of them (see Ritzer, 1997). More important to achieve the aims of my contribution are some sequels of these debates, and three aspects in particular: the aspect of the dissolution of one of the central topics of sociological analysis, the greater flexibility of the concept of theory and, finally, the implications of an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of social processes - the wholesale substitution of paradigmatic efforts in theory building by a conceptually much less rigorous program of social theory. I will characterize briefly these three aspects and add some commentaries, as in my view they directly affect themes that are at the core of any development sociology.

The first aspect concerns the dissolution of one of the central categories of sociological analysis: the category of “society”. This has been presented so often and has already deserved so many commentaries, that I don’t need to go into more details here. Of course, only macro-theoretical approaches that use this category are really affected by this, but generally development sociology belongs to these traditions. The observation has two points of reference: on the one side, it is an analytical one, and on the other side it refers to empirical problems. Analytically, the concept of society is a central notion of many sociological traditions, from structural functionalism to social interactionism, systems theory and feminist social theory, even when it has been used and defined in very different ways. In its most general sense it has referred to a set of bounded and structured/ordered social relations that are localized in time and space in the form of the nation-state-society. John Urry (2000: 11) has pointed out that in order to make sense, such a category must be discussed as part of a *system of societies*, as it is precisely control of its *boundary* that gives a society the capability of action vis-à-vis other societies and its qualities are discussed in reference to other nation-state-societies. Now, many sociologists agree that the concept of society nowadays doesn’t offer anymore the most useful platform for the

analysis of central social processes. This opinion, thus, combines the analytical farewell to the concept of society with an empirical statement. The empirical assertion is that processes of “globalization” transcend the boundaries of any nation-state-society and so significantly diminish its internal and external operative capacities. That is the main reason why the catch-all theme of “globalization” is so frequently mentioned as one of the central causes that effectively contribute to the “dissolution of the social” in the form of a “society”. Indeed, today at the level of macro-social analysis we can observe a marked preference for concepts that in their very metaphoric qualities reflect the turn away from the restrictions supposedly signified by topics like “order” or “structure”. Therefore, we have become accustomed to using concepts that try to convey an image of flexibility and fluidity: networks, flows, mobilities and a whole array of phenomena combined with the prefix “trans-“, that dominate sociological textbooks.

The second aspect refers to the greater flexibility and the diminishing methodological rigour that meanwhile generally go with the category of “theory”. In his very insightful assessment of the actual state of sociological theory, Jonathan Turner has asserted that “(M)ost theory in sociology is of two basic types: analytical schemes and loose systems of formal propositions. There is some analytical modelling at a general theoretical level, but it is usually part of a system of propositions or general analytical scheme.” (Turner, 1991: 27) In this sense, much of sociological “theory” actually belongs to different approaches to accumulating scientific knowledge and between them there often exist enormous conflicts as to claims of their respective role in theory building, without any prospective solution for these conflicts. Evidently, we nowadays have to come to terms with very different and divergent points of view regarding the rigour of theoretical propositions, their explanatory potential and their accessibility to empirical refutation. Consequently, Jeffrey Alexander has pointed out, that a broad range of different theoretical positions in social science move along an epistemological continuum between the empirical observational world and the non-empirical metaphysical world (Alexander, 1982: 2), and at one time or another, anyone of these positions can contribute to generating sociologically relevant theory. The multiple debates on post-modern thinking, their consequences for the epistemological bases of sociological arguments and the importance of constructivist perspectives, all have contributed to the third relevant aspect: the growing



accessibility of sociological theory building and sociological arguing to a diffuse form of interdisciplinary thinking in sociology.

As the most obvious evidence for this interdisciplinary character and its diffuseness we can regard the proliferating substitution of the adjective “sociological theory” by “social theory”. Originally a formula used in the British academic context, it has since some time expanded into the American terminology. Nowadays there are explicit attempts to establish it also in German Sociology (see for instance Joas / Knöbl 2004: 11). In the British context its use reflected the rather weak and socio-politically not very influential position of genuine sociological theorizing. Other social sciences - especially social anthropology - achieved a very prominent role already in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only thanks to their theoretical profile but also due to their role in supporting scientifically the complex administrative tasks of colonial control. Whereas, the British contribution to sociological theory has achieved international renown only recently (the fame of Hobhouse or Ginsberg was generally restricted to the British Isles, and the stay of Norbert Elias passed nearly unnoticed) mostly thanks to some important periodical publications (for instance, *Theory, Culture & Society*) and, of course, thanks to figures like Anthony Giddens, his function at the LSE and his cooperation in the formulation of political guidelines for social transformation in Gt. Britain. On the other side, the preference for the concept of social theory reflected the fact that in Britain the analysis of social contexts and its theoretical conceptualization has been more a task for social and political philosophy, and especially for historians and representatives of literary criticism. Therefore, what on the Continent had been the nearly undisputed domain of sociologists, in Britain found its counterpart in investigators who were oriented more toward concepts of a cultural science and therefore also preferred the label of social theory (see Kumar, 2001: 66, who speaks of “implicit sociology”).

Outside of its country of origin, and In spite of this relatively weak sociological traditions, the preference for the concept of social theory in recent contexts, inspired by post-Kuhnian and post-structuralist turns, reflects a growing interest in generating an interdisciplinary focus on the multiple social complexities of a world that is frequently, but erroneously labelled as “post-modern”. In the US especially, the reception of the post-structuralist critiques formulated by Lacan, Derrida, Foucault

and many others also met with the very special conditions of American intellectual life and generated a specific political impact (see also Cusset, 2003) that really cannot be simply transferred by a generalized use of the term “social theory”. So, George Ritzer explicitly speaks of “fin de siècle social theorists” and argues that he “...(uses) the term ‘social’ rather than ‘sociological’ theorist here to reflect the fact that many contributors to the recent literature are not sociologists, although they are theorizing about the social world.” (Ritzer 1996: 228, fn. 5). So it seems that with the demise of “society” we also are witnessing the demise of “sociological theory”. What consequences may this have for development sociology?

### 3. After the “end of the grand theories” - end of development sociology?

As sociology and its theory building always defined itself as a *modern* science of *modern* society it can come to no surprise that development sociology always fought a hopeless fight to get rid of its ancillary role that derived from its role as the specialization of social sciences that could be useful to explain why the less modern “societies” were in this regretful situation. As such a specialization it was also tolerated that its interdisciplinary cooperation with other (social as well as others) sciences became an acknowledged necessity and not a censurable intellectual treason. It was, finally, the affinity of development sociology to the role of an “applied” social science that relegated its contributions to sociological theory decidedly to the second rank, because its exotic and faraway fields of investigation were supposed to be exactly that: “underdeveloped”. Of course, this conjunction of a specific historical situation, a dominant structural-functionalist quasi-paradigm and political partisanship formed an unique background for the rise of development sociology. As to possible contributions to sociological theory this meant first of all, that development sociology was seen more as a testing field for some theories rather than as a creative laboratory for new approaches. Especially the phase of the dominance of “classic” structural-functionalist modernization theory (inaugurated by M. J. Levy and characterizing the Fifties and the Sixties) reflected such a relationship between general sociological theory and development sociology. This dominance of “classic” modernization theory can only be really understood, if it is taken into account that this approach was not only an important piece of sociological theory, but also expression of an ideological outlook on social reality - a “discourse” on modern North-American

society, as J. Alexander has so pointedly remarked (see Alexander (1995): 10 et seq., 35 et seq.). What at that time was strongly refuted as an ideologically inspired vision of the world, especially when the criticism was articulated by dependency or world-system theorists, is now perceived as an appraisal of a general logic supporting evolving theory. The focus of development sociology then, and also the basis for its interdisciplinary cooperation with political science or economics, was its orientation on the macro-sociological level of “society” as its master concept. Correspondingly, critical arguments were also mostly centred on this level. It is remarkable that the crucial theoretical debates in general sociology, the approaches of interaction theory or the perspectives of constructivism and of post-structuralist epistemology and of discourse-theory nearly took twenty years until they really began to influence development sociology. And that took place only after the “society”-centred macro-development perspective had itself experienced a critical revision. This revision, by the way, didn’t originate from insights derived from theoretical orientations in the strict sense of the term, but from the acknowledgement that empirical findings and analytical categories had evolved in different directions. The dissociation of theory and factual developments, the emergence of social, political and economic circumstances that were not accountable on the basis of the dominant perspectives, contributed effectively to the critical situation that development sociology experienced since the middle of the Eighties. At least, these experiences contributed much more to these critical perceptions than any of the many strictly analytical questions that had been debated on the theoretical horizons of development theory during the Seventies.

The much discussed “end” of the undisputed reign of the dominant paradigms in development sociology was reflected mainly in the fading away of the conceptual conflicts about the explanatory potential of these paradigms. Especially the old controversies about the bias and the weaknesses of modernization theories, of dependency concepts, of world-system approaches, etc. - all of them lost their thrust and their relevance. Of course, in a certain way this only mirrored the profound changes that the social, political and cultural world in general has experienced since the Eighties. Many social scientists have tried to come to terms with these observable changes by subsuming them analytically under a catch-all term like (for instance) “post-modernity” or “post-modern society”, misleadingly derived from the aesthetic

and epistemological concept of post-modernism. With those “all-inclusive” terms they tried to focus on the complex realities constituted by the growing discontinuity of political, economic and social orders. This not only culminated in the categorical end of the paradigmatic “container society” of the heroic age of classical sociology as a regular framework for sociological analysis and turnstile for “objectivism”. It received an additional push with the worldwide consequences of the well-known events that quickly come to mind: the end of the Cold War, the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, the short-term effects of transformation policies in Eastern Europe, and, especially, the generalized diffusion of neo-liberalism and its peculiar recipes in their different versions, with all the consequences these processes have brought about. As the effects of these events culminated in the nearly ubiquitous acceptance of the ways and means of generalized market capitalism, a renewed tendency at the front of sociological analysis could be observed attempting to revive perspectives inspired by modernization theory. This revival was not only strongly influenced by the heterogeneous vested interests in and the contradictory results of transformation policies in the former state-socialist socio-economies. J. Alexander has called attention to the fact “that during this same timeframe the capitalist market was also reinvigorated, both symbolically and objectively, in the capitalist West”. This happened mostly by way of “the marked privatization of nationalized capitalist economies in both authoritarian-corporatist and socialist-democratic states” (Alexander, 1995: 31). Consequently, the revitalization of theories that this author subsumes under the label of “neo-modernism”, had to be critically accompanied to avoid that they did not repeat the ideological and simplistic dichotomies that once had been the brand-name of modernization theories of the first generation.

Conceptually, these debates and attempts of reorientation have had many important consequences, also for the framework and the explorative possibilities of development sociology. I would like to point out especially two of them: One is the consistent and systematic de-coupling of the different social spaces of “development”. The classical view that development was a process assigned to a specific, more or less clearly delimited “society”, with a territorialized political and economic space, had already been consistently undermined by the old critiques of the modernization paradigm. It had been one of the most important achievements of these critiques, to demonstrate that heterogeneity of conditions, discontinuity of

processes of change and the combination of contradictory relationships were really the trade-mark of “development”, and taking “society” as frame of reference for research therefore could only lead to seriously distorted appreciations. General sociological theory and analysis didn’t really take notice of these debates, as they were thought to be specific for socio-economic and cultural conditions precisely under way to be “developed”. Now these perceptions of consistent homogeneity, of state-centred society as regular frame of reference have become so utterly obsolete, that even current sociological discussions of “globalization” can’t avoid pointing out routinely the implications of “glocalization” (Robertson) as the intertwined consequences of universalism and particularism in their contradictory but consistent relationship.

So the conventional social spaces of “development” have come to be questioned in the same way as the processes themselves, to which this concept may be applied. Especially the manifest or latent assumption of the linearity of these processes of “development”, so characteristic for many debates about these concepts, has been discredited thoroughly. As there is evidently no way to come to terms with the idea of a consistent and general measure of “development” that may be applicable to the many diffuse and partially contradictory social realities it created, attempts to get at a conceptual framework have to search for alternatives. Evidently, this also explains the temporary attractiveness of the concept of “sustainable development”. Later it became clear that such a framework was not always sufficient to substitute the old conventional perspectives, inspired by the idea of sustainable economic growth. An alternative should also come to terms with the conceptual considerations that have been initiated by the dialogue of social and natural science. Here surfaced the ideas of contingency, of “chaos” as characterization of the unpredictable behaviour of complex systems, of path-dependency - all of them combined in a way that definitely forbids operating with simple dichotomous concepts. Likewise, such considerations underlie Alexander’s critique of Giddens’ “enthusiastic return to the theory of modernity” as resting “upon the same *simpliste* set of binary oppositions as did earlier modernization theory in its most banal forms” (Alexander 1995: 44).

At least some of the more recent theory debates could benefit from S.N. Eisenstadt's (2000) approach, based on a comparative analysis of civilizations and retaining a

concept of modernity that makes a critical, but productive use of some of the contributions of “classical” modernization theories. In his perspective, modernity is a European experience, well founded on a series of unique factors that in a singular historic combination singled out this specific socio-cultural phenomenon as the very first manifestation of a cluster of characteristics that can be observed on a global scale. The core of this comparative analysis of history of civilizations is, of course, deeply inspired by the Weberian tradition, as cultural dimensions constitute the basis of its concept of modernity. But it avoids systematically and in an innovative way the old traps of modernization theories, as it describes “modernity” as a multiple phenomenon. This multiplicity is based on specific combinations of social and cultural patterns, heterodox ideas and social movements. As other civilizations have selectively adapted some elements of the historic European models, they have resulted in their own combinations of modernity. So the concept of multiple modernities opens up a perspective for the corresponding multiplicity and variations of “development” and so it can at least claim for taking a better account of cultural differences and their relevance for different development paths.

So, the ascent of neo-modernism, the worldwide diffusion of market-oriented policies and neo-liberal preferences, as well as the definitive “end” of a “Third World” (at least in its mythical versions) doesn’t really make obsolete the need for a development sociology. In any case, it signals the need for a development sociology that takes the chance of catching up with the different analytical debates of general sociological theory, as these signal also a search for new orientations. Elliott has cited an interesting diagnosis formulated by J. Alexander “that we live in an era of ‘critical post-Utopianism’ ”, meaning “the sense of the resilience of culture and the power of Utopian impulses and longings” and this has a very real background, as “(W)hile the metanarratives or big stories of the modern age (...) might have fallen on hard times, it is still the case that people hunger for better lives and better ways of living together” (Alexander, cited in Elliott 2004: 13). Well, that could be the hour of development sociology - but what about its possible counterpart?

There is little doubt that the shift from sociological theory to social theory during the last twenty years reflects the extension of perspectives and approaches, that all try to contribute their peculiar interpretations and analyses of “the social”, first of all by

diluting its contours. Sociology has opposed little resistance to these inroads and has been the less capable to affirm its theoretical monopoly the more explanatory difficulties were met by one of the master concepts of the discipline: "society". Moreover, some of the grand-masters of Sociology, for instance T. Parsons, were among those who contributed decidedly to this diffuseness of the corpus of sociological theory. Anyway, some of the most effective recent attempts to get hold conceptually of "the social" and its changes didn't come from sociology itself, but from adjacent areas of investigation. They were accompanied by other influential factors, that all contributed to break through the boundaries of the discipline. One of these influences is the formation of different specialized studies in some areas of the humanities, with strong sociological implications but without subscribing to the methodological and explanatory focus of sociology. Important examples here are the cultural studies, gender studies, post-colonial studies, etc. All of them have made important and sometimes empirically oriented contributions to the investigation of modern social conditions and have therefore also become components of contemporary social theory.

A second important influence has been the long term effect of debates concerning the normative and ontological aspects of modern social science. By incorporating arguments from neighbouring philosophical reflections on social and cultural conditions, contributions from the philosophy of science have become an integral part of social theory.

In a certain way then, sociology has, thirdly, become a victim of its own success. Many neighbouring disciplines have adopted part of the results of sociological perspectives and problem-orientations that initially counted as exclusive fields of sociology and its research approaches. History, Geography, Political Science, Literary Criticism, all of them have steadily approached areas and perspectives of investigation that formerly were integral parts of Sociology. By that they have strongly influenced the permeability of the boundaries of Sociology as a discipline, and, finally, they have by this become part of contemporary Social Theory. It is therefore also part of any theory of modernity and as a result also a precondition of development sociology, where all these tendencies and influences meet - not always free of conflicts, but frequently as starting point for potentially fruitful ideas.

Nevertheless, another consequence has also been a latent tendency that Rojek / Turner (2000) have rightly criticized as “decorative sociology”. Rojek / Turner see it mainly as a consequence of a predominantly textual understanding of social interaction: “Deconstructive methodology rejects classical sociology and adopts a literary analysis of texts which are assumed to have materiality. (...) By ‘reading’ social life as a text, decorative sociology equips itself with a payload of endless terminological disputes and esoteric debates about the disappearance of reality.” (Rojek / Turner, 2000: 639). Elliott thinks of it as a problematic feature of a Sociology that is “shorn of serious engagement with the social world, its changing practices and structures.” (Elliott, 2004: 4). Even a less acid appraisal must concede that such proliferation of different “approaches” and terminologies doesn’t add to the precision and the clarity of theory, as far as it is applied to the social world.

Especially the fallacy of confusing the results achieved by everyday knowledge with sociologically analytic and contra-factual knowledge indicates methodologically problematic aspects: „Much of current sociological theorizing appears to be guided by a disbelief in analytical abstractions and by a corresponding belief in the possibility of providing theoretical accounts of what happens as it actually happens. No one would dispute the attractiveness of this position if it were possible to realize, but accounting for something ‘as it actually happens’ is always problematic ...” Consequently, “(t)he distinction between a complex social reality and an intentionally simplified analytical model of this reality seems to have been lost in many sociological discussions of social theory.” (Hedström/Swedberg, 1998: 14 et seq.). Evidently, then, with the plural inferences into areas of hitherto genuine sociological interest by neighbouring disciplines, this diagnosis can be applied nearly wholesale to the situation of development sociology. In an attempt to get out of this impasse, then, the question for a comparative sociology of modernities and for development sociology could (and should) be answered by trying to establish the *sociologically specific* attributes of the multiple modernities and the *methodological instruments*, that can be applied to explain them.



## 5. A plea for a development sociology at an intermediate level

In the specific case of development sociology one of the first necessary steps to get at a genuinely sociological methodological approach would be to try to avoid the variable-centred type of social theorizing that, for instance, may be instrumentalized for the construction of socio-economic indices (like, for instance, the Human Development Index). That doesn't mean that such indices may not have positive effects, especially in the context of arguing for empowerment policies. But they frequently refer to the one master category of sociological analysis that by now has been successfully debunked as its pivotal focus: the category of "society".

One of the authors, who most decidedly have pleaded for sociological concepts of analysis that could supersede this idea of "society", is John Urry. He has even made his program into a book title, calling for a "sociology beyond societies" (Urry 2000), because the metaphor of "society" doesn't correspond any more to the realities to be explained: "In particular, if there is not a bounded society then how is it possible to establish the functional requirements that have to be met, in order that each 'society' continues? (...) Sociology thus appears to be cast adrift once we leave the relatively safe boundaries of a functionally integrated and bounded society..." (Urry, 2000: 17) The author, then, proceeds to offer other metaphors that may correspond better to the mobile realities created by processes of globalization: "I seek to develop theories pertaining to social life which depend upon metaphors of network, flow and travel" (Urry, 2000: 22). Such a program is surely highly attractive, but by now it is exactly only that: a programmatically organized set of alternative metaphors that still await the confrontation with the tasks of explanation and empirical investigation. Especially the metaphors of "flows" and "mobilities" are open to a critical review when taken too literally (see for instance, Evans 2004), or when mistaken themselves as sufficient analytical tools.

So, for instance, some aspects of the mobility metaphor are criticized on the charge that its undifferentiated use doesn't take account of the fact that there is emerging a global mobility regime, *contra* the hypothesis of the increasing social openness and fluidity of globalization. Especially transnational migratory flows are confronted by attempts to contain movements both across and within political borders based on a

state-managed mobility regime that operates on mechanisms of selective inclusion and exclusion. Therefore a “paradigm of suspicion” generates highly differentiated control strategies that result in selective mobility chances for people coming from different social contexts (see Shamir 2005).

But the critique of Shamir or Evans, even when sometimes exaggerated, calls attention to the fact that states as a specific form of organizing social spaces by monopolies of means of violence are still invariably of great influence, even when in the course of processes of globalization, their function may have changed dramatically (Kössler, 2003). Bauman (1991: 44 et seq.) and in his succession Urry and Münch have used the metaphors of the *gardening state* and the *game keeper state* to characterize this fundamental transition: “States that struggle to striate the space surrounding them, but numerical smooth global fluids cause them singular difficulties. (...) Thus shifts toward global networks and flows transforms [sic] the space beyond each state. It is this space which states have to striate and they are therefore involved in increasing efforts at ‘social regulation’” (Urry, 2000: 196, 198). But anyway, the state that regulates and tenders its actors is, nevertheless, a state that intervenes, even when his territorialized control has changed in its means as well as in its specific aims. In the context of “development” its analytical place has been discussed in especially controversial ways during the last twenty years, and together with the demise of “society” as focal point of sociological theory it has implications for the scope and range of development sociology.

Nearly ever since the popularisation of the term, “development” has been a field of research preferentially discussed and investigated in interdisciplinary ways. Nevertheless, the different disciplines implicated didn’t agree frequently in the content or even the aims of “development”. In a certain way, then, this field of research has been one of the first, where something like ‘social theory’ was constituted, as economics, sociology, cultural anthropology, psychology, post-colonial studies, cultural studies, gender studies and many others converged in the efforts to concretize the ways and implications of “development”. Among them, Sociology had evidently the problem not to dispose of a concept of “(social) development” of its own since the critical demise of the classical theories of modernization, still inspired by an evolutionist background.

Together with the turning away from “society” as analytical tool, these circumstances give additional legitimacy to any attempt to reorient sociological inquiry in this context. An especially promising procedure seems to be an actor-oriented approach in development sociology. Such an approach allows limiting the focus of analytically relevant sociological inquiry to situations which have been defined as “situations of development” by the actors themselves. Here the instruments of sociological analysis can be deployed within a framework that comes near to closed structural dynamics and where the sociological explanation of the preconditions and consequences of interdependencies of action within development situations could possibly generate useful knowledge. Nevertheless, the plea for an actor-oriented development sociology shouldn’t be confounded with a naïve “agency essentialism” because “as essential properties, agency and the agency-related faculties of mind are not allowed to vary” (Fuchs, 2001: 32).

The sociologically relevant actors operate in areas of action that they have intentionally defined as situations of development, but not as individuals, as persons, but as *collective actors* on an intermediate level constituted by their interrelations. These interrelations consist of the constellations of reciprocal observation, of interrelations of mutual influence and constellations of negotiation. Analytically, that means that development sociology has no monopoly on certain conceptual means and instruments beyond the simple fact that the actors themselves define these contexts as dominated by discourses of development. Generally, these contexts are by no means characterized by harmonious relationships or something like “social integration” as orientation of action. Quite on the contrary, they are deeply permeated by conflictive and even antagonistic relationships. Many development situations can be explained with the methodological means that the sociological tool-box has to offer also for explanation in other contexts. The actors, of course, are specific ones, and I would like to single out four of them as especially relevant in situations of development and therefore generally for the analytic work of development sociology: organizations, networks, social movements and households. All these (collective) actors are characterized by an (at least frequent) identity constitution as task-oriented “we-groups”, that is, they are oriented by a generalized interest to strive for better material/ existential conditions, that can serve as collective motivational background

to project its activities of cooperation or competition in a specific development situation.

Now the specific and important contribution of development sociology to the solution of analytical problems confronted by social theory in the study of development processes can be identified with its explanatory potential. That could be the specific contribution of development sociology, going beyond the identification of correlations and establishing propositions about social mechanisms which are effective in development situations. Of course, such a task is by no means easy and to solve it and to specify causal chains involves a complex theoretical and analytical labour. Following the conceptual specifications of R. Mayntz, social mechanisms “are sequences of causally linked events that occur repeatedly in reality if certain conditions are given” (Mayntz, 2004: 241). Specifications about causal chains in the form of propositions about social mechanisms effective in development situations could be one of the methodologically and conceptually crucial and distinctive contributions of development sociology in an area, where the interdisciplinary melange has offered many interesting ideas and heated debates, but not always really explanatory stringent causal reconstructions, process-tracing that allows for the identification of the relevant initial conditions (Mayntz, 2004: 244).

Development sociology could well base itself here on the different typologies of social mechanisms that have been already identified in the discussion of macro-micro-macro-relationships. Here the relational mechanisms are of central importance for the analysis of relevant developmental causal sequences. The example of the mechanism of brokerage could well illustrate these analytical possibilities of development sociology in situations that exemplify its genuine and unmistakably *sociological* approach.

Such an approach would, moreover, contribute significantly to the efforts of development sociology to specify and concretize the interdependencies and social processes subsumed under the categories of “flows” and “mobilities” in contexts that evidently make obsolete any attempt to insist on or even to revive a social theory centred on the notion of “society”.

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