

Social Theory as a Vocation? State of Affairs of Sociological Theorizing in Europe

Midterm Conference of the ESA Research Network 29

University of Copenhagen

New date: 14-15 January 2021



Call for Papers

After the “Golden Age of Social Theory” he celebrated in the 1980s, Jeffrey Alexander recently bemoaned the “abandonment of theoretical discourse”. Already before the turn of the Millennium, in 1997, the late Donald Levine complained about the dismal conditions of social theory in the US. In Scandinavia today, practically no young sociologist would dare to try to make an academic carrier by “writing theory”. General theory is often dismissed as “armchair sociology” and rarely supported by external funding.

On the other hand, we are under the impression that situation differs in other parts of Europe. There are some evidences that theorizing is regarded in much higher esteem on the European Continent. In Germany, France or Italy there are lively debates in social theory, and theoretical sociologists play major roles in public debates as well as in research.

In view of this contrasting images and seemingly diverging tendencies, it seems to us pertinent that the Research Network “Social Theory” in the European Sociological Association addresses these issues. We would therefore like to devote our next mid-term conference to (1) discuss the state of affairs of contemporary social theory in Europe. How should we understand the present state and conditions of social theory? Do we find dissimilar situations for social theory in Anglophone sociology as compared to other parts of Europe? Are there new developments on social theory in different countries, regions or language areas, and what do they look like. What are the social and cultural conditions that allow for or restrict the flourishing of social theory? How and why can social theory become a vocation or a profession? And what is the significance of social theory in sociology, in the social sciences and in the public debates?

This first group of questions requires clarifying (2) the practices and methodologies of social theory. We therefore ask, what do we mean by “social theory”? What is it that distinguishes the activity of doing social theory from social philosophy, on the one side, and empirical work, on the other? How do we do what we do when we theorize in sociology and the social sciences generally? Can we propose methodologies for doing social theory? In view of the conditions of contemporary social theory, working out methods for theorizing seems to be important.

The conference therefore invites papers which discuss (1) the present state of affairs, social and cultural conditions and societal effects of social theory in Europe, and (2) the meaning, practices or methodologies of “social theory” and sociological theorizing?

Key Note Speakers: Richard Swedberg, Cornell University and Angelika Pofert Technische Universität Dortmund

Abstracts (max 250 words) can be submitted until *October 1 2020* at
<https://eventsignup.ku.dk/rn29/about.html>

Organizers: ESA Research Network on Social Theory in collaboration with the Department of sociology, University of Copenhagen, the Centre for Political, Anthropological and Social Theory, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Copenhagen (Mikael Carleheden) and Hubert Knoblauch, Technical University of Berlin.

For further information visit <https://www.europeansociology.org/research-networks/rn29-social-theory>