

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (Cologne) (Ed.)

Periodical Part

**Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter,
Volume 1, No. 1-3**

Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter

Provided in Cooperation with:

Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne

Suggested Citation: Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (Cologne) (Ed.) (2000) : Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter, Volume 1, No. 1-3, Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter, ISSN 1871-3351, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), Cologne, Vol. 1, Iss. 1-3

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/155289>

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ECONOMIC SOCIOLOGY

European Electronic Newsletter

Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1999)

XX

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Welcome to the Reader !!!

by

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The decision to publish an electronic newsletter of this type was formally taken by Jens Beckert, Johan Heilbron, Ton Korver and myself at the annual meeting of the European Sociological Association in Amsterdam in August 1999. The *raison d'être* for the newsletter, it was agreed, is to encourage collaboration and interaction between people who are interested in economic sociology in Europe - and thereby also make a contribution to a more varied and creative economic sociology in general.

While in the United States economic sociology has been moving ahead at a brisk pace at least since the mid-1980s, this is much less the case in Europe. It is true that during the last ten-fifteen years some of the best-known sociologists in Europe - such as Pierre Bourdieu, Niklas Luhmann, Claus Offe and Anthony Giddens - have all discussed economic topics in their works and thereby made contributions to economic sociology. But they have usually done so in their capacity of general sociologists, and they have not made a call for, or otherwise encouraged, the development of a distinct economic sociology. Today, however, the situation is somewhat different in several European countries; and since a few years people have started to appear who identify themselves as economic sociologists and also have something novel to say. Some people trained in the sociology of science are, for example, beginning to make studies of economic phenomena; and some people, who have been inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, are doing the same. It is my belief that there exist more of these interesting, new practitioners of economic sociology than is currently known and also that most economic sociologists in Europe do not know about each other's existence. What is happening in Italy is rarely known to sociologists in Germany or Sweden and vice versa. Hopefully this newsletter will change this situation a bit - and in other ways be of help in advancing the cause of economic sociology in Europe.

Economic sociology is often defined as the application of the sociological perspective to economic phenomena as well as to phenomena which are economically relevant and economically conditioned (Max Weber). This is a very broad definition, and practically all varieties of economic sociology can be made to fit under it. It is also my hope that this newsletter will encourage all of the different types of economic sociology that already exist as well as those which are about to surface. To this can be added that it is my personal conviction that explicit political positions should be avoided in social science analyses. The thing to aim for, as I see it, is simply good economic sociology. This, of course, does not mean that there is no need for a discussion of the normative dimension of economic sociology; indeed, such a discussion is probably long overdue.

The first issue of this newsletter contains a brief overview of economic sociology in France by Johan Heilbron, and in the next issue there will be a similar introduction to economic sociology in Germany by Jens Beckert. There is also an excerpt from an interview with Mark Granovetter on economic sociology in Europe as well as an account of the sessions on economic sociology at the 1999

meeting of the European Sociological Association by Reza Azarian, the managing editor of this newsletter. A very special thanks should be extended to Ton Korver and Bert van Hees at SISWO (Institute for the Social Sciences, Amsterdam) which kindly helps with the distribution of the newsletter. It should also be mentioned that efforts are under way to distribute this newsletter to the members of various electronic lists for economic sociology in the United States and to create a website where all the issues of this newsletter will be stored.

Readers are encouraged to e-mail the people who work with this newsletter and send them news items of various kinds, such as information about new books, conferences to attend, and similar items. We are also grateful for comments, suggestions for brief articles and the kind. There is very little knowledge about what is happening in economic sociology in most European countries, so the newsletter could be of assistance on this score. With your help, and if everything works out as planned, the main task of this newsletter will hopefully have been accomplished in a few years, namely to help create an exciting and viable economic sociology in Europe.

Economic Sociology in France

by

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Until recently, economic sociology did not exist as a recognisable subfield in French social science. Various social science approaches to the economy emerged during the 1980s, but none of the French currents defined itself as economic sociology. The 'regulation school' developed an unorthodox macro-perspective, which was shaped by sources ranging from neo-marxism to the structural history of the Annales school. The 'economics of conventions' adopted an interpretative micro-perspective, focusing on economic actors and their situated interaction. The Revue du Mauss (1983) presented itself as an interdisciplinary platform for 'anti-utilitarian' currents of thought.

The reception of American economic sociology took place primarily within these various movements. Much of it was therefore perceived in a context which was quite different from the American one. Although some economic sociologists from the US, Mark Granovetter among them, participated in French conferences and workshops, their work was discussed in a constellation in which 'economic sociology' did not appear as a distinctive field of scholarship and research.

It was only when the publication of The Handbook of Economic Sociology (1994, ed. by Neil Smelser and Richard Swedberg) that the scope and the promise of economic sociology became fully visible. Economic sociology has since become an issue in France as well, and the emerging interest is well illustrated by the fact that in 1997 three major journals published special issues on economic sociology: Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales (no. 119, 1997), Revue française de sociologie (no. 3, 1997), and Cahiers internationaux de sociologie (vol. CII, 1997).

In the following note I will briefly present four research areas in which work has been done recently. Given the rapidly expanding interest and the limited space available here, this is obviously only a selection of a larger set of research efforts.

The Structural Dynamics of the Economic Field

A first body of work has emerged from the network around Pierre Bourdieu's journal Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales (ARSS). As is well known, Bourdieu himself has a long-standing interest in the sociology and ethnography of economic practices. His early work on Algeria was, among others, concerned with the discrepancies between the dispositions of Algerian sub-proletarians and the demands of the capitalist market. Bourdieu's view that the functioning of fields demands specific dispositions of the actors involved, has remained one of the characteristics of the economic sociology that one finds in ARSS.

From its beginning ARSS has published a substantial number of articles in the domain of economic sociology, although they are not presented as belonging to a specific area, economic sociology, to be

separated from other areas of social science inquiry. Thematic issues of the journal, for example, were successively concerned with 'Le patronat' (no. 20, 1978), 'Le capital social' (no. 31, 1980), 'Le construction sociale de l'économie' (no. 65, 1986), 'L'économie de la maison' (no. 80-81, 1990), 'Economie et morale' (no. 94, 1992) and, most recently, 'Economie et économistes' (no. 119, 1997). Some of this work has received attention outside France (like the work on the French economic elite, and on social capital), other aspects have remained largely unnoticed.

The collective research project on the market for individual houses (ARSS 80-81, 1990) is a paradigmatic example of Bourdieu's approach to economic sociology. It analyses in great detail the arrangements and the functioning of this complex market. Bourdieu's starting point is that the purchase of a house is both an economic and a symbolic investment. It entails not only economic transactions but also an emotional investment, one that is linked to the family and, most often, to a project of biological and social reproduction. This specific characteristic gives the housing market a particular structure, visible, for example, in the way modern firms advertise their products by appealing to very traditional values. Various aspects of the market are subsequently studied in a series of articles: size, structure and strategy of major and minor firms, the actual interactions between sellers and buyers (as based on tape-recordings), the post-war evolution of the demand for housing and its determinants, the changing housing policy of state agencies.

A more recent example is Bourdieu's analysis of the French publishing field. Here again is a market for goods which are object of both economic and symbolic investments. By analysing 61 publishing houses with the help of multiple correlation analysis, Bourdieu and his co-workers found different dimensions which structure the French publishing field. The first dimension opposes the long-standing major firms, which cumulate all sorts of capital (Gallimard is the prime example), to small and recent firms that are practically devoid of resources. These small firms often do not possess much more than some symbolic capital in the form of the esteem and recognition they have gained from avant-garde writers, critics, enlightened bookshop owners and informed readers. The second dimension differentiates publishers on the basis of the structure of their capital, that is according to the relative weight of their financial and their symbolic capital. The third dimension distinguishes publishers who publish few translations, usually from little-spoken languages, from those who publish many translations mostly from English.

In a general article on the 'economic field' (Bourdieu 1997), Bourdieu proposes a systematic outline of his view. What he calls the economic field is the product of a process of historical differentiation which has allowed the economy to function according to specific laws ('business is business'). This particular social world is, first of all, seen as a field of forces between actors. The relations between these actors, usually firms, are based on the volume and the composition of their capital. The concept of a field is thus distinguished from the interactionist view which characterises both game theory and network analysis. The economic field is, secondly, defined as a field of struggle, as an opposition mainly between established powers and their challengers. Here Bourdieu treats a series of questions about the conditions and strategies of change (and in particular the role of technological capital). The competing actors or agents are no homogeneous units: firms and other institutions are themselves fields, consisting of competing groups. In order to avoid a mechanistic image of the field dynamics, Bourdieu thus differentiates his analysis further and in the last part of his paper introduces the notion of 'economic habitus' to replace what he considers to be a scholastic notion: homo economicus. As

a 'socialised subjectivity' the habitus informs the ways in which economic and other interests are actually perceived and pursued.

In addition to this general model and its applications, one more specific aspect of Bourdieu's work is worth mentioning, because it has produced interesting work for which there is no equivalent in American economic sociology. In the functioning of fields intellectual experts often play a strategically important role, especially if they operate in the name of science and rationality. The sociology of economic expertise and of economics is therefore an integral part of economic sociology. This reflexive dimension is indeed missing in much of American economic sociology. In the otherwise very complete Handbook of Economic Sociology, there is no chapter devoted to the sociology of economic expertise and economics. Some of the members of Bourdieu's group have done important work in this respect. Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth have investigated the genesis of the so-called 'Washington consensus', the neo-liberal model of economic policies which have replaced Keynesianism (Dezalay and Garth 1998). Frédéric Lebaron similarly published a paper on the social construction of 'economic neutrality', a study which was based on the monetary council of the French central bank (Lebaron 1997a). Lebaron has also studied the field of economics and presented an illuminating analysis of the main oppositions among leading French economists (Lebaron 1997b).

The attention for the cognitive dimension of economic practice is also present in other French research groups. One line of work is connected to ethnographical and anthropological approaches, the other to the history and sociology of economic thought.

Economic Ethnography and the Anthropology of Markets

The journal for a historically oriented social science, Genèses, published a special issue in 1996 devoted to 'economic ethnography'. The various articles, collected and edited by Florence Weber, share a great finesse in their descriptions and observations; they are particularly sensitive to the categories used to describe and classify economic practices, and they tend to combine this approach quite naturally with a historical perspective. Florence Weber's paper about the domestic economy starts with a critical analysis of statistical surveys and then proposes an alternative framework of analysis. Her paper contains, among other things, original reflections on the significance of 'personal relations'. Hervé Sciardet observes transactions on the side-walks of a flea market. Marie-France Garcia studies the way in which scientific representations intervene in the economy, either by crediting or by discrediting certain practices. Her paper is a continuation of an ingenious article she published earlier on the transformation of a strawberry market in the Sologne region (Garcia 1986). In this pioneering article, she described all the investments that were made to construct a new type of market. It was no coincidence that the new market corresponded so well with the 'pure market' described in economic textbooks. The young counsellor of the Chamber of Agriculture had in fact modelled reality on what he had learned during his training as an economist.

Michel Callon has recently commented on Garcia's paper in a collective volume which is concerned with the cognitive framing of the economy (Callon 1998). Coming from the anthropology of science, Callon states that economics, rather than observing and explaining, actually 'performs, shapes and formats' the economy. The economy is 'embedded not so much in society but in economics'.

Economics is understood in the broadest sense of the term including all the knowledge and practices that make up, for example, accounting or marketing. Sociology, in Callon's view, needs to avoid two pitfalls: to try to enrich homo economicus and to denounce the market. "What we expect from sociology is not a more complex homo economicus, but the comprehension of his simplicity and poverty." Homo economicus is not a fiction; it really exists and the task of the scholar is to understand how calculative agencies are equipped by economics to carry out their calculations. The objective of an anthropology of markets then is to explore the "diversity of calculative agencies forms and distributions and hence of organised markets" (Callon 1998:51).

History and Sociology of Economic Thought

In a very different way, Philippe Steiner has also been concerned with the role of economic knowledge. Steiner, who is both an economist and a sociologist by training, has published extensively on the history of economic thought. In some of this work he has adopted a sociological approach. His Sociologie de la connaissance économique (1998), for example, is a Weberian interpretation of economic knowledge during the formative period of classical political economy (1750-1850). Steiner looks at the various forms of economic knowledge in this period from the perspective of rationalisation. Following Weber's sociology of law and religion, he distinguishes especially between formal and material rationalisation. Not only is the formal rationality of economic theory understood differently by various economists, it is also often in conflict with other forms of rationalisation which equally affect the knowledge of economic processes.

Steiner is also more directly involved in economic sociology and currently co-ordinates a small French network for economic sociology. He has written about economic sociology as an intellectual tradition (1995) and co-authored a book with Jean-Jacques Gislain on the economic sociology of the years between 1890 and 1920. Starting from a number of basic problems inherent in economic theory, Gislain and Steiner show how the major economic sociologists have suggested answers to the questions that pure economics was not able to deal with. The book is organised thematically and discusses the work of Pareto, Veblen, Weber, Durkheim, Simiand and Schumpeter.

Steiner's most recent work is a textbook on economic sociology (1999, in press), which is actually the first one of its kind in French. It will be published this autumn by the publisher La Découverte in a series of smaller textbooks called Repères.

Finance and Social Exclusion

A last area of research which may be mentioned is 'finance and social exclusion'. A group of researchers at the Centre Walras of the University of Lyon -2 has carried out numerous studies in this field, most notably on saving behaviour and systems of micro-finance. Initially concerned with countries in the third world, the research extended to groups of immigrants in Europe, and has since 1994 focused on financial practices outside of the regular system of banking and finance.

In the fieldwork which is done, two types of questions are recurrent: which are the representations of money, saving and finance of the specific group concerned, and which kind of financial and other arrangements could prevent their social exclusion?

Among the recent projects L'euro au quotidien (1998) concerns the difficulties that may arise with the introduction of the euro. Various social groups -the elderly, the poor, the illiterate- will experience difficulties in using the new currency. These social and psychological obstacles are analysed in the book by Jean-Michel Servet -the current director of the Centre Walras. The book is published in the series 'Sociologie économique' of Desclée de Brouwer, a collection of books which includes books of Richard Swedberg, William Julius Wilson, and Jean-Louis Laville, who is himself the editor in chief of the series.

Another recent project is the collective research on Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS in English, SEL in French). Originating in the 1970s in Canada, these associations emerged in France in the 1980s and have spread rapidly during the past years. Despite their great variety, LETS are all characterised by a denunciation of the rule of money and by a "civic re-appropriation of the economy". Since they have their own currency, their economy is situated between the reciprocity of gift relationships and a market system. In Une économie sans argent (1999) Servet and his co-workers extensively describe the history of the movement, analyse their actual functioning and variety, and discuss their future prospects.

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Mark Granovetter on Economic Sociology in Europe

The following text is an excerpt from an interview with Mark Granovetter, conducted by Richard Swedberg on September 10, 1999 at Stanford University. In the first part of the interview Granovetter discusses his current research, and in the second part - from which the excerpt has been taken - he talks about his view on economic sociology in Europe.

Granovetter says that he is currently involved in three major research projects. The first is a theoretical work in economic sociology, Society and Economy: The Social Construction of Economic Institutions. The current task is to reconstruct various draft chapters and to pull together all the material theoretically. Projects number two and three fall in the category of sociology of industry. The first is called "The Social Construction of the Electricity Industry in the United States, 1880-1925" (for working papers and similar items, see website www.stanford.edu/class/soc315b). The second industry project is termed "A Network Study of Silicon Valley". Granovetter is also editor of a successful book series at Cambridge University Press, "Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences".

Question: What is your opinion of European economic sociology?

Answer: I think it is hard for me to say what European economic sociology is --except for the French version -- because most Europeans who do economic sociology are so fully integrated into the world tradition of economic sociology that I don't think of them as doing something separate.

Now, if you ask me how Swedish economic sociology is different from American economic sociology, it seems to me that they all do very similar things, and it has never occurred to me to ask what is different about Swedish or European economic sociology. I think there may be some separate traditions in economic sociology, but within each tradition there are Europeans and Americans together, and there is more variation between traditions than there is between countries. France is often the exception, partly because of different traditions, and partly because the French always take pride in having their own intellectual productions. Thus I think there is perhaps a distinct francophone (as they call it, I think mainly so as to include Québec) economic sociology.

As you know, there is a book of my papers, especially in economic sociology, that has just been translated into French and is about to come out [from the publisher Desclée de Brouwer, in Paris]. The title has not been decided yet, but it may be the same as the one they used for a volume of mine in Italian: The Strength of Weak Ties and Other Essays. In any case, I wrote an introduction to this book in which I talk about the relationship between, on the one hand, my economic sociology, American economic sociology and the New Economic Sociology, and, on the other hand, francophone economic sociology. There are certainly distinctive themes in francophone economic sociology, compared to anglophone economic sociology. It is, for example, much more interested in culture, power, institutions and class relations and how these relate to what is happening in communities. I also talk there about the different traditions in French economic sociology, where there are numerous schools: the conventions school, the regulation school and the interesting work by Thévenot and Boltanski on Les Economies de la Grandeur (1991). Some of these people are in fact economists, and in the French-speaking world there are perhaps as many economists as sociologists,

who do something that looks like economic sociology, even though they call it economics, for example, "the economics of conventions". It is hard for me to see that there is really anything much in the English-speaking world that looks like that, and is as sociological as that, while in a sense it nevertheless is economics.

These days I am certainly also more interested in the cultural and semiotic aspects of the economy than I was some years ago. It has taken me a while to get around to that, but I now see its importance. I talk in the introduction to my French book about how I and others who worked with Harrison White as his graduate students in the 1960s were in rebellion against the dominant Talcott Parsons framework, which looked like a rather elaborate taxonomy and did not pay enough attention to concrete social relations and networks of relations.

It seems to me that in what you might call a sort of over-reaction to this very abstract argument, we were aggressively uninterested in cultural or mental states -- we were almost, though never quite, behaviourists, without ever giving up the idea that meaning is terribly important (we had, after all, read Weber). But it wasn't clear how to integrate that with the more concrete and manipulable and non-tautological parts of social life that we were paying more attention to, like social networks.

The pendulum has now swung back, and I think that a lot of us have become quite interested in these matters, and in part been influenced by the French. The work of Pierre Bourdieu has had an important impact and made us understand that these cultural aspects are quite wrapped up with issues of power and networks.

And this brings me to propose that in the long run there will be considerable convergence between anglophone and francophone economic sociology. You can already see this taking place, for example, in the work of people like David Stark, who has a deep appreciation of the French tradition but who also uses many of the ideas and tools of anglophone economic sociology [see e.g. Stark in M. Callon (ed.) The Laws of the Markets]. I think that the more these French works are appreciated in the English-speaking world, the more convergence we will see.

But it certainly has been healthy to have had a divergence; otherwise everybody would have been thinking the same way, and everything would have been less rich as a result. It is good to have some contrast in vision - it makes you think about whether there might not be some way to enrich and make more subtle what you are working on. That's how I view European economic sociology.

Economic Sociology at the ESA in Amsterdam

by

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In August this year Amsterdam hosted the fourth conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA), under the general theme "Will Europe Work?". Along with five symposiums, the programme also included a number of paper sessions run by various sectional units or Research Networks, among them six sessions organised by the Research Network Economic Sociology. What follows is a brief report of these six sessions, highlighting some of twenty or so papers that were presented.

During the first two sessions more general and theoretical issues were addressed. Here three papers sought to bring into focus the untapped potentials in the heritage of classical sociology. In *Max Weber's Sociology of Capitalisms*, Richard Swedberg called attention to Weber's analysis of the different ways in which capitalist economies can be, and have been, organised in history. The author argued that Weber's account embraces a social action-dimension as well as an institutional dimension; and that a variety of different types of capitalism can be discerned.

Soeren Jagd's paper, *Max Weber's Sociological Theory of the Firm*, was devoted to the Weberian model of the modern rational business enterprise, as distinguished from both the neo-classical economic theory of the firm and the models developed within economic sociology. The main argument here concerned Weber's extension of the conventional model by adding several types of variables, such as ethical orientations and institutional restrictions on the mobility of key economic resources. In another paper, *Crossing the Boundaries of Economics and Sociology: The Case of Vilfredo Pareto* Partik Aspers highlighted Pareto's emphasis on the non-logical parts of human action, and the implications that this kind of action has for social life in general and economic activity in particular.

In *The Intersubjectivity of the New: Toward A Pragmatist Theory of Innovation*, Jens Beckert addressed the problematic conceptualisation of innovation within the neo-classical framework. The paper can be characterised as an attempt aimed at a sociological approach to the innovative process which, informed by pragmatism, emphasises the piecemeal character of this process and its intersubjectivity. Finally there was a paper written by Bernard Convert and Johan Heilbron, who presented a sociological account of the recent re-emergence of economic sociology in the United States after decades of stagnation. The authors discussed two main interpretations of the revival of New Economic Sociology and pointed out some barriers to its reception in Europe.

The focus of the two subsequent sessions was on questions discussing various aspects of the emergence of economic institutions, particularly in the transition economies of Eastern Europe. Under this general heading Janos Istvan Toth presented a paper on recent changes in the ownership structure of enterprises in Hungary, while György Lengyel's paper, *Action Potential, Exit and Radical Voice*, reported on some empirical findings regarding the effect of material conditions on the

readiness of people to participate in radical protest actions. Another paper that deserves to be mentioned is *The Relevance of Gender and Class in Becoming a Top Manager in Hungary*, in which the author, Lilla Vicsek, reported on her findings which suggest that gender has a stronger impact, as compared to class origin, on Hungarian women's chances of becoming top managers.

During the following session entitled 'Informal Economy and Survival Strategies', two interesting papers were presented. The first of these, *Private Protection, Taxation and Law Enforcement in Post-Communist Russia*, by Vadim Volkov, addressed the dissolution of the state monopoly on the use of force in post-communist Russia and the emergence of new actors who have taken over this once so characteristic function of the state. In the second paper, *Return of the Crowd: Shareholders of Russian 'Financial Pyramids' in Mid 90s*, Vadim Radaev explored the informal practices and after-failure strategies of small private investors, caught in these pyramids.

In a paper entitled *Informal Economic Activity: Strategies of Households and Communities*, Madeleine Leonard developed an argument against omitting a whole range of economic activities which take place outside of the market, within households and communities. And finally, touching on a similar topic, Sokratis Koniordos reported in *Informal but Real Power Structures in Labour Relations* his research results on the various control strategies used by employers within small and medium size enterprises in Greece.

During one of the sessions a business meeting was held in which the formation of an electronic network was announced. This network, it was agreed, is meant to function as a channel for exchange of ideas, information and knowledge about work in economic sociology being done everywhere in Europe, as well as to facilitate contacts among scholars and researchers in the field. The overall purpose is to tie the community of European economic sociologists closer and make it more coherent. The network will be administrated by SISWO (Institute for the Social Sciences, Amsterdam) and will give out an electronic newsletter three times a year.

Another issue that was discussed at the business meeting concerned the nomination of new members to the organising committee, which for the next two years will be in charge of ESA's Research Network Economic Sociology. The following were nominated: Patrik Aspers (Stockholm University, Sweden), Sokratis Koniordos (University of Crete, Greece) and Janos Istvan Toth (Research Institute of Economic, Budapest, Hungary). The electronic voting is due to take place soon.

Economic Sociology Section Under Formation in the United States

by

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As chair of the organising committee to create a new Section on Economic Sociology in the American Sociological Association (ASA), I am delighted to have this opportunity to communicate with our European colleagues. Our field of economic sociology spans national boundaries. We hope that the new Section will be a resource for economic sociologists wherever they may be. Our vision is that the Section will be part of a network of centres of economic sociology around the globe, promoting the exchange of ideas, research, visiting scholars, and other endeavours that will enhance the vitality of our field.

A Brief History

In February 1998, Neil Fligstein (University of California, Berkeley) and Brian Uzzi (Northwestern University) hosted a conference at Berkeley on 'Economic Sociology and Market Dynamics'. This conference was attended by a number of economic sociologists from around the United States. During the conference, I suggested that perhaps it was time for us to create a formal Section on Economic Sociology. (Sections are the formal organisational units of the ASA.) Of course, this was not a new idea; many others had made the same suggestion before. It seemed, however, that interest in economic sociology had grown to a point where a new Section was a logical step in the development of our field. Since I suggested the idea, several of the participants challenged me to take on the task of leading the effort. I was glad to volunteer, but I note that any of the participants would be as qualified (if not more qualified) to lead the effort.

The next step was the formation of an organising committee. I was soon joined by a number of prominent economic sociologists: Nicole Woolsey Biggart (University of California), Neil Fligstein (Berkeley), Mark Granovetter (Stanford), Brian Uzzi (Northwestern), Fernanda Wanderly (a Ph.D. student at Columbia University), and Harrison C. White (Columbia).

With the organising committee in place, we began the long and laborious process of becoming a Section. This included a 'kick-off' event held at the San Francisco Hilton during the 1998 annual meetings of the ASA. This event was a great success, with an estimated 170 participants. We distributed our petition at the event, collecting many more than the 100 signatures required by the ASA.

Our next step was to write our proposal. This included (1) a mission statement, (2) discussion of the relationship between the proposed Section and other Sections (to avoid conflicts and duplications), (3) an overview of the field, (4) additional evidence of the vitality of the field of economic sociology (such as majors, Ph.D. programmes, centres, workshops, conferences, etc. around the country), an extended bibliography, and the signed petition.

In February 1999, the ASA Council approved the proposal to create a new Section on Economic Sociology. In accordance with ASA policy, Economic Sociology is now an official Section-in-Formation. Economic Sociology will become a full-fledged Section as soon as the by-laws are approved and the membership of the Section reaches 300 hundred. the Section-in-Formation has two years to achieve this goal, but I hope that we reach the 300 mark by this September-October (the period in which members renew their membership in the Association and join Sections).

Our first official business meeting was held at the 1999 annual meetings of the ASA in Chicago. This event was also very well attended, and we had an energetic discussion of the Section, our mission, and the ways in which the Section could contribute to the advancement of our field. Richard Swedberg gave us an excellent overview of the extent and growth of interest in economic sociology in Europe, and many of your exciting developments.

The Mission

The mission statement, as approved by the ASA, describes the broad outlines and intent of the Section: "The mission of the Section on Economic Sociology is to promote the sociological study of the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption of scarce goods and services. It does so by facilitating the exchange of ideas, information, and resources among economic sociologists, by stimulating research on matters of both theoretical and policy interest, by assisting the education of undergraduate and graduate students, and by communicating research findings to policy makers and other external audiences. Economic sociology is a distinct subfield. It is ecumenical with respect to method and theory. Economic sociologists use the full range of qualitative and quantitative methods. No theoretical approach dominates; the field is inclusive, eclectic, and pluralistic."

Our complete mission statement and related matters can be found at the Section's web site (<http://www.asanet.org/sections/economic.html>).

Building Bridges

I hope that this short essay will contribute to the building of bridges between our communities of economic sociologists. We would like our new Section to be open, creative, and innovative. We invite your ideas, comments, suggestions, and participation. Please feel free to contact any member of the organising committee. And thank you for this opportunity to share with you some of the developments in economic sociology in the United States.

Organising Committee

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Dr. Vadim Radaev
Programme organiser
Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences & InterCenter

PS. For those interesting in attending this conference: Please remember that you have to apply for a visa, and that this might take some time.

Economic Sociology in Cyberspace

There exist several electronic discussion lists in economic sociology. One of them contains editorials on economic sociology by well-known people: jmote@sas.upenn.edu. Another list is about social capital: vnyhan@worldbank.org.