

Swedberg, Richard

Article

Welcome to the reader!!!

Economic Sociology: European Electronic Newsletter

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Welcome to the Reader !!!

by

Richard Swedberg
Stockholm University
richard.swedberg@sociology.su.se

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.