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'Modern Times': The Conceptualization of Contemporary Societies

Lindgren, Lena

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



XVIII ISA WORLD CONGRESS OF SOCIOLOGY

FACING AN UNEQUAL WORLD:
CHALLENGES FOR GLOBAL SOCIOLOGY



13-19 July 2014

279.3

'Modern Times': The Conceptualization of Contemporary Societies

Monday, July 14, 2014: 6:00 PM

Room: 304

Oral Presentation

Lena LINDGREN, Lund University, Sweden

This paper attempts to do three things in following the development of the concept of modernity. First, its history of the last three decades is outlined: from its initial appearance and its early critique in the eighties of the then emerging postmodernity, to the now frequently used and almost indispensable appearing term when it comes to diagnosing contemporary societies. There has thus been a journey from conceptual polemics to its having become a part of the 'dominant intellectual discourse'. Lyotard's *La Condition postmoderne* (1979) was probably the starting point. The dichotomy of *Modernity versus Postmodernity* (Habermas 1980) was established soon thereafter. Later the term gradually became an integrated part of sociological theory and it was declared that "*Modernity is itself deeply and intrinsically sociological*" (Giddens 1990). 'Modernity' then came to refer to a "global condition" and possibly also the beginning of a future "world sociology of modernity" (Wagner 2012). A second question the paper is concerned with is the explanatory value that the concept of modernity has for empirical research on contemporary societies. The third question the paper considers is the impact which the success of the concept has had on sociological thinking. It appears to be common knowledge that we are living in a period of 'late modernity', even if there is now a panoply of different 'modernities'. The more general question here is what the consequences have been for further theorizing and analysis after the important breakthrough of "modernity" in the media and the academic discourse. One can note that the first reference to it made by Habermas in *Modernity versus Postmodernity* is to an art critic who in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* advanced the thesis that "*Postmodernity (-) presents itself as Antimodernity*", thus expressing what was to become the new 'Modernity'.

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When:

July 13 - 19, 2014

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