
Cocta News

The Rome Symposium on Concept Formation and Measurement, Sept. 27–30, 1984

by Alberto Marradi

The participants in the Rome Symposium felt the need to explicitly manifest their satisfaction with the depth and level of the debate, and many gave the due credit to the formula and the great deal of forethought and preparation. In my opinion there is still a large margin for improvement, if the ideas behind the Symposium are developed with more courage. These ideas (as expressed in the programme agreed to by Artus, Pawson and me in 1982 Mexico City, and in the first circular) were: in order to avoid the low quality of most papers and the paucity of discussion in ordinary meetings, a) the number of papers-per-time-unit should be reduced, b) the discussant status should be enhanced, c) the stress on 'originality' of papers should be removed, so that papers already submitted to other meetings may be presented, profiting by previous debate of further thought.

Of these 3 points, only (b) has been perfectly implemented in the Rome Symposium. The number of papers (a) per time unit was still too high, with the triple negative consequence that (a1) chairmen have been forced to somehow curtail the debate in order not to intrude into other papers' right, (a2) the burden on everybody's brain has been too heavy, as little respite could be given, (a3) very little time was left for informal get-togethers and discussion of future initiatives.

What is worse, the idea of presenting revisions of already discussed papers (c) has fared rather badly. Most people still feel they should submit something new, which has delayed the selection process. Therefore, I wonder whether we should not go a big step further in our search for well-pondered and well-digested papers, and devote at least part of the next Symposia to a sort of review symposium of a small number of previously published, well known and topic-consistent papers. The additional advantages of this procedure would be: (c1) to shorten the selection process, delivering it from the dependence on the inflow of new papers; c2) the possibility of involving some big shots, attracted by the perspectives of having their papers discussed by a dozen scholars at a time, and being able to immediately counter criticism, by qualifying it.

This would entail the quick selection of no more than 4 papers (one per Symposium day) covering the chosen Symposium topic, the diffusion of a circular-calling for comments, and the selection of the authors of the most thorough comments as discussants.

Papers

TOPIC A: Helmut ARTUS: How far are Concepts Theory Dependent? (IZ Sozialwiss., Lennéstr. 30, D-5300 Bonn,

F.R. Germany); Norman BLAIKIE: The Generation of Grounded Concepts (Dept. of Soc. Sc., RMII, P.O. Box 2476V, Melbourne, Vic 3001, AUL); Jan-Erik LANE: Against Theoreticism (Dept of Political Science, University of Umeå, S-901 87 Umeå, Sweden). Discussants: Alessandro BRUSCHI (Fac. di Sc. Politiche, Via Laura 48, 50121 Firenze, Italy), Antanas BURACHAS (Lithuania Acad. of Sciences, 232000 Vilnius, Lenino Str. 3, USSR), Aaron CICOUREL (Dept. of Sociology, La Jolla, Calif. 92903, USA), Gordon DIRENZO (Dept. Sociology, Univ. of Delaware, 322 Ed. Laur. Smith Hall, Newark, Del 19711 USA). Richard GRATHOFF (Fak. für Soziol., Univ. Bielefeld, Postfach 8640, 4800 Bielefeld, F.R. Germany), Peter HALFPENNY (Dept. Sociology, Univ. of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, UK), Georg RITZER (Dept. Sociology, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, Md 20742, USA), Gianni STATERA (Ist. di Sociologia, Via Parigi 11, 00185 Roma, Italy), Nico STEHR (till next summer: Inst. für Soziologie, Univ. München, Konradstr. 6, D-8000 München, F.R. Germany), Barry TURNER (Dept. of Sociology, Amory Bdg, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ, UK), Stephen TURNER (Dept. of South Florida, 830 First Street South, St. Petersburg, Fla 33701, USA).

Additions to all topics: Khjallah ASSAR, BP 466 Annaba (Algeria); Rainmondo STRASSOLDO, Ist. Sociologica, Fac. Sc. Politiche, P. Europa 1, 34127 Trieste, Italy).

TOPIC B: John BRYNNER: Factor Analysis and the Construct-Indicator (Relat. to Fac. of Educ. Studies, Open Univ., Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7, 6AA, UK); Aaron CICOUREL: Social Measurement as a Creation of Expert Systems (Dept. Sociol., La Jolla, Calif. 92903, USA); Jean MORTON-WILLIAMS: The Communication Process and Respondent Understanding of Survey Questions (S.C.P.R., 35, Northampton Square, London EC1V OAX, UK). Ray PAWSON: On the Level: Measurement Scales and Sociological Theory (Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK). Discussants: Paolo AMMASSARI (Via Aladino Govoni 35, 00136 Roma, Italy), Anthony COXON (Dept. of Sociology, Univ. College, P.O. Box 78, Cardiff CF1 1XL, UK), Irwin DEUTSCHER (1280 21st. Str., Apt. 204, Washington DC 20036). Georg LIND, Sozialwiss. Fak, Univ. Konstanz. Postfach 5560, D-7750 Konstanz 1, F.R. Germany), Jan LUTYNSKI (Univ. Lodzki, Inst. Sozjologii, 90124 Lodz, Poland); BON, BURACHAS, GRATHOFF, LANE, S. TURNER: see address under topic A: ASSAR, STRASSOLDO: see address under "additions to all topics". KRIZ, MARRADI: see address under topic C.

TOPIC C: Jürgen KRIZ: Concepts, Operational Links, and Measurement Scales (Fach. Klin. Psychologie, Univ. Osnabrück, D-4500 Osnabrück, Knollstrasse 15, F.R. Germany); Alberto MARRADI: Measurement and Scales (Ist. Pol-Amm, Via G. Petroni 33, 40126 Bologna, Italy); Leo VAN DOORN: Discrete or Continuous Measurement? (Vakgroep Methoden, FSW-A, Grimburgwal 10, geb. 5, 1012 GA Amsterdam, the Netherlands). Discussants: ASSAR; STRASSOLDO: see address under + additions to all topics. AMMASSARI, BRYNNER, COXON, DEUTSCHER, LIND, LUTYNSKI, PAWSON: see address under topic B.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Helmut Artus has taken the pledge to organize the second Symposium, that should take place in Bad Homburg, at the Center of the Werner Reimers Stiftung. In fact, he had obtained the availability of that center for the first Symposium, but – as the Centro Evoluzione Umana offered the same possibilities – we preferred to start with Rome. As far as I understand there are two problems: obtaining confirmation of the Stiftung's offer for the second Symposium, and finding travel funds. The Stiftung will just cover board and lodging (as it was in Rome).

At the Sept. 28 "business meeting", the following decisions were taken concerning this symposium: it will focus on approaches (so that a title might be: 2nd European Symposium: "Interpretative" versus "Scientific" Sociologies); two papers are considered as already screened and accepted (Artus on Causality Measurement and Meaning, and Turner on the Suppression of Reason . . .); a screening committee will help to find two or three already published papers. I hope you will hear more details soon.

As far as the third Symposium is concerned, several hints seem to point in the direction of Poland as a guest country. Edmund Mokrzycki personally told me last May that he would be willing to organize a meeting along guidelines; the Institut Socjologii of Lodz (proff. Kulpinska and Lutynski) wrote to me about their willingness to organize a kind of a meeting in Lodz in 1986. At the Rome Symposium, Richard Grathoff who was going to visit Poland took upon himself the task of exploring such possibilities, and I hope to hear from him soon. I would just suggest that the date is postponed, as in 1986 we have an excellent occasion to meet in New Delhi for the ISA Congress.

Steve Turner may organize a Symposium in the States. Bruschi told me he has several avenues to obtain the availability of nice villas owned by the Tuscan local government around Florence. I think we must pursue such avenues, but first give Germany and Poland their chances for the second and third meetings.

There are several opportunities to pursue the debates on the themes interesting us at the XI Congress of ISA

(New Delhi, August 18–22, 1986). Each RC has ten sessions of 2 hours each. The officers of both RC 33 and 35 begun to gather proposals since Mexico City, and we proposed two joint sessions of both RC's: one on CONCEPTS AND THEORIES (convenors Marradi and Pawson), and one on VALIDITY and RELIABILITY (convenors Artus and Pawson). The two sessions have already been approved by COCTA (RC 35), while RC 33 set up a longer screening process: however, we always met the deadlines and requirements, and I would be extremely surprised to learn that more than a handful other session convenors did the same.

Our "business meeting" (Sept. 28) considered to more proposals: BLAIKIE suggested a session on RESEARCH STRATEGIES AND SOCIAL REALITIES, which gathered a lot of immediate support, showing it is likely to be very popular. I therefore think he might try and submit it to the officers of RC 33, although it will have to queue behind proposals submitted in due time and due form.

Steve TURNER made a proposal that he has later formalized in a letter to me: CAUSE, LAW, AND PROBABILITY: THEORY AND RESEARCH DISCOURSES. I think this is a typical COCTA subject, and I am more than confident that it can be accepted as a RC 35 (COCTA) session.

For your convenience, I remind you of two deadlines, as gathered from ISA Bulletin no. 35, p. 3. By October 1, 1985 session organizers must submit names & addresses of papergivers and discussants + paper titles. By March 1, 1986 abstracts must reach ISA hqs in order to be published in the Congress official handout. As a consequence, whoever has an interest in one of the 4 sessions described above, should perhaps contact the convenor soon, and propose a paper title, or volunteer as discussant.

Those interested in these COCTA sponsored activities should contact Alberto Marradi as soon as possible.

Jan-Erik Lane
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