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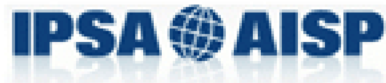

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Studying Social Transformation

STEPHEN CASTLES

ABSTRACT. Global change and the increasing importance of transnational flows and networks in all areas of social life create new challenges for the social sciences. However, their underlying assumptions are linked to their origins in Western models of industrialization and nation-state formation. There is still considerable national specificity in modes of organization, theoretical and methodological approaches, research questions, and findings. In contrast, social transformation studies can be understood as the analysis of transnational connectedness and the way this affects national societies, local communities, and individuals. New research approaches include a focus on transnational processes; analysis of local dimensions of change using participatory methods; and the construction of international and interdisciplinary research networks.

Key words: Development theory • Globalization • Network research • Social transformation

Introduction

The last quarter of the twentieth century was a period of rapid growth in transnational linkages and flows affecting all areas of human life: economy, politics, environment, culture, society, and even interpersonal relations. These global processes gave rise to major social transformations throughout the world, so that old economic and cultural dichotomies such as "modern and traditional," "highly-developed and less-developed," "eastern and western," "the South and the North" lost their sharpness. It became increasingly difficult to act locally without thinking globally (as the slogan went), while the national level lost its preeminence as a framework for understanding society.

Social scientists who set out to analyze these dramatic changes soon came up against the limits of existing theories and methodologies. Core disciplines such as economics and sociology were based on (often tacit) cultural assumptions and developmental models deriving from the western experience of capitalism and

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industrialization. The evolution of social scientific knowledge had been largely based on the principles needed for construction and integration of the western nation-state as the organizational form for global expansion and hegemony. Hence the emphasis was on understanding emerging industrial society and on studying colonized societies, in order to control dangerous classes and peoples (see Connell, 1997).

Moreover, despite international interchange between social scientists, there was (and still is) considerable national specificity in the modes of organization, the theoretical and methodological approaches, the research questions, and the findings of the social sciences. Within each country, there are competing schools or paradigms, yet these function within distinct intellectual frameworks with strong historical roots and surprising durability. Such frameworks have often been exported to areas of political and cultural influence in a sort of intellectual neo-colonization. The determinants of national specificity include: religious, philosophical and ideological traditions; varying historical roles of intellectuals in constructing national culture and identity; relationships between states and "political classes"; the role of social science in informing social policy; and modes of interaction of state apparatuses with universities and other research bodies.

This is not the place to pursue such issues of the sociology of knowledge. The point is that global change and the increasing importance of transnational processes require new approaches from the social sciences. These will not automatically develop out of existing paradigms, because the latter are often based on institutional and conceptual frameworks that may be resistant to change, and whose protagonists may have strong interests in the preservation of the intellectual status quo. If classical social theory was premised on the emerging national-industrial society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then a renewal of social theory should take as its starting point the global transformations occurring at the dawn of the twenty-first century. As transnational linkages pervade all areas of social life, national boundaries become more porous and local autonomy declines; communities and regions become increasingly interconnected and mutually dependent. Just as cutting down a forest in one place has consequences for the global environment, social, economic, cultural, and political changes in a specific country are likely to affect people elsewhere. Social transformation studies can thus be understood as the analysis of transnational connectedness and the way this affects national societies, local communities, and individuals.

This, in very broad terms, is the thinking underlying Unesco's Management of Social Transformation (MOST) Program. The approach of MOST has been to sponsor international networks which have sought to develop new research themes, methods, and theories through collaborative practice. The task of developing an overarching theoretical framework is still in its early stages. This article is an attempt to contribute to this debate by discussing some of the basic ideas of social transformation studies. Of course, this endeavour is not specific to Unesco. A rich and innovative literature on globalization and social transformation has begun to emerge in recent years. Moreover, principles of social transformation research are being developed and used by practitioners in a range of organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. We are dealing with a complex and fast-changing field.

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Social Transformation and Development

There is nothing intrinsically new about the term "social transformation." Generally it implies an underlying notion of the way society and culture change in response to such factors as economic growth, war, or political upheavals. We may have in mind the "great transformation" (Polanyi, 1944) in western societies brought about by industrialization and modernization, or more recent changes linked to decolonization, nation-state formation, and economic change. I am suggesting that it is useful to define social transformation studies in a new, more specific sense as an *interdisciplinary analytical framework* for understanding global interconnectedness and its regional, national, and local effects. Social transformation studies therefore need to be conceptualized in contrast to notions of development (or development studies).

Modernity, Progress, and Development

The notion of *development* often implies a teleological belief in progression towards a predetermined goal: usually the type of economy and society to be found in the "highly-developed" western countries. Social transformation, by contrast, does not imply any predetermined outcome, nor that the process is essentially a positive one. Social transformation can be seen as the *antithesis of globalization* in the dialectical sense that it is both an integral part of globalization and a process that undermines its central ideologies. Today's dominant neoliberal theories of globalization have an overwhelmingly celebratory character; focusing on the social upheavals which inevitably accompany economic globalization can lead to a more critical assessment. This became evident in practical terms during the Asian economic and financial crisis of 1997–99, when governments and international agencies suddenly became aware of the social contradictions of unregulated world markets. A continuation of the dialectical logic would, of course, require thinking about a *synthesis*, or a solution to the current contradictions. This is perhaps to be found in new notions of sustainable development or human development (see below).

The Modern Age is generally seen as starting with the European "discovery" of the "New World" in the fifteenth century. The Enlightenment philosophies of the eighteenth century provided intellectual explanations and legitimations of modernity. The idea of development is the most recent stage of the Enlightenment notion of human progress as a continual process of internal and external expansion based on values of rationality, secularity, and efficiency. Internal expansion refers to economic growth, industrialization, improved administration, government based not on divine right but on competence, and popular consent—in short, to the development of the modern capitalist nation-state. External expansion refers to European colonization of the rest of the world, with the accompanying diffusion of western values, institutions, and technologies. Modernity had the military and economic power to eliminate all alternatives, and the ideological strength to claim a right to a universal civilizing mission. The most obvious reason why modernity is coming to an end is that its core principle—continual expansion—has become unviable:

- there are no significant new territories to colonize or integrate into the world economy;
- human activity now has global environmental consequences;

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- weapons of mass destruction threaten global annihilation;
- the economy and communications systems are organized on a global level;
- global reflexivity is developing: increasing numbers of people (especially those in global cities and postindustrial occupations) refer to the whole world—not the local community or the nation-state—as the frame for their beliefs and actions (Albrow 1996); and
- new forms of resistance by groups that refuse to accept the universality of western values are becoming increasingly significant (Castells, 1997).

The result is a social and political crisis that affects all regions and most countries of the world, albeit in different ways. The principle of quantitative growth (based for instance on the indicator of GDP per capita) has to be replaced by qualitative growth (that is, sustainable environments and enriched livelihoods). This situation has also led to a crisis of development theory.

Development Studies and the Cold War

The notion of development arose after 1945 in the context of decolonization, system competition between capitalism and communism, and the emergence of the non-aligned bloc of nations—the Third World. The First World offered a development model based on an interpretation of its own experience. The development economics of the immediate postwar period, deriving from the work of Rosenstein-Rodan, Nurkse, Kuznets, Clark, Lewis, and others, called for economic growth based on state investment, urbanization, cheap and abundant labour, and free entrepreneurs (Baeck, 1993): emerging nations should have economic and political institutions designed to achieve integration into a world economy dominated by western corporations. The international institutional structure was established through the Bretton Woods agreement and the establishment of such bodies as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Second World offered an alternative model based on the experience of the Soviet Five-Year Plans: a state command economy, which extracted agricultural surpluses to fund rapid capital accumulation and industrialization. The state acting in the name of "the people" would be the dominant force in economic growth, which would in turn lead to the emergence of a new working class free of local and tribal loyalties—a model attractive to new elites in emerging nations.

The problem for the western model was to identify the agent of economic growth. Here the sociology of development and its modernization theory provided the crucial answer. For example, Rostow's five stages of growth culminating in economic "take-off" were based on an ethic of hard work and savings, combined with laissez-faire economics and free markets. Rostow sub-titled his work a "non-communist manifesto" (Baeck, 1993; Rostow, 1960). For modernization theory: "Development was a question of instilling the 'right' orientations—values and norms—in the cultures of the non-Western world so as to enable its people to partake in the modern wealth-creating economic and political institutions of the advanced West" (Portes, 1997: 230). Modernization theory predicted that such orientations would lead to changes in demographic behaviour (a decline in fertility), in political culture (the emergence of democracy), and in social patterns (reduced social inequality through a "trickle-down" of the new wealth). By the 1960s, however, these expectations had proved largely illusory. Economic growth

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in Africa, Asia, and Latin America was slow, inequality within countries increased, and the gaps between poor and rich countries grew larger.

In response to the critique of modernization theory, the dependency school emerged, initially in Latin America, through the work of Cardoso, Frank, Baran, and others. Dependency theory was based on Marxist political economy, and saw underdevelopment as a deliberate process designed to perpetuate the exploitation of Third World economies by western capitalism. The neocolonial structures of world markets blocked development, and could only be countered by import-substitution strategies designed to increase national economic and political autonomy (Baeck, 1993: chap. 3; Portes, 1997). However, dependency theories too ran into difficulties by the mid-1970s. Latin American countries which had tried the import-substitution approach had not been very successful, while the beginnings of export-led rapid industrialization in some Third World areas, especially Brazil and East Asia, questioned the prediction of continued dependency.

In the 1980s and 1990s, neoclassical economic theory became dominant. This approach to development emphasized reliance on market mechanisms and reduction of the role of the state in developing economies. Taken to an extreme, the state was to be limited to its functions of providing infrastructure (such as roads and educational facilities) and securing order (in the sense both of preventing civil unrest and of financial regulation), while regulation of economic activity was to be left entirely to the market. All too often the neoclassical recipe for development seemed designed to make the world safe for global investors and corporations, while prohibiting policies to protect workers, farmers, or consumers from the cold winds of market rationality. Moreover, the value of neoclassical development theory was often impaired by its methodological individualism, which tended to neglect the role of social and cultural factors in economic change.

A competing model was provided by world systems theory: such theorists as Amin (1974) and Wallerstein (1984) argued that national development was an irrelevant concept: the crucial issue was the development of the world economy itself through increasing flows of trade, investment, labour, etc. Within this global economy, various countries or groups could gain ascendancy on the basis of economic, political or military strength. Less-developed countries could not achieve autonomy (as proposed by dependency theory); rather they had to insert themselves in global economic chains to avoid marginalization. Clearly this approach was a forerunner of current theories on globalization (see below), but its concentration on general trends at the global level reduced its usefulness as a framework for understanding local resistance or national policies to counter negative effects of globalization (Portes, 1997).

The Crisis of Development Theory

The whole notion of development became problematic beginning in the late 1980s due to major economic, geopolitical, technological, and cultural changes:

- Trends towards economic and cultural globalization accelerated, largely due to the information technology revolution. The structure and control mechanisms of global markets changed rapidly. The new media allowed an increasingly rapid diffusion of cultural values based on an idealized US consumer society. A

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leap in military technology shifted the global balance of power to the United States and its allies.
- Globalization and industrial restructuring led to marginalization, impoverishment, and social exclusion for large numbers of people in both the older industrial countries and the rest of the world, undermining the supposed dichotomy between developed and underdeveloped economies.
- The end of the cold war, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the partial shift to a market economy in China heralded the end of the Second World and the bipolar global system. Victorious capitalism appeared to be an uncontested economic model.
- The emergence of the "tiger economies" in East Asia and trends to industrialization in some parts of Latin America and the Middle East further undermined the notion of a dualistic world. At the same time, the "Asian miracle" and the discourse on Asian values questioned the dominance of the western development paradigm.

All these changes tended to undermine the autonomy of nation-states and their ability to control their economies, social policies, and cultures. The key notions of development theories—"developed," "underdeveloped," "modernization," "dependency"—all became problematic. The concept of the Third World became unviable, due to economic and political differentiation within the former less-developed areas. Moreover, in the absence of a Second World, the Third World lost its political meaning—namely the idea that nonaligned developing nations could play off the capitalist and communist worlds against each other. In response, the new concept of the *North–South divide* emerged. However, this notion also lacks sharpness, since some countries of the South have achieved substantial economic growth, and South–South linkages in economy, politics, and cultures are increasingly significant. Moreover, the vast and growing disparities within the South (class divisions, the rural-urban split, gender inequality, ethnic and religious differences) make any totalizing notion counter-productive.

Social Transformation Studies

The critique of development theories was the context for the emergence of social transformation studies as a new analytical framework. It is based on the following assumptions:

1. Social transformation affects all types of society in both developed and less-developed regions, in the context of globalization, regionalization, and the emergence of various forms of supranational governance.
2. Globalization is leading to new forms of social differentiation at the international and national levels. Polarization between rich and poor as well as social exclusion are problems affecting most countries, as also the relations between them.
3. The principal goals of development can no longer be defined in terms of economic growth and modernization on the western model. Uneven growth and social polarization may actually increase the disadvantage and marginalization of significant groups. In view of differing cultures and group values it is impossible to put forward a universally-accepted goal for processes of change.
4. Studying social transformation means examining the different ways in which globalizing forces affect local communities and national societies with highly-

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diverse historical experiences, economic and social patterns, political institutions, and cultures.

5. Social transformation can have both positive and negative consequences for local communities and nation-states. Moreover, some countries and groups may be by-passed or excluded. The response of affected groups may not be adaptation to globalization but rather resistance. This may involve mobilization of traditional cultural and social resources, but can also take new forms of "globalization from below" through transnational civil society organizations.

Using the concept of social transformation as an analytical tool does not mean abandoning the goal of development, although it does mean moving away from earlier simplistic ideas that economic growth is the key to everything and will automatically trickle down to improve living standards for all. It is important to conceptualize social transformation studies as a field of research that can and should lead to positive recipes for social and political action to help communities improve their livelihoods and cope with the consequences of global change. Researchers in the field should seek to influence the strategies of powerful institutions such as governments, transnational corporations, and international organizations.

Radical critiques of economistic development models have had a strong influence on contemporary mainstream thinking. This is shown by the widespread adoption of the principle of *sustainable development,* according to which raising per capita income is only one of many objectives. Others include improving health and educational opportunities, giving everyone the chance to participate in public life, ensuring efficient and honest administration, and safeguarding the environment and intergenerational equity (which means that current generations should not deplete resources to the detriment of future generations) (World Bank, 1999: 13). The concept of *human development* introduced in 1990 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is even broader: "Human development is the process of enlarging people's choices—not just choices among different detergents, television channels or car models but the choices that are created by expanding human capabilities and functionings—what people do and can do in their lives' (Paul Streeten in UNDP, 1999: 16). This includes a wide range of desired goods, from clean water through to safe working conditions, human rights, and freedom of cultural and religious expression.

Nowhere is this shift in thinking more evident than at the World Bank, which in the past has had a one-sided focus on economic growth and large projects: "In the 1950s and 1960s large dams were almost synonymous with development" (World Bank, 1999: 18). In the 1980s, the World Bank together with the IMF came to be seen by many as the global policemen of capital, intervening in the name of free markets and deregulation wherever states tried to maintain economic autonomy or social equity. This orthodoxy was summed up in the "Washington consensus," with its neoclassical economic principles of liberalization, stabilization, and privatization (Stiglitz, 1998). The problem with such approaches, according to Stiglitz,[1] was that they "saw development as a technical problem requiring technical solutions. . . . They did not reach deep down into society, nor did they believe that such a participatory approach was necessary." They tried to impose supposedly universal economic laws, and ignored the lessons of history. Most importantly, this development approach often failed: many countries that followed the dictums of the Washington consensus (at great human cost) did not achieve economic growth.

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Stiglitz's solution is to adopt a much broader concept of development as the *transformation of the whole of society.* This means a shift away from a primary focus on economic growth, and more consideration of social development. It also means complementing the top-down approach of working with governments and powerful institutions with bottom-up methods designed to discover and include the needs and interests of a wide range of social groups. Stiglitiz stresses such concepts as "participation," "social capital," inclusion," and "ownership," and this new rhetoric now finds a prominent place in World Bank documents.[2] But how real is this revolution in thinking? The Bank's Comprehensive Development Framework offers a blueprint for "a holistic approach to development" with "poverty alleviation" as the main goal (World Bank, 1999: 21). The introduction of social assessment methods since the mid-1990s to review the effects of projects on affected communities also marks a significant change. The World Bank pulled out of the Sardar Sarovar Dam Project on India's Narmada River in 1993 due to concerns about environmental damage and mass displacement, but continues to support the Three Gorges Project in China, which is displacing even larger numbers of people (Roy, 1999). Emphasis on poverty alleviation and social development played an important role in the response to the Asian crisis. However, this did not prevent the World Bank and the IMF from imposing policies on Indonesia that may have actually exacerbated economic disruption and poverty. Thus it is not clear to what extent the new thinking has percolated through to the key levels of decision-making in multilateral funding agencies and donor governments.

Social Transformation and Globalization

Clearly, social transformation is closely linked to globalization. At the most general level, globalization refers to a process of change which affects all regions of the world in a variety of sectors including the economy, technology, politics, the media, culture, and the environment. A more precise definition of globalization is:

> A process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power (Held et al., 1999: 16).

This definition permits operationalization and empirical research, since the flows and networks can be mapped, measured, and analyzed. However, understandings and assessment of globalization vary widely. Held and associates suggest that approaches can be roughly divided into three broad categories which they refer to as hyperglobalizers, sceptics, and transformationalists.

Hyperglobalizers believe that globalization represents a new epoch in human history, in which all types of relationships are becoming integrated at the global level, transcending the nation-state and making it increasingly irrelevant. Hyperglobalizers include both those who celebrate these trends and those with more critical assessments. The celebratory hyperglobalizers are mainly neoliberal advocates of open, global markets, who believe that these will guarantee optimal economic growth and will, in the long run, bring about improved living standards for everyone (see, for example, Ohmae, 1991; 1995). Critical hyperglobalizers emphasize the revolutionary character of such trends as the rapid growth in global

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media and global mobility, but argue that these only benefit a small elite. Globalization, they hold, is the mechanism for the rule of international investors and transnational corporations, who can no longer be controlled by ever-weaker nation-states. Trade unions and welfare systems are collapsing, unemployment and social exclusion are burgeoning, while uncontrolled growth is leading to life-threatening environmental degradation. Thus globalization can lead to social fragmentation, cultural uncertainty, conflict, and violence. One solution they offer is to reassert the power of democratic nation-states, and at the same time strengthen European cooperation as a counterweight to the American free market model (see also Beck, 1997; Martin and Schumann, 1997; Schnapper, 1994). A similar call for the resurrection of the national economy was advanced by Robert Reich, secretary of labor in the first Clinton administration (Reich, 1991).

The *sceptics* focus mainly on the economic aspects of globalization. They acknowledge the high levels of cross-border flows of trade, investment, and labour, but argue that there is nothing new about this: international economic integration in the period preceding the First World War was comparable with current levels. Moreover, they point out that most world trade (80 percent or more) is between the highly-developed economies, so that less-developed countries have not participated significantly in processes of economic integration. They therefore prefer the term "internationalization" to globalization (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). The sceptics argue that the role of the nation-state remains as strong as ever. This applies especially to the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, which are now at the centre of the three dominant economic blocs (Weiss, 1997). "Regionalization" is seen as an alternative to globalization, which allows nation-states to maintain their predominant position in the world system. The sceptics discount the idea that global travel and diffusion of media are giving birth to a global culture or even a global civilisation; rather, they see continuing hierarchy and fragmentation.

Transformationalists understand globalization as the result of closely interlinked processes of change in technology, economic activity, governance, communication, and culture. Cross-border flows (of trade, investment, migrants, cultural artefacts, environmental factors, etc.) have reached unprecedented levels, and now integrate virtually all countries into a global system. This brings about major social transformations at all levels. However, these trends do not necessarily lead to global convergence or the emergence of a single "world society." Rather, globalization creates new forms of global stratification in which some individuals, communities, countries, or regions become integrated into global networks of power and prosperity, while others are excluded and marginalized. Transformationalists argue that these new divisions cut across the old schisms of East–West and North–South. But globalization cannot be equated with a general reduction in the power of states. Rather, as the nexus between territory and sovereignty is undermined by globalizing forces, new forms of governance emerge at the national, regional, and global levels, with the military and economic power of the dominant states still playing a decisive role. Clearly, transformationalist theories of globalization are very close to the social transformation approach discussed in this article. Apart from the work of Held and associates (1999), the most comprehensive exposition of the transformational thesis is the three-volume work by Castells (1996; 1997; 1998).

Analyses of globalization and social transformation emphasize the differing effects on various regions of the world (Castells, 1996: 106–148).

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- The highly-developed countries of North America, Western Europe, and Japan, which are experiencing a crisis of rustbelt industries, the decline of welfare states, and increasing social polarization.
- The Asian tiger economies, and the next wave of tigers which were rapidly reaching the status of highly-industrialized countries until growth was interrupted by the Asian crisis in 1997. Sometimes the oil economies of the Arab Gulf states are included in this category.
- The rest of Asia, including the giants of India and China, which, despite areas of rapid industrialization and emerging middle classes, still have generally backward economies and low-income levels, making them into labour reserves for the faster-growing economies.
- Latin America, with its uneven experience of sporadic growth, economic dependence, and political conflict.
- Africa, which is largely excluded from the global economy. Here the failure of economic development and nation-state formation has led to declining incomes, appalling social conditions, endemic conflicts, and vast refugee flows.
- The so-called "transition countries" (the former Soviet bloc), beset by problems of restructuring their economies and institutions to fit into the capitalist world.

Such differences make it clear that social transformation research needs to look not only at general aspects of globalization, but also at the specific factors that lead to varying effects and reactions at the regional, national, and local levels. Indeed, the key theme for social transformation research could be characterized as the processes of mediation between global factors and regional, national and local factors. Moreover, these processes are multidirectional, with the regional, national, and local factors helping to shape the global ones. Such factors include not only varying economic and political structures, but also specific historical experiences, philosophical and religious values, cultural patterns, and social relationships.

Studying Transnational Processes

Historically, the main research unit of the social sciences has been the bounded society of a specific nation-state. Typically, data sources, contextual material, and empirical research populations have all been located within the national society; similarly, policy recommendations emerging from research have mainly been addressed to the national government. There has, of course, been a long tradition of comparative studies going back to early sociologists like Durkheim, but these have been mainly concerned with constructing typologies and identifying national specificities (see Ghorra-Gobin, 2000). If the field of social transformation studies is concerned with processes of global connectedness, and the way these are linking existing communities and national societies into an incipient global society, then it requires new research approaches, themes, and questions. A major focus should be on identifying and understanding transnational processes. It is equally important to analyze the effects of such processes at the regional, national, and subnational level, as well as the ways various communities and groups experience and react to such processes. Moreover, social transformation research should not be a top-down exercise in which First World researchers study the problems of supposedly less-developed societies. Rather it should be based on international

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networks linking researchers, NGOs, and policy-makers in a common endeavour to understand and manage processes of change.

The cross-border flows and networks that make up the visible face of globalization can be adequately understood in no other way but as transnational phenomena. Flows refer to movements of tangibles like capital, commodities, cultural artefacts, migrants, and refugees. Flows also include intangibles like values, media images, scientific ideas, and modes of governance. Networks refer to frameworks for the communication, regulation, and management of linkages: transnational corporations, international governmental organizations, legal frameworks, international non-governmental organizations, transnational criminal syndicates, and so on.[3] Castells (1996) argues that the network is the specific organizational form of the emerging global society, replacing earlier modes of the hierarchical organization of economic and political institutions. In a similar way, Ohmae (1991) argues that successful transnational corporations are those that abandon a national or "headquarters" mentality, and create a decentralized organization held together by a set of cultural values. Culture plays a key role in understanding transnational networks. For example, the success of transnational criminal organizations like the Mafia or the Triads is often based on the use of ethnic culture to ensure loyalty and secrecy (Castells, 1998: chap. 3).

However, the obvious merit of studying such flows and networks as transnational processes does not mean that this is the dominant research approach, nor that it is easy to do in practice. For example, international migration research is still largely based on national frameworks and data. In dispatching countries, like Italy or the Philippines, the focus has been on emigration and its effects on the economy and society; in receiving countries like the United States or Malaysia, research has been concerned with such issues as labour supply, settlement, assimilation, community relations, and public order. The emergence of transnational research frameworks such as migration systems theory or transnational community studies started as recently as the 1970s, and although such approaches grew more widespread by the end of the 1990s, they are still far from dominant.

One reason for the persistence of national research frameworks is that data are still generally collected by national authorities for purposes of administration and policy-formation. National definitions and collection methods vary, so that data are often unsuitable for international comparisons and may compartmentalize transnational processes. This is particularly problematic in former colonial countries, where national boundaries inherited from the colonial period often cut across geographical, economic, and ethnic regions. International agencies have made considerable efforts to achieve greater comparability. For instance, the OECD's Continuous Reporting System on Migration (OECD, 1998) has taken some twenty years to achieve a fair measure of compatibility between the national statistics of the industrialized countries. Availability of suitable data for research on other transnational processes, particularly with regard to less-developed countries, lags far behind. Interestingly, the 1999 *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 1999) focuses on globalization, yet presents data and rankings for individual countries.

However, transnational research should not be restricted to phenomena that clearly transcend borders. In the context of globalization, many issues that appear to concern a specific national society cannot be properly understood without analysis of their transnational dimensions. Since the 1995 UN World Summit for Social Development, poverty eradication has become a key goal for international

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agencies. However, poverty is generally measured and analyzed as a national-level phenomenon, and strategies to alleviate it are developed for specific countries (McDowell, 1999). A transnational research perspective reveals that much of the poverty in today's world is attributable (in part at least) to cross-border processes. For instance, changes in agricultural production methods as part of the "Green Revolution" may lead to unemployment, landlessness, increased inequality, and rural–urban migration. Yet the Green Revolution is linked to the role of international science and technology, the interests of transnational pharmaceutical and agribusiness corporations, and the interventions of well-meaning aid agencies. Of course, national and local factors also play a part, but they cannot be understood in isolation from the transnational factors.

Many further examples could be cited. Violent conflicts and failed states that generate refugee flows are frequently attributable to the economic and political interests of rich countries and transnational corporations. Ethnic and religious conflicts often have their roots in attempts to assert (or construct) traditional identities in the face of threatening cultural changes linked to global media or pervasive of western values. Exploitative working conditions and child labour may be the result of off-shore production and subcontracting by huge corporations. Environmental catastrophes may be the result of deforestation brought about to grow crops or provide timber for export.

Similarly, national or regional economic crises may be linked to global geopolitical and economic factors, as an analysis of the roots of the 1997–99 Asian crisis shows. After 1945, decolonization, the cold war, and the superpower struggle for political control in the region encouraged the economic take-off of Japan and the tiger economies (Berger and Borer, 1997). By the beginning of the 1990s, the high-growth rates and the easy profits to be made in the region had become a magnet for investment from western countries. As new information technologies speeded up the flow of capital in never-closing financial markets, much of this investment took the form of short-term speculative loans. In a situation of economic euphoria, no one worried about the absence of adequate regulatory bodies; when the credit crunch came in 1997, the Asian crisis appeared as both a threat to the global economy and a vindication of the western economic model. The hitherto much-admired "Asian virtues" were suddenly reinterpreted as nepotism, corruption, cronyism, and a lack of sound financial regulation. Western economists called for liberalization of markets and strict financial discipline (Godement, 1999). However, other observers noted that the crisis was mainly caused by global factors, especially the huge inflows of short-term credit pumped into the region by western banks and investment funds. The sudden withdrawal of such credit at the onset of liquidity difficulties in Thailand shattered investors' confidence and led to a downward spiral, which was further exacerbated by the IMF's deflationary loans policy (Bezanson and Griffith-Jones, 1999). The crisis wiped out many of the gains made in the previous thirty years with regard to economic growth and poverty alleviation.

Most forms of social transformation today are linked in complex ways to globalizing forces and transnational processes. Research confined to national frameworks ignoring cross-border linkages is hardly ever likely to reveal the whole picture. Even more important, such research is not likely to provide adequate strategies for managing social transformation. This does not imply that the national dimension should be neglected. Nation-states remain important, and will do so for the foreseeable future. They are the location of policies on public order,

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economic infrastructure, social welfare, health services, and so on. Nation-states also retain considerable political significance and have important symbolic and cultural functions. But the autonomy of the national governments in all these areas is being eroded, and it is no longer possible to abstract from transnational factors in decision-making and planning.

Understanding the Local: Participatory Research

The flows and networks that constitute globalization take on specific forms at different spatial levels: the regional, the national, and the local. These should not be understood in opposition to each other (for example, regionalization as a possible counterweight to globalization), but rather as elements of complex and dynamic relationships, in which global forces have varying impacts according to differing structural and cultural factors and responses at the other levels (see Held et al., 1999: 14–16). However, for most people, the preeminent level for experiencing social transformation is *the local*. Changes to production and distribution systems, social relations, and cultural practices transform conditions in the local community, which is the focus of everyday life. This applies even where social transformation makes it necessary for people to leave their communities and move elsewhere: for instance through changes in agricultural practices or land tenure, or through a development project (such as a dam, airport, or factory) which physically displaces people. The need for migration is experienced as a crisis in the economic and social conditions of the community of origin, while resettlement is experienced as trying to build up a new livelihood in another community.

Social transformation research must therefore give as much weight to the local as to the global, while not forgetting the national and regional levels in between. However, understanding the local experience of social transformation often requires specific approaches. It is vital to understand that methods are not neutral: the choice of research methods is based on specific conceptual frameworks and objectives, and may lead to widely varying findings. One can differentiate between top-down and bottom-up approaches. These in turn can be linked to differing ideas on the development process.

If development is understood mainly as a process of modernization, industrialization, and economic growth, then its agents can be experts from developed countries often working together with local experts who have received their training in developed countries and share the same underlying cultural values. Their research focuses on technical and economic factors, and the favoured instruments are scientific information, economic indicators, and statistical data. Top-down methods often ignore the social situation and needs of local groups, especially the poor and women, who have little access to political power. Such groups may be disadvantaged and pushed aside by development projects, and may develop resistance to them. Local people and their organizations are then seen as obstacles to progress, to be dealt with either through public order measures or educational strategies designed to foster willingness to accept change.

The social research methods arising from the top-down approach include use of official social statistics, short studies by expatriate social experts, and survey methods using questionnaires with multiple-choice questions. However, statistical data are often unreliable, and may reflect biases built into data collection systems.

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Social researchers on short visits tend to rely on information from people in positions of power (particularly men) and may not perceive the problems, needs, and wishes of other groups. Formal questionnaires structure answers and give little opportunity for presenting new information or divergent views. Such methods do little to analyze processes of change, nor to link them to historical experiences or cultural practices. This type of development research has led to a long series of errors in understanding and to unsuccessful development strategies. Most seriously, "vested interests and professional predispositions can sustain an entrenched belief long after it has been repeatedly exposed as false" (Chambers, 1997: 21).

Top-down approaches to understanding social transformation tend to focus on the realities of powerful institutions and privileged groups at both the global and local levels, and may be blind to the differing realities of disempowered groups. The new focus on sustainability and poverty alleviation in development requires research approaches that are sensitive to the needs, interests, and values of all the groups involved in processes of change. Such methods, known collectively as participatory approaches, emerged as radical critiques of entrenched development theories from the 1970s, and began to gain mainstream acceptance by the late 1980s.

Again, research methods are linked to specific social and political assumptions. For instance, squatters (that is, poor people who illegally build shacks on urban wasteland) are often seen as obstacles to orderly urbanization. Yet the alternative reality is that large numbers of people (often the majority of a city's population) have no access to legal housing markets, nor to such infrastructure as water, sewerage, and power. The *favela, geçecondo* or shantytown (often built overnight to avoid police intervention) is an active form of planning, organization, and building by millions of people in the cities of less-developed countries, yet it is seen negatively by governments, which do not consider squatters to be citizens with legitimate rights and needs for services. The official solution often lies in bulldozing slums and evicting "illegal populations." An alternative approach is to recognize that squatters are citizens who are taking active steps to improve their lives (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989). Working with them to develop communities and infrastructure can be a cost-effective form of urban policy.[4]

In recent years a whole gamut of methods for participatory research has been developed, starting with the Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) approach of the 1970s and going on to a group of techniques known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in the late 1980s and 1990s. The intellectual origins of these approaches lie in the work of Paulo Freire in Brazil in the 1960s, and his principle of "conscientization," which combined social learning with action research. His key idea was that the poor could analyze their own situation and find strategies for change (Freire, 1970). PRA techniques are based on the principle that analysis of development is a collective learning process including researchers and all the various social groups involved in a particular situation. Stakeholders include the local groups affected by a project (particularly those who are often without a voice, such as the poor, ethnic minorities, and women), as well as government officials, companies, and NGOs. It is impossible adequately to describe participatory approaches here. *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook* (World Bank, 1996) provides detailed accounts of the various methods and examples for their practical use. Chambers summarizes the approaches as follows:

> RRA has tended to stress the use of secondary sources, observation and verbal interaction. Semi-structured interviewing and focus groups have been

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> stressed. . . . PRA on the other hand, has been distinguished especially by shared visual representations and analysis by local people, such as mapping or modelling on the ground or paper; listing, sequencing and card sorting; estimating, comparing, scoring and ranking with seeds, stones, sticks or shapes; Venn diagramming; linkage diagramming; and group and community presentations for checking and validation. . . . The list indicated is not comprehensive (Chambers, 1997: 116).

The underlying idea is that strategies for change based on a participatory analysis of problems will lead to sustainable development strategies based on feelings of "ownership" on the part of the various stakeholder groups. This in turn can provide the basis for attitudinal change and the development of new institutional structures. PRA techniques have developed in the context of rural development work by aid agencies and NGOs, but they also provide important insights for social transformation researchers in urban and rural contexts in less-developed and industrial countries. The principle of social analysis as a mutual learning process involving researchers and stakeholders is generally applicable. It provides valuable instruments for understanding the local dimensions of global processes, and for analyzing the way local social and cultural factors mediate the effects of globalizing forces. The acceptance of the principles of participatory research implies the need to rethink techniques in various forms of social research. For example, research on urban problems in developed countries has often failed to produce useful results because of top-down bureaucratic approaches. Participatory methods, which give a voice to disempowered groups, are far more likely to find the real causes of social problems and viable solutions to them.[5]

However, caution is necessary, for participatory methods cannot in themselves resolve deep-seated conflicts of interest on such matters as land ownership, use and protection of resources, or the wages and conditions of labour. Nor can such methods provide a full understanding of the institutions and structures of national societies and how these are affected by transnational processes. To make an effective contribution to understanding and managing change, social transformation research needs to combine such top-down methods as large surveys, statistical analysis, econometrics, and policy studies with the bottom-up approaches of participatory research.

Network Research

If the network is the key organizing principle for the emerging global society (Castells, 1996), then it should also be the basic principle for organizing research on globalization and social transformation. International networks of researchers can help overcome the nationalist and colonialist legacy of the social sciences. Because early anthropologicial research on "primitive peoples" was based on explicit ideas of the superiority of the white race and European culture, it was often closely linked to official strategies for control of colonized peoples; more recent development research has often been predicated on ideas of western superiority and the need to export western values to the less-developed world.[6] Network research implies a new approach in which researchers in a range of countries, western and non-western, become equal partners in the research process. Instead of First World social scientists going out to conduct studies of

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other peoples, research becomes a collaborative process of equals. The researchers of each country can then apply their understanding of local social structures and cultural practices, while western values and methods cease to be the yardstick, but themselves become objects of study and critique.

Network research is a basic principle of the MOST Program, which has built up some twenty international research networks around the world. Each network has a regional focus, linking a number of countries to study a particular theme, such as urban issues, drug problems, international migration, or multiculturalism. However, all are concerned with global processes of social transformation and the way these affect a specific region. These networks will not be described here, since this issue of IPSR includes articles on the work of a number of them. However, it is worth mentioning a few features of the MOST networks (see also Ghorra-Gobin, 2000).

MOST research networks emphasize interdisciplinarity, for social transformation cannot be adequately understood from the perspective of any single social science. The networks include sociologists, political scientists, economists, anthropologists, geographers, demographers, and so on. International comparative approaches play an important part, with a stress on understanding transnational linkages and similarities, as well as understanding national specificities. Analysis of social transformation seems to sharpen perceptions for the differing social locations, interests, and access to power of various groups. Culture, ethnicity, class, and gender are important topics in all the networks, influencing the choice of research projects, methods, and theoretical frameworks. This implies the need to break down barriers between researchers and the wider community (Auriat, 1998). Research is not a neutral activity, and researchers can make conscious choices about goals, such as supporting measures to alleviate poverty and to increase social and political participation by disadvantaged groups. Many MOST researchers seek to include NGOs in their work, as a way of facilitating the establishment of the communicative links and knowledge base needed for "globalization from below." MOST networks emphasize links between research and policy formation. This influences the choice of research topics and ways in which research findings are made available to policy makers and the public at large. In addition, the networks seek to include policy-makers as participants in all stages of research planning, implementation, and analysis.

MOST research networks are not unique in these characteristics. In recent years there has been a trend towards increased international cooperation and networking in the social sciences (although it should be noted that national frameworks remain dominant in the funding and organization of research). International cooperation has been encouraged by some independent funding bodies, such as the Ford Foundation and the Volkswagen Foundation. Some national research councils have also looked favourably on projects that stress international collaboration. The emergence of theoretical discourses on globalization, social transformation, and transnational connectedness have further encouraged collaboration. Many researchers who participate in international networks have found that the going is not always easy. Language remains an important barrier—often in subtle ways: the translation of concepts from one language to another may mask quite different cultural meanings and historical connotations. Researchers who have been trained in different national academic cultures often ask questions in rather different ways, use differing methods, and interpret findings in specific ways. There are examples of international

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collaborative projects that have collapsed because of the failure to grasp such differences. Indeed, a major aspect of network research is bringing these issues out into the open, and making their analysis part of the research process.[7]

Principles for Social Transformation Research

To conclude, here are some principle*s* arising from the use of social transformation studies as an analytical framework for social science research. For reasons of space, not all of these have been dealt with in this article, but they are listed here in the interest of further debate.

1. Researchers need to adopt a holistic approach. Although research generally focuses on specific areas and topics, it should be informed by a consciousness that social transformation processes concern all aspects of social existence, at all spatial levels. To fully understand any specific issue, it is necessary to understand its embeddedness in much broader processes. Studies of communities or countries should include an analysis of global and regional factors and their linkages with the area being examined. Contextual frameworks should include such components as international relations, political economy, demographic trends, environmental conditions, and cultural factors.
2. Social transformation research is interdisciplinary. It is hard to think of any research theme in the context of globalization and social transformation that could be adequately understood within the bounds of a single academic discipline. This means that individual researchers need to expand their disciplinary horizons, and that research should be carried out by interdisciplinary teams.
3. However, interdisciplinarity does not mean we can dispense with systematic disciplinary knowledge. On the contrary, interdisciplinarity has to be grounded in sound training and a thorough acquaintance with the theory, methods, and knowledge of specific social sciences.
4. Changes in science, technology, and the biosphere play a crucial part in social transformations, and it is therefore important to include an analysis of knowledge systems in research frameworks. This includes not only the study of modern science and technology, but also learning about traditional and indigenous knowledge systems that often contain important insights on the management of specific environmental and social conditions.
5. An understanding of past experiences that have helped shape contemporary cultures, institutions, and societies is vital for comprehending both the present and the possibilities for the future. Historical analysis should therefore be part of every study.
6. Comparative analysis is often the appropriate approach for understanding the relationship between the global and the local. By examining how similar global factors can lead to different results in different places, we gain insights into the significance of cultural and historical factors.
7. However, a comparison can only be carried out effectively on the basis of detailed knowledge about specific cultures, communities, and societies. Analysis of local dimensions is vital to an adequate understanding of differing impacts of and responses to globalizing factors.
8. Understanding the local requires methods that encourage the participation of

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all social groups and all relevant stakeholders in processes of social assessment and planning. Participatory method*s* should be particularly designed to ensure that disempowered groups, such as the poor, ethnic minorities, and women are able to articulate their needs and interests.

9. Culture and identity play a vital role in processes of social transformation. Identity politics is often a form of mobilization against globalizing forces which appears as threats to the livelihoods and values of marginalized groups. This makes it necessary to reject prevailing dualisms between objective and subjective, modern and traditional, rational and emotional. Every type of social research needs to consider both structural factors and the meanings produced by the groups concerned.
10. The most appropriate organizational form for social transformation research is the international and interdisciplinary research network, in which colleagues from a wide range of backgrounds carry out collaborative work as equal partners. The relevance of the work carried out by such networks is further enhanced by inclusion of policy-makers and civil society organizations at all stages of the research process. However, no such partnership should be allowed to compromise the independence of the research process.
11. The production of knowledge is not a value-free undertaking. It is important to define the underlying values in the choices of research themes and methods. The central aim of social transformation research networks should be to produce knowledge designed to improve the social conditions and sustainable livelihoods of the populations concerned.
12. This means that researchers should make their work accessible to society, through disseminating it in suitable forms to civil society organizations, governments, business, and the public at large.

Notes

1. Joseph E. Stiglitz was the senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank until the end of 1999.
2. See Website of the World Bank "Environmentally and socially sustainable development network": http://worldbank.org.essd
3. Between 1946 and 1975, the number of international treaties in force increased from 6 351 to 14 061. By 1996 there were 260 intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations and its various agencies, other global bodies like the World Trade Organization, regional bodies like the European Union (EU) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum, legal bodies like the International Court of Justice, and specialized bodies in every imaginable area of production, trade, culture, human rights, and so on. There were 5 472 international non-governmental organizations, including international lobby groups of all kinds, aid agencies, employers' groups, trade union internationals, religious groups, cultural associations, etc. (Held et al., 1999).
4. For an example of such an approach in the *favelas* of Brazil see Abel Mejia, "Brazil: municipalities and low-income sanitation" in World Bank (1996).
5. For example, in a disadvantaged housing estate in a Sydney suburb, a survey of social agencies workers found that the key problem was crime and public disorder, leading to a demand for better policing. A later study of the perceptions of local residents found by contrast that the main problem was the failure of local authorities to provide adequate maintenance of housing, which had led to poor living conditions and a feeling of dereliction. This led to strategies to include residents in the planning and monitoring of maintenance services.

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6. Johan Galtung exposes the cultural imperialism implicit in development advice by turning the process around: "Imagine what this can mean in practice. An Indian delegation arrives in Manhattan to study US patterns of procreation and family planning, firmly convinced that if 5% of the world population consumes disproportionate amounts of world energy resources and is responsible for disproportionate amounts of world pollution, then what is needed is drastic population reduction. Corresponding reports have been made for the LDCs by the MDCs. How about the LDCs making them for the MDCs?..." (Galtung, 1996).
7. The author of this article was a participant in the project "Intercultural Relations, Identity and Citizenship: a Comparison of Australia, France and Germany," carried out collaboratively by research teams from the three countries, and funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. The significance of differing national social scientific research cultures was an important and unexpected finding of the project, leading to the decision to dedicate one of the three books based on the project to this theme.

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