



Round Table: The Use of Social Sciences and Humanities: New Governance and Traditional Democracy

UNIVERSITY OF TEL - AVIV

Monday, 30 October 2006, 3:00 p.m.

Participants:

- Patricia van Hemert, Free University of Amsterdam
- Luk van Langenhove, United Nations University
- Mr. Nadler, Tel-Aviv University
- Martin Peterson, University of Gothenburg
- Michael Schmidt, ICCR Vienna & CIR Paris

Moderation: Mr. Yaar, Tel-Aviv University

To lead into the discussion, each of the five panellists will provide an opening statement of approximately 10 minutes and then the floor will be opened for a general discussion among all participants.

New Governance and Traditional Democracy

Since its early beginnings the social sciences had, unlike the natural sciences, to prove their academic value as much as its “usefulness”. Like the humanities, the social sciences are considered as being “soft science”, its purpose unclear to most members of the general public.

However, there are serious societal problems that are apparently not yet resolved. On the national level one finds increasingly deep gaps between social strata, the rich and the poor, resident and migrant population, etc. On the international level, multinational organisations seem to lack the capacity to implement international regulations, that in term seem to be weak in resolving international disputes. Social equalities and social rights are as much in the scope of social sciences and humanities as working on international conflict regulation and peace.

Traditional democracy is the result of the social and political clashes of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. The modes of international conflict regulations was the outcome of two World Wars of the XXth century.

It is obvious that traditional democracy and international organisations have their role to play. However, the limits of these instruments became visible: the emergence of a new right wing in Europe, the growth of poverty, social and cultural segregation and the environmental crisis show new threats on a domestic level; social disintegration leads to domestic violence. The limits of the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms on the international level has led to the increase of wars and armed conflicts.

Societal integration and the maintenance of peace require new instruments and political procedures. The development of these instruments require multi-cultural understanding, a fresh look on the visions of the relevant actors and procedures to include old and new stakeholders in the decision making process. The new instruments do by no means replace the traditional ones; however, they are relevant to ensure the rule of the law on a national and international level.

This new idea is called "governance". Good concepts of governance try to include stakeholders into a process in which conflicts of interests can be mediated and conflict of identities can be transformed in a conflict of interests that in turn can be mediated. Decision making is thus not just limited to the traditional policy makers, but include all types of stakeholders. However, there are problems occurring as well: what legitimacy does modern governance have, what distinguishes it from traditional lobbying?

Those issues are closely linked to different forms of social science and humanities research. What role social sciences' and humanities' knowledge, what role the social scientists in designing and promoting new forms of governance?

Some information on the study The future of Social Sciences & Humanities

The SSH-FUTURES Project

"SSH-FUTURES" is a key European project for understanding the future of the social sciences and humanities in Europe. Whereas there seems to be a consensus that investment in science and technology is the most important policy issue to guarantee social welfare and employment social sciences and humanities are more often than not neglected. Whereas investment in the technological infrastructures do not need much justification, the social sciences have to fight for their survival.

Like all sciences, the social sciences as well as the humanities have to contribute to the societies that spend public money for their existence. And it is obvious that there is a need for useful knowledge production; however, the usefulness of the SSH might not be as obvious as the results of natural sciences and engineering. This is the more so for the generic research and the development of sophisticated methods: where the natural sciences can show impressive research infrastructures that produce generic research, the social sciences and humanities cannot show more than books and contributions to public debates.

In order to increase the awareness of the importance of the social sciences and the humanities SSH-FUTURES does not only produce a research project dealing with the future of the social sciences and humanities, but organises public workshops and a debate series around the following topics in the social sciences and humanities:

- Life sciences and converging technologies (NBIC)
- Information and knowledge society
- Social policy, inclusion and migration
- Governance and democracy
- Sustainable growth and the future of welfare

The first event of this series was held in June 2006 in Vienna and dealt with the role of social science and humanities research results in political decision making. The programme and pictures can be accessed under www.iccr-international.org/ssh-futures.