

13th Conference  
of the European  
Sociological Association

(Un)Making Europe:  
Capitalism, Solidarities,  
Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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and its corollary, the permeable frontier between nature and culture.

#### A Europe of Happiness and Sustainability?

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While being in a severe crisis Europe is still mainly focussing on economic issues as a common ground, trying to keep the current system up and running, with the vision of regaining a pre-crisis level of economic wealth.

This means pursuing a pathway that has never been sustainable, not economically and especially not ecologically. The Planetary boundaries and all research on climate change etc. make it obvious that such a growth focussed development is impossible to maintain, despite all hopes on 'green growth' there is a strong need for a sufficiency approach to complement technological improvements. But concepts of a degrowth approach remain marginal and sufficient lifestyles are broadly still envisioned as asceticism.

The discourse on 'happiness' and 'the good life' could offer a viable third pathway: Results from the studies on subjective well-being suggest a correlation between happiness and sufficiency. Lifestyles that are less materialistic while not reducing it to a modest life as such, but focusing to develop once capabilities into a realm of pleasure and meaningful deeds.

A good life for all needs a redefinition beyond the one house, one car, one full-time job picture being framed in the 20th century. Ancient and modern philosophies of a happy life roam around either intellectual work or a joyful laziness. In no regard they promote a stressful life pivoting around labour and consumerism.

So might going for the happy life be a good target for a sustainable future in Europe?

#### **Exploitation of Nature and Capitalist World-Ecology in Neoliberal Times**

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Jason Moore's idea of world ecology suggests that capitalism does not have but is an ecological regime. Value creation occurs not upon nature, but through it, that is, within socio-natural relations emerging from the articulation of capital, power and the environment. Moore's analysis can be further historicized by projecting it against current neoliberalization processes. Issues as diverse as carbon trading, biotech industry and solar radiation management show that the way 'nature' is accounted for and enacted in neoliberalism is profoundly entangled with labor (as information-producing activity). Hence, a critique of Cartesian dualism(s) does not necessarily lead to emancipation: cutting-edge neoliberal managerial thinking actually departs from Western binaries, thriving on the indistinctiveness of the natural and the social. In this context one can talk of 'exploitation of the environment' in a Marxist technical

sense, that is, detecting value-extraction directly from nature.

To address such transformation we mobilize the concept of imprinting as a logic of exploitation which takes place beyond the wage-form and supplements what Marx called subsumption of labor under capital: neoliberal environmental commodities (e.g. carbon offsets) contain labor as information and, consequently, embody value through the exploitation of that specific form of labor.

The implications of our argument will be gauged against so-called accelerationism. The case for acceleration is made from both the right and the left. Despite contrasting aims (preserving vs. overturning the social order), these standpoints hypostatize capitalist social relations and share the idea of decoupling social systems from natural biophysical systems, pointing towards a 'post-natural' sustainability. Problematizing this picture should help envisage non-exploitative forms of productivity as a way out from the crisis of world-ecology.

#### On the trails of SDGs and Paris Agreement

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The drive to economic growth has persisted in contemporary societies, despite its effects on the very foundations of the global economy, whereas the discourse of sustainability has not surpassed the level of "wishful thinking". The evolution of the global ecological footprint, which underlines climate change impact, points to a narrow path in the reconciliation of social and environmental imperatives for present and future generations and to a redoubled need for social and environmental equity. Within an approach that postulates a stronger connection between discourse and practice, both Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the Paris Agreement achieved under COP21 strengthen the strategy of universal involvement and commitment, recognizing the scarce nature of results obtained so far, and demanding alternative action for effective change regarding a new and strategic global agenda. This presentation reflects on this universal desideratum which requires redoubled attention to the decline – and also recovery - of environmental and social conditions, particularly in a time of perplexing political change. Indeed, the COP 22 (Marrakesh, Morocco, November 2016) was overshadowed by the American elections results, and the victory of the 'negationist' Donald Trump. The long-term consequences of this fact are still difficult to foresee, yet the impact of climate change, and the societal apprehension which has gradually produced the consensus surrounding it, constitute factors which are pushing governments to comply with Paris Agreement and to its efforts to ensure adjustment to change and the reduction of emissions.