



International Sociological Association

**Research Committee 53.  
The Sociology of Childhood**

Newsletter March 2009

Dear Colleagues

We have three particular topics for this newsletter.

First, we present you with our program for the XVII ISA World Congress, to be held in Gothenburg Sweden from 11-17 July 2010. We hope that you are interested in the sessions we have worked out, thus are inspired to send us many interesting abstracts (before September 15 please).

Second, we have added some reflections about the ISA World Forum which was held in Barcelona last September. The World Forum offered the research committees the opportunity to organize their midterm conferences. RC 53 took advantage of this solution by making this our mid-term conference.

Third, Doris informs you about an international study cooperation project between Germany and Kyrgyzstan which is an attempt to introduce and implement childhood sociological research in parts of the world where it had not existed yet. Maybe there are other members of our RC who are engaged in similar projects and an exchange might be helpful. If this is so please let us know if you are interested in an exchange concerning such binational or trinational projects with developing countries.

Last but not least we are happy to inform you, that the publication of our midterm conference in Wuppertal 2005 is to appear soon with the following bibliographical specifications: Doris Bühler-Niederberger, Régine Sirota (eds.), *Marginality and voice – childhood in sociology and society*, Current Sociology, Monograph Issue 58 (02). London: Sage. You will find there the reports concerning the development of childhood sociology in ten countries.

With kind regards

Doris Bühler-Niederberger, Wuppertal  
Ali Cocks, Independent

**XVII ISA World Congress, Gothenburg Sweden 11-17 July 2010 – RC 53  
Sociology of Childhood**

**Please send your paper proposal until September, 15, to Doris Bühler-Niederberger; University of Wuppertal: [buehler@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:buehler@uni-wuppertal.de), and to the organizer of the session you would like to choose for your paper.**

**Programme Coordinator**

Doris Bühler-Niederberger, University of Wuppertal, Germany; [buehler@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:buehler@uni-wuppertal.de)

**1. Session:**

**Childhood sociology on the move (Organizer: Doris Bühler-Niederberger; University of Wuppertal: [buehler@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:buehler@uni-wuppertal.de))**

“Determinism is dead in the social sciences. Despite a strong interest in social structures, social mechanisms, forms of reproduction, we are all aware that human beings are not completely dominated by them. The world changes and this change to a large extent depends on human action and imagination.” This is the announcement describing the rationale for the theme of the XV11 ISA World Congress. The development of childhood sociological research and theory shall be considered and evaluated according to this statement. The session welcomes papers dealing with the following questions:

- Recent development of childhood sociological theory and research (overviews, new approaches)
- Childhood sociology between determinism and actor orientation
- The “child as an actor” – rise and decline (?) of a programmatic concept
- New methodological developments and their actor orientation

**2. Session:**

**Children’s Health as It Shapes Children’s Lives (Organizer: Bass, Loretta, University of Oklahoma; [lbass@ou.edu](mailto:lbass@ou.edu))**

This session takes two conference subthemes, sustainability and worlds of difference, and uses them to focus our attention on children’s health. This session will investigate the relationship between children’s health status and the stratification system, both in the near and long term. The case for child health status as a measure has been made in so far as it may be used to understand current and persistent inequalities because early childhood health shapes the pathway to adult social class positions. This session will bring together papers focused on health disparities for children and then relate these papers to the conference themes of sustainability and worlds of difference. In addition to being open to current children’s health research (e.g., HIV/AIDS, spread of disease, mortality), this session is interested in the reach of children’s health in terms of longer term effects (e.g., mortality differences, income inequalities, education). This session may also discuss how current research on children’s health in different regions of the world may inform childhood theories and future lines of questioning.

### **3. Session:**

#### **Methodological and Ethical Developments in research related to Children (Organizer: Cocks, Alison, Ali Cocks, alicocks@btopenworld)**

The sociological perception of children, which draws on notions of agency and competence is recognised as having a significant impact on the theoretical positioning of childhood sociology. This has impacted on the way in which we, as sociologists, engage with children. The associated methodological developments within the research process which have emerged over recent years, such as children's participation, demands reflection and perhaps a review of our understanding of the position of children within research. This session aims to build on the issues raised in the Barcelona conference in 2008 where consideration was given to the implications of methods of research, research governance (both globally and locally) and the role of the researcher in facilitating the participation of children in an ethical way. Paper submissions which critically reflect on the processes of researching children's lives will be considered. As an example, papers may consider issues such as:

- The development of new methods of working with children in an ethical framework.
- The impact of Research governance on children's participation within research.
- The perceived role of the researcher as 'protector' of children within research.

### **4. Session:**

#### **Childhood, governance and control (Organizer: Harriet Strandell, University of Helsinki, Finland, harriet.strandell@helsinki.fi)**

During the last decades, intensified public concern on children's lives and well-being has emerged, on community level, among national governments and international organisations, among politicians and child professionals. Once again, children are moved towards the centre of political agendas. Contemporary economic, ideological and technological changes have opened alternative arenas of action for children, but also introduced new uncertainties about the distinctions between childhood and adulthood - uncertainties calling for new systems of control and regulation of children. Ambiguities concerning the proper place of children in society easily result in defining childhood in terms of risk and control, and in making children objects of intervention.

This session will address ways in which children's lives are governed, changes in models of governance and in their connections to broader changes in global economic steering systems, (welfare) state and child politics. The session will also address consequences of the changes for the understanding of childhood, for relations between the child, the family and the state, for child-adult relations and for children's everyday lives and experiences. The session welcomes papers addressing issues of regulation and control of children, their well-being, care and education. Papers can address cultural reasoning systems or discourses policing children's identities, well-being and understanding of who they are. Papers can also address mechanisms and processes by which children, through their own action and participation, themselves experience, deal with, take part in, and also influence processes of ordering and control.

## 5. Session:

**Participation: a new paradigm for children in society? (Organizer: Lucia Rabello de Castro, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; [lrcastro@infolink.com.br](mailto:lrcastro@infolink.com.br))**

Understandings of children – as ‘not ready human beings’ or as ‘becoming citizens’ – have been gradually superseded by paradigmatic alternatives which regard children as ‘competent social actors’. Developmental models of children, which have for long embedded the grammar of generational relationships, are questioned as to whether and how they still provide insightful relevance to ground social practices involving children and adults in contemporary societies. The disarticulation of developmental perspectives has put forward demands for reflection and updated understanding about children’s positions in the present. The notion of participation is increasingly put in evidence as a sort of paradigmatic alternative to include children as active social actors, establishing therefore, a different normative language to account for children’s and adults’ relationships. Nevertheless, participation seems a notion in quest for better geopolitical, psychological, legal and epistemological territorialization.

This session calls for papers which aim at critically discussing such an ‘alternative paradigm’ for positioning children in society today, so that empirical evidence and theoretical debate can throw light on the differential contribution of children in society and the diverse ways whereby participation can be construed and produced among different social actors.

## 6. Session

**Joint Session of RC 53 “Sociology of Childhood” and RC 55 “Social Indicators”: Assessing children’s quality of life (Organizer: Doris Bühler-Niederberger, University of Wuppertal, [buehler@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:buehler@uni-wuppertal.de), and Heinz-Herbert Noll, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, [heinz-herbert.noll@gesis.org](mailto:heinz-herbert.noll@gesis.org))**

Assessing children’s quality of life has become a scientific as well as a political aim in the last years and a considerable amount of studies and specific reports on “child well-being” have been published recently. Many of them put a focus on international comparison and even on rankings of countries and regions in league tables. Different methods of life quality assessment may be used and the results are therefore sometimes overlapping, sometimes diverging. The session particularly welcomes papers presenting results of national as well as comparative studies on the quality of life of children, papers dealing with related methodological issues, such as the choice of appropriate indicators and the specific challenges of surveying the well-being of children, and not least papers focusing on the differences between the assessment of young people’s and adult’s qualities of life.

## 7. Session

**Joint Session of RC 53 “Sociology of Childhood”, RC 34 “Sociology of Youth” and RC 13 “Sociology of Leisure”: Growing up in 21century”: Leisure, Lifestyles and unequal chances of Children and the Youth” (Organizer: Alexandra König, University of Wuppertal, [akoenig@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:akoenig@uni-wuppertal.de); NP Ngai, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, [npngai@swk.cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:npngai@swk.cuhk.edu.hk) and Ishwar Modi, University of Rajasthan, India, [iiiss2005modi@yahoo.co.in](mailto:iiiss2005modi@yahoo.co.in))**

The impact of childhood and youth on life chances and lifelong development is a growing area of concern. Familial as well as public and professional investment into

educational careers, purposeful use of young people's leisure time, habitus formation, acquisition of health behaviour etc. is growing and this is reflected in a renewal of social policy which relies heavily onto investment into young people. This opens a new area of research between childhood and youth sociology, analysing such endeavours and their impact onto further life. The session welcomes papers dealing with childhood and youth in a biographical perspectives, analyzing social inequalities in childhood and youth and there significance for development, reconstructing public and private approaches of socialization of young people and their qualities and failures and identifying the significance of this phase of life.

#### **8. Session:**

**Joint Session of RC 53 “Sociology of Childhood” and RC 12 “Sociology of Law”:  
Defining childhood by law (Organizer Sabina Schutter, Berlin:  
[schutter@vamv.de](mailto:schutter@vamv.de), Robert van Krieken, University of Sydney,  
[robertvk@usyd.edu.au](mailto:robertvk@usyd.edu.au); Peter, Robson; University of Strathclyde)**

Children usually have limited access to legal actorship although they are addressed by law in many ways. The ways they are addressed are influenced by the definition of childhood and the child as a legal object and vice versa. Legal fields usually concerning childhood are family law, youth welfare, and child protection. The round table deals with national differences and the definition of children concerning their actorship and/or its consequences.

The session welcomes papers dealing with questions like:

- The child as object or subject? Development of the actorship of children in different legal fields / topics between syndromizing, paternalizing, and enabling
- Legal decisions, law and changes in law concerning discursive patterns of policy
- Sociology of Childhood and Legal Sociology: research and methodological aspects
- UN-CRC: Effects, development, relations to political and legal action
- The child in the family: Child custody and visiting rights between different interests of fathers, mothers, and children

#### **9. Session:**

**Childhood rituals on the move (Organizer; Régine Sirota, Université René Descartes, Paris, [regine.sirota@paris5.sorbonne.fr](mailto:regine.sirota@paris5.sorbonne.fr))**

It has been said that a certain “deritualization” is a characteristic of modern societies. However new approaches, taking into account private life, children's culture, children as actors and profane rituality have shown an evolution of new forms of rituality during childhood. Particular attention will be paid to new ways of celebration of the child in modern societies, raising questions such as: Is there an apparition of new rituals? Is there a reinvention or a transformation of classical rituality? Does the classical way to consider rituals or “rites de passage” still allow us to catch those transformations, or do we need some news ways of investigation, new conceptualizations to understand the transformation of the place of the child? How the

different trends of a sociology on the move can enable us to understand and decipher those rituals? And reciprocally how these new ways to consider this stage of life can improve a sociology on the move?

#### **10. Session:**

**Childhood, Child Labour and Globalization (Organizer: Vinod Chandra, <mailto:ccyrcci@rediffmail.com>)**

In the last two decades, societies of both developed world and developing world experienced significant changes in their childhood at local as well as global level. If, digitalization and consumer culture has changed the contours of western childhood, computerization and influx of information through internet and electronic media has altered the indigenous and traditional childhood of developing countries in manifold. The phenomenon of child labour and children's work has gained the new meanings and significance for children themselves. Privatization and liberalization in global economic order has changed the forms and meanings of child labour. Given to this, social scientists have proposed a new debate of child labour through development perspective. Corporate social responsibility and business ethics are now discussed in the light of development and child labour. The latest economic recession and its impact on labour market will also be an important issue.

The proposed session will address the issue of child labour from various perspectives and tries to focus on other related issues of childhood in the light of child labour in present phase of globalization. The debate on development and globalization will be engaged to understand various contributions of children through their paid and unpaid 'work' and their 'agency'.

<b>11. Session: RC 53 session on the Congress theme:</b>
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**Violence and Generational Order (Organizer: Doris Bühler-Niederberger; University of Wuppertal: [buehler@uni-wuppertal.de](mailto:buehler@uni-wuppertal.de), and Elisabet Näsman, University of Uppsala, [Elisabet.Nasman@soc.uu.se](mailto:Elisabet.Nasman@soc.uu.se))**

Violence is still in many countries a legally and morally accepted practice to settle conflicts with children and until very recently it has been so almost worldwide. While the UN-Convention on Rights of the Child declares that "States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child" (Article 19) - this is not accepted in the legislation of all states and the real situation of many children is a very different one in all parts of the world. Compared to gender relations violence has a much wider acceptance as a strategy to settle conflicts and enforce obedience as far as children are concerned and there is a continuum of measures which all use physical force, for example, from locking them up in the nursery, "Holding Therapy" etc. which are even approved and recommended methods until severe injury of bodies.

The session can tackle questions like:

- Different forms of violence – incidence, regional and social distribution
- Private and public forms of violence against children

- Professional interventions in cases of violence against children
- Changing generational relations in a changing world and the influence of the Rights of the Child
- New legislation, arenas, actors, outcomes and impacts
- Theoretical questions, e.g. is it recommendable to develop a sociology of violence as the plenary sessions of the Congress are asking for or should the generational order be in the centre of a sociological approach towards violence against children.

## **12. Session: Business Meeting**

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### **Reflections on the ISA World Forum. Barcelona September 2008. RC 53 – Sociology of Childhood.**

The lead up to the forum was chaotic at work and I have to admit to not really wishing to be there. But how is it that it is those very events you are reluctant to attend that turn out to be really worthwhile and valuable ?! Doris, our President, had coordinated a really wide range of sessions which covered many issues of concern for all of us who are researching and working with children. In addition to this there were plenty of opportunities to socialise in the evenings, eat delicious food, talk about our work and explore the beautiful city of Barcelona.

Every paper brought something to mind for me which has pushed my thinking forward and while I would happily write about each paper we don't have space in this newsletter!! So I will stick to those which had a particular resonance for me, while acknowledging that this omits some excellent papers, the fact that I missed a couple of childhood sessions to hear what was happening in other research committees and that these are my subjective views!!

Jo Moran-Ellis presented a thought-provoking paper exploring the regulation of childhood research in the UK, particularly the role of ethics committees in 'protecting' children from adult defined and perceived harm. She challenged us to consider how we inform those who sit on these committees of the sociological understandings of children and in particular children's agency. The theme of adult recognition of and at times either support or suppression of agency within specific contexts was further explored in papers presented by Claudio Baraldi, Lise Morgensen and Ozkan Yildiz. Jan Falloon explored the complexity of the children protection system within Australia where, she argues, risk management and accountability can lead to an increased vulnerability of all those involved, including the adults and the very children the system is designed to protect. Sharon Pinkney discussed her recent research with participation officers in the UK, linking this to an exploration of the development of children's participation. This highlighted the ways in which children's voices are mediated by the adults around them, thus questioning the authenticity of children's' voices.

In the session “defining childhood by law” Sabina Schutter analyzed the recent history of German filiation law which swang back towards biological definitions of fatherhood. Alan Firth presented a paper out of a research together with Christopher Jenks and Liz Trindler, showing how much children’s individual needs and voices are ignored during court mediation sessions. These were highly interesting insights in the powerlessness of children in the legal frame which persists although laws may have changed.

We also had some very insightful papers which explored children within economic spheres, as consumers and laborers. Alexandra König linked children’s consumption with their identity, as children and among their peer groups. Maria-Carmen Pantea also considered the way in which the labour and employment of young people is negotiated between parents, institutions and the children and young people themselves. This informed some very heated discussion about the role of children as defined and perceived by society and led to a collective view that we need to perhaps pose the question ‘consumers or citizens: can children be both?’

I would urge any members who have not yet attended an ISA event to seriously consider attending and contributing to the World Congress in Gothenburg in 2010!! While the gathering of RC 53 members is formalised through the presentation of papers I think most of the really fascinating aspect of any ISA event occurs in the spaces between papers, in the discussions, the debates and the socialising. RC 53 is comprised of a group of very open, friendly and lively members keen to have the opportunity to discover what others are working on in relation to children.

Alison Cocks

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### **Development Cooperation University of Wuppertal and three Bishkek Universities – Growing Up in Kyrgyzstan: Structures and Conditions**

There are still remaining uncharted territories on the map of childhood sociology – one of them is Kyrgyzstan. There is neither literature on growing up there available in international journals and editions, nor are researchers, presenting related insights at international meetings. We even lack data on the current situation. Nonetheless, there are Kyrgyz researchers interested in working on this topic and there are agencies and institutions, highly interested in any research outcome. One of them is Dr. Saikal Junushova, who stayed a few months as a guest researcher at the University of Wuppertal and with whom we had the opportunity to establish a cooperation, financed for the next four years by the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service). And there is a lot to research indeed: First, there are insights into a childhood – taking place in family structures quite different, in a society less individualised, under partly precarious economical conditions, and in minimally developed or crumbling post-soviet infrastructures.

During a fact finding commission at site, the petitioners were able to explore the situation and validate the long-ranging need of fundamental research and data on the topic “conditions of growing up in Kyrgyzstan” in a series of conversations with representatives of local NGOs, universities and ministries. This topic will be the focus of the developmental cooperation between Wuppertal University and three of the

universities in Bishkek (Kyrgyz National Jusup Balasagyn University, Kyrgyz Economical University, Kyrgyz State University I. Arabaev) starting in 2009.

The goal of the developmental cooperation between Wuppertal University and Bishkek is a long-term intertwining of offered sociological courses to the profit of both. The cooperation is anchored in a study project of the curriculum of a master course “Childhood, Youth and Social Services” in Wuppertal. The students of Wuppertal University therefore have the opportunity to achieve research experience in a foreign country, train their intercultural competences and prepare themselves for labour positions in the field of international cooperation. The students of Bishkek are offered a chance to update their knowledge of contemporary social research and to use it for the empirical access to an urgent social problem of their country, but as well to use it for research work in Germany.

The curricular form is innovative and internationally oriented. The Core is a research module, which focuses on empirically founded social analysis of processes and structures of growing up, therefore gaining relevance for developmental policies. In this research module, students are teamed in bi-national pairs. The tandem partner of the other country is a partner in discussing theoretical issues and methodological decisions, and in supporting concrete implementation. Whether the students work on a common or a single project (in a general thematic context), is up to them. Indispensable remains the constant exchange and a continual comparative reflection. The tandem partnership will help to shape this part more lucid and more binding. This will be credited along with additional courses and individual research efforts.

In individual cases of adequate interest in the problem and social research, students of other subject areas or PhD students may be considered. The courses of the research module will be held in English. Knowledge of the Russian language is an advantage, but may be acquired at the Wuppertal University, too.

Any interest is very welcome and information is available via:

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