Similarities and differences between sociology 90 years ago and sociology 90 years from now

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Before setting off, I wish to pay tribute to the person who held the first chair for sociology in Finland. Inevitably that person did not study sociology. Uno Harva came from theology, collected myths of steppe and forest societies in Northern Eurasia, found that their stories about the origin of the world refer to, among others, trees of life and water spirits, and admitted that their tales about the end of times are understudied. These societies and such ideas no longer charm sociologists. Still, Harva’s findings are pertinent to a venerable question: what is the content of the origin and destination stories told in various human societies, and how did these ideas come about? They were not derived from observations, since neither the story tellers themselves were present at the events they recount, nor the persons who told them the hearsay. Now, one hypothesis says that people do not always derive ideas from observations, but reason by analogy, with the far away and unknown being modeled on the familiar and vitally important. In addition, the world originated long ago, and lakes, rivers and trees feature in the survival strategy of fishers and hunters in forests of Northern Eurasia, but not in that of peoples there who herd cattle on dry and treeless grasslands. So, trees of life and water spirits will be less dominant in folklore of steppe societies. I quite like my own theoretical exercise regarding Harva’s societies and their myths. However, I will not follow it up here by identifying analogies behind ideas on coming catastrophes in contemporary high-tech societies. There are quite a few possible disasters: the bursting of bubbles blown from a tower in Frankfurt, floods resulting from fossil fuel overdoses, mass killings in the name of God, and military clashes after diplomatic brinkmanship by Putin and Trump. I deal with the prospects, if any, of sociology in general.

Contemporary sociology is in a sorry state. This is valid for Finland, where people in Turku decided to celebrate the launch of sociology in Finland in 1926, by a talk in 2016 on the state of sociology in 2106. That sociology is in a sorry state, holds for the Netherlands too: Turku seduced with success a Dutch sociologist to take up the 90+90 topic. All joking apart, I do think that several phenomena indicate that present day sociology is in a sorry state, and I will argue that, as a consequence of the digitalization of everything, sociology’s state in 2106 will be much healthier. I thank the organizers of this event for asking me to elaborate on +90 sociology. I hope they do not mind that I bring in -90 sociology too. It was quite decent as regards problems and theories, and +90 sociology will resemble it.

Contemporary sociology’s state: five flaws

Five phenomena indicate that contemporary sociology is in a sorry state.

First, for decades now strife about styles of research roils and soils sociology. Before 1968 the division between exploratory and confirmatory research held sway, then the opposition between qualitative and quantitative research gained ground, and now many a methodologist makes much of the merits and minuses of case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches. My take on these quarrels is that as refutations of conjectures are desirable, every piece of research should be taken as exploratory. The pertinent distinction is between researchers who do and do not make much of an effort to write their thoughts down. The retort that it is impossible to state all one’s expectations, is a bad excuse for not volunteering any. In the coming decades the distinction between case- and variable-oriented approaches will collapse.

Second, the gap between theory and research in present day sociology is so wide, that it has been called a scandal. One malefactor is the existence of pure theorists, another culprit their preoccupation with concepts. Concepts are illustrated, while propositions are testable, which creates research jobs. Logically related propositions are not difficult to draft, they take shape by staying tuned to puzzling findings. Later I state how concepts go out, and which multilayered theories drive sociological research in 2106.

Third, several things are wrong with how contemporary sociology deals with theories. It is dumbfounding that, although it is known that several theories may be derived from one and the same more general theory, few such exercises are undertaken. Treatises tell students about sociology’s sources in the French Enlightenment and in the Scottish Enlightenment, yet do not compare the fluids that flowed from one well with the other, and sidestep the German Enlightenment, as if Durkheim did not reject Kant’s idea that the categories of human knowledge are a priori, and as if Bourdieu did not seek to supersede in a Durkheimian way Kant’s thoughts on beauty. All in all, Students delve so deep into sociology’s past, that they ignore the deduction of new specific theories, important for future sociology, from old but general theories. When it comes to logical relations between contemporary theories, the textbook contention that sociology

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embraces multiple, one another complementing, paradigms misses out on what is wrong with sociology’s theories, since most approaches around do not comprise the exemplars of archetypical paradigms. Later on I outline to what extent in future decades, theory tomes and reviews of sociology’s history contain a mish mash.

Fourth, present day sociology is in a sorry state as its theories do not link up with its questions. A theory should answer several questions, and proves it mettle when it answers a novel one. For pure theorists this common sense notion excuses dealing with any specific question.

A fifth indication of sociology’s sorry state is that there is something fishy about sociology’s questions themselves. Leading sociologists admit that sociology cannot be pigeon-holed by its questions, since they are so diverse. I will hold that seemingly disparate problems are sub-problems of long-standing larger problems, and that pure theorists should command problem structures out of the closet. In 2002 Ruhr Vilhjámssson and Thorolfur Thórliðsson from Iceland, as editors of Acta Sociologica, wrote four pages on central issues in sociology. By 2106 most journals will do so almost every decade. The first editors to follow in Islandic footsteps will be the Finns Jani Erola and Suvi Salmenniemi. Later I detail three overarching problems for sociology.

Seven effects of the digitalisation of everything

The prime mover in sociology for the next 90 years is the digitalization of everything, which started in the 1980s. It has seven effects, and they mostly upgrade sociology’s present state.

First and second effect: two victories for quantitative research

Digitalization hastens the quantification of long-term societal trends. For some decades now the universities of, among others, the Netherlands and the United States have harbored a sizeable historical sociology, with questions on gradual developments and all-changing events. Since quantitative data have piled up for more than a century in 2106, as a first effect of digitalization, historical sociology will merge into quantitative research.

Second, privacy concerns about individual information will weaken qualitative research. In addition, strains of qualitative research will get re-labelled as quantitative, such as verbose studies dealing with questions about the year in which various countries passed a certain piece of social security legislation. After all, the difference between these years for country A and B is a quantitative variable. Quantitative research will be strengthened strongly by public access to data files of national and international statistical offices. Data sets from various non-governmental organizations will do so, too.

Third effect: quantitative research splitting up into a lenient and a strict camp

These victories of quantitative research will not bring eternal peace, fierce fighting among number crunchers will be a third effect of the digitalization of everything. The accuracy of non-governmental surveys will be doubted first. The U.S. Religious Landscape Surveys downplayed findings of religious decline by dropping longstanding indications of religiosity, and offering shaky new ones. Disputes about indicator accuracy will be followed by wrangling about data collection. Some quantitative sociologists use data for persons right now and taken on their own, while other sociologists go for data on multiple moments, multiple actors and multiple contexts. A superior answer to, say, the question of high employment and underclass formation, requires data on a person’s unemployment history, that of a person’s spouse, the local labor market, and programs of the regional employment office. Yet, with BIG MAC data discord still strikes. Retrospective data on multiple moments cannot be trusted. But then, drop out plagues panels. This leads to stalemates. On top of strife about indicator accuracy and the right type of data, there will be issues about the statistical models to be estimated for the data and the indicators constructed from them, with pure methodologists insisting that assumptions are violated by various kinds of models. Quite often, the supposedly best kind of model still will be under construction.

All in all, a strict and a lenient camp arise. The data, indicators, and models of the strict camp are logically superior, the lenient camp wishes to know to what extent they actually are so, and no camp tests hypotheses about the direction and size of systematic errors. In 2106 lenient sociologists at an international conference call strict campers overzealous policemen.

Fourth and fifth effects: better teaching of theories and methods

Open access digital libraries with the complete works of famous foreigners and all comments of all their foes will kill the format of student papers for classes on sociology’s history and theories. Browsing and searching books by Germans who died two centuries ago - remember I am going on about 2106 - make smooth sailing of papers like “Did Marianne Schnitger write on rationalization before her husband Max Weber did?”, and “Which concept of habitus did Bourdieu take from Weber, and which one from Panovsky?”. This bad apple in the sociology curriculum was noted by a committee on the quality of teaching programs for sociology in European universities, which issued a report 2026.

As a remedy, a fourth effect of the digitalization of everything, those teaching courses on sociology’s history and theories began to spread the message that conceptual schemes are out and multilayered theories are in. Since then students are instructed, among others, to state the concept of the logic of the media, as proposed by Manuel Castells, in the form of a proposition on effects of competition between mass media.
They also are to summarize The Transformation of Intimacy by Anthony Giddens into one hypothesis, which specifies from what to what intimacy transformed, and what exactly caused it. And from that they are to derive that same-sex marriages in some European countries were allowed earlier than in others.

The digitalization everything had, fifth, another and even bigger impact on sociology courses. In 2031 contrarian nerds from method sections in sociology departments at various European universities transformed the digestible methods books of their pre-digitalization professors. These geeks, who earlier on chatted in the box Statistical Stupities of Sociology Students, did so with an internet course given telegenic lecturers on Advances and Blunders in the History of Sociological Research. The course and its e-books went viral, and since these materials gave big shots a close shave, while also pointing to lesser gods who set things right, the old mish mash in printed textbooks on sociology’s history and theories got jetisoned. The premise was that every new method avoids blunders in sociological research, and the course and its e-books pinpointed sociologists who committed them.

I will not detail the blunders highlighted in Advances and Blunders, but mention that according to the Finnish nerd in the team, the figures on men with more than one wife, collected by Hilma Granquist from Finland while living in a Palestinian village for three years in the 1920s, are an underestimate. Applying the dictum that women can be studied only by women, Granquist constructed, with the help of local women, trees of descent for the four clans and six other families in the village of Artas. These trees stretch back to 1830, when people returned after a long absence, having fled away places, by lodging with local working class families, where he feasted his eyes, and pricked up his ears. Each of Le Play’s case descriptions ends with a list of revenues and expenses. Sitting down with persons to note receipts and expenditures, was another new method for obtaining evidence. The comments of Ducpétiaux and Le Play on the budgets were meager, as if figures speak for themselves.

The final shot for this episode stars Ernst Engel, the director of the statistical office for Saxony. He held in 1857 that Ducpétiaux and Le Play did not carry through the program of the budget method. Calculating for their 255 budgets the percent of all revenues spent on food, he found that as income is higher, the proportion for food is lower. This regularity got known as Engel’s law, and became part of a theory on human needs. Advances and Blunders commented that Engel, by culling findings from case-oriented research to deploy them in variable-oriented research, undermined the distinction between case-oriented and variable-oriented approaches.

Advances and Blunders also has a three-shots episode in the history of sociological research from the late 20th century. You may know it, but it bears repeating since variable-oriented research turned into case-oriented research, denting anew the distinction between case- and variable-oriented approaches.

Sociology for the 1970s contains papers by John Goldthorpe, with Catriona Llewellyn and Clive Payne, presenting findings on class mobility for a random sample of 12,000 British men in 1978. These men were visited at their home by trained interviewers from a specialized commercial agency, a by then established method of data collection. Since many hypotheses were adduced and scores of odds ratios were computed, these studies were variable-oriented.

Yet all men studied lived in one country, and Goldthorpe, with Robert Erikson and Lucienne Portocarero, published around 1980 in The British Journal of Sociology on class mobility in Britain, France and Sweden. These papers recyled the 1972 data by turning 12,000 men into one case, and added to that case two others. According to Advances and Blunders variables became cases.

In 1987b Erikson & Goldthorpe (1987a) European Sociological Review published papers by Erikson and Goldthorpe on class mobility, adding nine industrial nations to the previous three. These papers contribute to what Advances and Blunders calls “variabilization”, not at the level of men described by their origin and destination, but at the level of countries. The question in wait is to what extent government by social democratic parties makes for more mobility, and, if so, how: by full-employment policies, or easy access to higher education for poorer people? Advances and
They added that it is misleading to say that at first men were studied, and then countries. According to the nerds originally men-in-one-society were cases, and later men-in-


Sociology’s overarching questions from 2016 to 2106

My reading of recent sociology textbooks and journals, makes me venture that order, inequality and change are candidates for sociology’s big problems. I will show how their extension and reformulation will steer sociology in the right direction towards 2106.

Inequality as a master question

Inequality is the most obvious master problem. Questions once were generated by the Weberian conceptual scheme that classes, status groups and political parties are dimensions of societal stratification, and lately by the neo-Weberian principle that the economic, symbolic and political resources of the members of a society determine their life chances, with longevity, living standard and life styles as specific life chances. This thesis concerns individuals-in-one-society, and leads to an array of questions I need not spell out here.

Lenski’s societal hypothesis in Power and Privilege from 1966 was that the more unbalanced a society’s power relations are, the more advantageous life chances will be for the more powerful. This hypothesis was specified for various levels of subsistence technology, by stating for each level new resources, the extent they cumulate with old ones, and the tilt in the total power balance. By assuming that power relations become more lopsided with technological progress, Lenski predicted that technological progress increases inequalities.

Lenski’s findings showed that standard of living differences were smaller in industrial than in agrarian societies. By postulating new, democratic, ideologies, Lenski solves that puzzle, also predicting smaller income disparities when social-democratic parties gain power. Soon after that, quantitative macro-sociologists showed as much. Two new resources of industrial societies, the universal right to vote and widespread professional knowledge, only to some extent cumulate with another new resource, ownership of machinery in the form of stocks.
In 2016 Lenski’s puzzle solution sounds naïve: economic and political resources cumulate to an at least considerable extent. In future decades a prime inequality question will be to what extent and under which conditions democratic high-tech states will turn into plutocracies (the United States since the Bush family?), and into kleptocracies (like Russia now), once more with high income disparities. Another important question for the coming decades is also about the cumulation of economic with political resources: why did in European societies after World War II class-based voting decline, why did a green left emerge next to the old left, and why did in the 21st century the decent right lose out to the white right?

Cohesion as a master question

Since Thomas Hobbes there is the problem of violence, named by Talcott Parsons as that of order. The first research sociologists narrowed it into the question of who trespasses laws protecting life and property. Here we find, depending upon the law being broken and the persons doing so, studies on juvenile delinquency, white collar crimes, race riots, and lynching. Of late the question of who gets victimized became prominent. Digitalization will make questions of who murdered whom, as regards sex and country of birth, doable. In future decades questions of violence/order also will be posed as questions of groups against hallmarks of other groups. Arson in synagogues during the Pogrom Night in Nazi-Germany will become a textbook topic, with follow-ups in classes on questions about ongoing attacks in Europe on mosques, as well as on housing for persons fleeing from violence outside Europe.

Since Durkheim, the question of violence/order is only half the problem of (dis)cohesion. He intuited that the mem-
Figure 3. Modes of subsistence technology and environmental influences on them according to Lenski (2005).

Figure 4. The relationship according to Lenski (2015) in pre-industrial societies between subsistence technology and the frequency of hereditary slavery and any form of slavery.
members of a society without violence may form a heap of sand. Two of his books involve non-violent relations: economic links generated by the division of labor, and ties forged at religious gatherings. Durkheim also studied questions of sexual bonding: marriage, divorce, parenthood and adoption. His suicide question is about cutting the last connection people have with society: merely living among others. In future decades sociology will study other forms of extreme isolation, like the number of persons found in their house after dying weeks ago without neighbors noticing, and the number of burials and cremations without anyone attending. Digitalization will make such time series available for European capitals. So, the question of (dis)cohesion comprises an array of questions too.

An important (dis)cohesion topic for the coming decades is the paradox of strong individual integration and weak societal cohesion. If all members of a society have strong ties with some other members, and if like links up with like, the cohesion of this society as a whole is weak. In 2000, Robert Putnam depicted trends in the United States, but did not state what went on in this society before people started *Bowling alone*. Since separate black bowling clubs existed, Americans once were *Bowling apart*. Putnam covered up the paradox of strong integration and weak cohesion with the concepts of bonding and bridging capital. In the coming decades the paradox will enter into sociology textbooks, and research papers will be published on flare-ups of violence in segmented high-tech societies.

**Rationalization as a master question**

Weber in 1920 formulated an overarching question about changes in Western societies involving neither inequality nor cohesion: why did in the West rationalization processes in fields like science, economy and polity, proceed further than in China and India? In coming decades the question of rationalization will be separated from those of inequality and cohesion, with the argument that whereas the last two questions are about persons-in-societies, the first involves persons-in-institutions-in-societies. A list of Western institutions will include: universities with observatories and laboratories, professional police and standing armies, as well as banks, stock exchanges and limited liability companies. Weber assumed that these institutions were more effective and efficient than their predecessors, and in coming decades a flourishing sociology of formal organizations will test so.

In 2106 Weber’s sub-question of a trend towards formal polities will have been recast. This will have been done with the thesis from welfare economics that free markets fail when it comes to negative externalities of actions by some people for society at large, and states then step in. Weber held that heads of states differ very much in the aims they pursue. In the line of the Dutch sociologist Abram De Swaan’s 1988 *In care of the state*, a big question will become: to what extent do democratic states dampen negative effects of some people’s acts, limit collective nuisances, and further the production of collective goods? Specific research questions will be generated by lists of public bads and laws. Three examples: a) to what degree do police lower crime and increase general safety?, b) how did towns come to provide piped water and sewers, and to what extent did this eliminate contagious diseases?, and c) how did in country A at t1 laws laying down unemployment benefits come about, and to what extent did they lower poverty? Are you reminded of global warming and Paris? If you do, you get how an extension of Weber’s problem structure generates questions.

**Sociology’s multilayered theories from 2016 to 2106**

After a review of how sociology’s three big questions will unfold until 2106, now two messages about sociology’s theories in this period.

First, it will take several decades before referees and editors of sociology journals appreciate how many layers seemingly simply statements consist, and how much information they convey. As a consequence, papers on some sub-problem applying a multilayered theory, may be rejected by general journals as they deal with a minor question only, while specific journals may refuse them because of too much theory. Take the proposition that people live up to group norms, part of old structural functionalism and contemporary cultural sociology. Its layers are recognized if it is phrased as: *all inhabitants of whatever society, to some extent live up to any norm of any of the groups they belong to, and this extent will be higher if they are more strongly tied, in whatever way, to these groups*. This hypothesis explains that Catholics less likely die of suicide than Protestants, manual workers from districts with a higher percent of manual workers more likely vote for the left, and juveniles more strongly attached to their parents less likely commit petty crimes. Now guess the publication chances of research applying this hypothesis to the question of which factors explain that secondary school pupils in a sizeable city of some European country decline to sit in class next to a gay or lesbian pupil. The theoretically generated list of factors includes: what others in their class hold of same-sex love, the percent of non-western migrants in their school, their membership of a sport club, parental (dis)approval of homosexuality, and the vote in their neighborhood for Christian parties. The authors of such a paper likely will feel misjudged.

My second post. Westermarck’s *History of human marriage* commenced with two pages by Alfred Russell Wallace, the first biologist to propose that new species arise through natural selection under environmental pressures. The application of this hypothesis to human beings by Westermarck and others got known as Social Darwinism. For reasons I need not state here, it went out after World War II. All the same, for some time now, evolutionary biology has been staging a comeback in sociology. An early bird was Lenski, and ecological evolutionism will be a major theory in 2106 sociology. Long before, misgivings about it will have evaporated.

To begin with, evolutionary biology holds that struggles for life lead to equilibria between species, and a recent hypothesis says that diversity of species furthers the reproduc-
tive success of all species taken together. I leave it up to you
whether this effect of biodiversity, provides a good justifi-
cation for ethnic diversity as a goal in contemporary human
polities. But this showing up of a proposition from evolution-
ary biology in politics learns that links between biological
evolutionism and particular kinds of politics are not logically
necessary.

Secondly, there are variants of evolutionary biology. For
many 2016 sociologists evolutionary explanations imply a
hunt for genetic factors. However, for contemporary evolu-
tionary biologists like Richard Dawkins the ultimate causes
are environmental. Species emerge through plate tectonics,
impact of meteorites, and volcano eruptions, and what not.
Human societies become more complex with the invention
of more efficient subsistence technologies, and retrogress in
the wake of overexploitation of habitats, like overfishing and
depleted oil wells.

Thirdly, 2016 inequality sociology tends to reject evolu-
tionary biology, since it would bring in IQ as a genetic all
important factor. However, even if people inherit their IQ,
the more mating approaches randomness, the less dispersion
in the distribution of IQ scores in the next generation. Other
hypotheses about social factors affecting IQ are: under strict
abortion laws the Zika-virus has more impact, lead in piped
water - rising in U.S. cities - lowers IQ, and women above
the age of 40 more likely bear a child having Down’s syn-
drome, with a rising percent of births after that age in high-
tech societies. Finally, limited supply of oxygen to the brain
during childbirth lowers IQ and a society’s rate of births with
complications varies with its health care system. In 2106 this
list of societal influences on IQ distributions will not only
be longer and more systematic, it also will be well-known
among inequality sociologists.

The move of evolutionary biology to sociology is driven
by the proposition that differences between human popula-
tions are to be explained by the same factors that account for
the diversity of species, to wit environmental factors. Wall-
ace proposed it in 1864, adding that environmental changes
rarely change the genetic composition of human societies,
and mainly make for temporary storage of new thoughts in
human brains, with these thoughts being called by Dawkins
memes. This hypothesis provides a bridge to present day cul-
tural sociology, and it will contribute in three ways to existing
theories.

First, Peter Hedström dissected the social, and according
to analytical sociology’s principles, the elements of societies
are individuals. Ecological evolutionism analyses in opposite
direction: human societies are instances of animal societies,
and human societies at higher levels of subsistence technol-
yogy involve more institutions, with the balance between nat-
ural and collective actors in high-tech societies shifting to-
wards the latter. It is a matter for animal ethology, which in-
stitutions societies of close relatives of humans have, if any,
and how they differ from the limited number of institutions
in societies of hunting and gathering humans.

Second, ecological evolutionism harbors the hypothesis
that people do not logically derive ideas from observations,
at best throw out ideas that do not square with them, and
obtain ideas about the unknown by analogies with the famil-
 iar. In this it differs from rational action theories. These
theories assume that people think up ideas by random vari-
ation. The ancient analogy thesis surfaced in 2003 in The
God Delusion by Dawkins. Since natural selection works
against waste, Dawkins found it puzzling that people spend
time and energy on religion. To solve this difficulty, Dawkins
replaced the question of religion’s survival value by that of
whether religion is a by-product of something else. His thesis
was that natural selection wired children to follow educators,
with as a by-product acceptance of anthropomorphic ideas
on the world’s origin. Since newborns survive by the actions
of their caretakers, they will as adults believe in benevolent
creators. Research on origin stories from pre-industrial so-
cieties confirms this. In coming decades questions will be
raised on analogical reasoning in high-tech societies. Under
which conditions do their politicians skip data on legislative
effects and ridicule opponents with analogies, and in which
settings do even academics use analogies rather than general
principles to answer concrete questions?

Finally, ecological evolutionism has hypotheses about ef-
ects of natural environments on subsistence technologies.
One is about industrial societies, in particular high-tech so-
cieties. Their per capita energy consumption is much higher
than that of agrarian and other pre-industrial societies, and
industrial energy until now mainly came from fossil fuels.
At first this fuel was coal, giving a head start to England and
Belgium, later it became oil. Like coal, oil is unequally dis-
tributed across the world, and that is partly why per capita in-
come now is higher in some parts of the world. Oil wells dry
up before 2106, or phased out because of hydrocarbon emis-
sion, and new sources of energy will be unequally distributed
across the world. Sweden generates hydropower, other coun-
tries will be unable to do so. Solar power will expand before
2106, but several high tech countries will have to import it.
And it is a windmill that every country without hydropower
or solar power, will get by 2106 the energy it now guzzles
from windmills. So the ranking of the world’s countries af-
ter per capita income will change, and in slipping countries
cohesion falls and income disparities increase. I hope young
sociologists in my audience will devise detailed hypotheses
on effects of the worldwide redistribution of energy resources
for societal inequality and cohesion.

The five-year PAESR award: 2021 to 2106

There is no Nobel Prize for sociology right now, there will
be not be one in 2106, and that for Economics was scrapped
in the meantime. In 2021 the first Award for Preservation
and Alteration in European Sociological Research was
handed out, and then every five years. The initiative was
taken by sociologists who started in academia and made it
big in big data, and goes to research superseding some golden
olde. Book titles give a good impression of the best type
of concrete research undertaken in sociology from now until
2106. I present them without comments, but except 2021,
2051 and 2106, which I treat last.
Fifteen PAESR awards

2005 Peter Hedström, Dissecting the social, On the principles of analytical sociology
2026 Human societies and other animal societies, Principles of ecological evolutionism
1956 Pitirim Sorokin, Fads and foibles in modern sociology
2031 Advances and blunders in the history of sociological research
1936 Edvard Westermarck, The future of marriage in Western civilization
2036 The future of gay marriage and straight cohabitation in European societies
1977 Ronald Inglehart, The silent revolution, changing values and political styles among Western publics
2041 Violent revolutions, How in Europe the decent right lost from the white right
1946 Karl Popper, The open society and its enemies
1984 Peter Blau, Crosscutting social circles
2046 Open societies without crosscutting social circles
1913 Émile Durkheim, The elementary forms of religious life
2006 Richard Dawkins, The god delusion
2056 The elementary forms of atheist life, Doing without god delusions
1959 Ernst Topitsch, Vom Ursprung und Ende der Metaphysik
2061 Analogical reasoning and syllogisms, How Ph.D. holders and politicians argue in high-tech societies
1966 Gerhard Lenski, Power and privilege, a theory of social stratification
2066 Resources and advantages, A theory of vicious circles, recurrent effects and compensatory strategies
1980 James Coleman, The asymmetric society
2076 The ever more asymmetric EU and US, How corporate actors grab you and me
1979 Helen Fein, Accounting for genocide, victims and survivors of the holocaust
2081 Accounting for 21st century mass murders
1981 Pierre Bourdieu, La distinction, critique social du jugement
2086 Why Bourdieu became less distinctive, Leading sociologists falling from grace

Three more awards

1991 Nathalie Heinich, La gloire de Van Gogh
2091 Van Gogh’s decline and Monet’s
decline, Time series of museum tickets
and poster sales

1994 Sara McLanahan & Gary Sandefur,
Growing up with a single parent
2096 Growing up with four parents

1993 Anthony Oberschall, Social movements,
Ideologies, interests and identities
2096 Failures and successes of ad-free
society movements

2014 Thomas Piketty, Capital in the twenty-first century
2101 That was capital in the 21st, this will
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Three more awards

The first PAESR-award went against the rule that the prize-book would follow up on one of sociology’s classics. Its point of departure was a clipping from the Helsinki Times of May 28, 2014, with the heading “Finland has the lowest income inequality in the EU”, and invoked a report of Eurostat. Finland dethroned argued against this finding. The study’s questions were about the rich, the super-rich and the hyper-rich, it stated that the published data on the income shares of the richest 10% persons-in-households were not accompanied by standard errors, and held that the Finnish samples were not big enough to arrive at reliable estimates for the richest 1% and richest 0.1%. It also pointed out that sample sizes differed a lot from country to country (in 2007: 10,000 for Finland, 80,000 for the Netherlands, 20,000 for Sweden, 5,000 for the United Kingdom, and 100,000 for the United States), particularly if it is taken into account that incomes are not normally distributed, but skewed at the upper end. The sociologists behind the book laid its hands on bigger samples for all EU-countries from tax records, with one of its findings that income inequalities were significantly smaller in the Netherlands than in Finland. Here is the book title and that of the newspaper clipping:

2014 Finland has the lowest income inequality in EU
2021 Finland dethroned, When big data on income inequality are not big enough

The prize for 2051 did not go either to a study outdoing one of sociology’s classics. It argued against a study by Becker, a winner of a Nobel-prize for economics. In A treatise on the family Becker - unlike previous economists and sociologists - did not regard the family as a consumption unit, but as a production unit, just like firms traditionally studied by economics. The award-winning book turned the tables by raising questions about firms as consumption units,
offered propositions on consumption functions of chief executive officers of corporations in the Fortune Global 500, and estimated them with data on company jets, five-star hotels for business trips, office furniture, number of private secretaries, and three-martini lunches. An honorary award that year went to research on food in the canteens of the main plants and offices of these corporations. Here are the vignettes:

1957  Erving Goffman, *The characteristics of total institutions*

2016  Are European sociology departments total institutions?

The 2106 PAESR-award invoked a paper from 1957, that became famous as a chapter in Goffman’s *Asylums* from 1961. Goffman had written down observations while employed in a U.S. mental hospital, and showed that persons who entered it lost so much control over their life, that they became inmates of a total institution. The prize-winning book for 2106 applied this theory to what went on around 2100 in sociology departments of European universities. At the level of each employed person, working hours are monitored by the minute, emails on a regular basis are checked for sociological content, the number of words in publications is counted every year, as well as the number times publications are quoted, time spent on estimating which models with what kind of software is traced regularly, the quality of power-points and examination questions is determined for each semester, while records are kept of how many students each staff member fails, and of how high or low students rate each teacher. When changing jobs between universities, sociologists have to present these materials. The main difference found in this PAESR-award is that members of sociology departments are thrown out more easily that inmates of mental hospitals.

1981  Gary Becker, *A treatise on the family*

2051  A treatise on the firm, *The CEO consumption function*

References


