

Universal, prismatic, entropic? A note on lines shaping the images of World Society research activities 1982 – 2022.

In this year we are looking back to the activities of the Foundation since 1982 evolving as an observatory of events and laboratory of research and theoretical reflections. More than 150 research projects of scholars from about 40 countries, 16 volumes of the World Foundation Series summarize the significant insights; since 2007 a series of conferences have been organised and stimulated a transnational network.

One can summarize the events and scenes as specific periods along the timeline revealing harmonic but also dramatic changes. The recent episode, the pandemic events, poses the question of „After globalization - the Future of World Society“ which addresses a paper contest and an online conference of a selection of participants culminating in a presentation act of the World Society Award 2022 in Zurich. We will not enter into the detailed list of the WSF activities preceding the global pandemic. Indeed the current events in the Ukraine illustrate an essential feature of world society: linearity of developments is fragile and disruptive events are probable like actually the Cold War could return under new conditions.

It is obvious that the developments and events on a global scale are rather complex if we look from global levels, from centres to peripheries, North to global South and East. Instead of crystallized structures the global society looks like a „liquid formation“ (Zygmunt Baumann). However, three lines are visible in the trajectories and flows of development; they are reflected in research contributions, which we select here as examples of research promoted by the Foundation:

The *universal* line guided the research activities from the beginning. The planetary society is becoming a civil formation, spreading like a concentric play of waves into all regions, nations, regions and individuals. In the archive we could cite the research of Bruce Russett addressing the vision of “Kantian Peace”. This line is reflected in the research of the 80s to the 90s and culminated in the event “Fall of the Berlin Wall”. It is a period of rather utopian developments contributing to the image of a *civil* world although it was interrupted by the Balkan wars or the catastrophe of Chernobyl.

Simultaneously during these decades the vectors of technological innovation, computer science and modernization have led to the vision of *one* world documented in our archive by authors dealing with long waves. (Volker Bornschier, Peter Lengyel, eds 1992). But the financial crisis challenged the world society by the global economic crisis discussed at an international conference published in Christian Suter/ Mark Herkenrath eds 2011. Since that critical period the universal line is interrupted or even broken: the *own* worlds and identities are recovered and reinvented contrasting utopian outlooks of civil and modern future.

The *prismatic* line tries to respond to risks and insecurities, crises or catastrophes. Recourse to traditions and to the *longue durée* rooted in collective memory are revitalized and articulated. The vision of a civil or modern one world is shattered by rediscovered or reinvented identities („retrotopias“). In our research archive we find, for instance, the contributions of Shmuel Eisenstadt’s research project (1988) demonstrating the prismatic character of modernisation in different cultures.

Salvatore Babones (2018) recently focused on the Chinese ambitions and in the actual contest on the Indian roots of a worldwide identity. Such radical shifts from a modern image of universalism to traditional frames articulating world wide identity, for instance the *tianxia* („all-under-the-heaven“), can be observed also in revivals of traditional values along local and national contexts as well as identities of populations, ethnic groups, leaders and social classes.

At the same time, this upheaval is linked to the repositioning of power i.e. the strategies to dominate the world evident in the episode “return of geopolitics“, which continues actually along the nations and boundaries in the Transatlantic, European, and Eurasian area. (Albert Bergesen / Christian Suter, 2018).

The third, *entropic* line, arises by unexpected events as vividly demonstrated in the pandemic. The policy of established rules can be overtaken by politics of events (Perry Anderson). In that way the first observations of entropic trends in world system and codes to explain it by the founder of WSF Peter Heintz gained a new actuality: his book “Events in the mirror of World Society” (1982) was declared by himself as guideline in the Foundation act.

The three lines are recognizable in the observatory along these 40 years, once they dominated or they remained latent. Summarising, the planetary society in the lenses of world observatory is not a universe – but a multiverse of scenes and developments in various places and often occurring simultaneously. – In a specific cultural event in Zurich three figures will illustrate the universal, prismatic, entropic lines addressing a larger audience.

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