REGULAR SESSION INFORMATION

Session: Beyond Assimilationism and Multiculturalism: Social Dynamics and Contemporary Cultural Identities II

Session Convener(s): Claudia Portioli, University of Ferrara; Felipe Arocena, University of the Republic, Montevideo

Chair: Felipe Arocena, University of the Republic, Montevideo

Comments: -

I) *Canadian Francophone Minority, Health Network and Solidarity*
Louise Bouchard, Université d'Ottawa

II) *What Do Teachers Think about Acculturation of Immigrant Children?*
Claudia Portioli, University of Ferrara
Dino Giovannini, University of Reggio Emilia
Loris Vezzali, University of Reggio Emilia

III) *Toward a Multiethnic Community by Constructing a Social and Cultural Identity: A Case Study of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles*
Kumiko Tsuchida, Tohoku University

IV) *Interculturalism and Hybrid Identities*
Claudia Portioli, University of Ferrara

ABSTRACTS

Session description

Which social processes allow us to explain the construction of contemporary cultural identities in the context of immgration? What are the main characteristics of these identities? Do the coexistence of members coming from different cultures query the traditional ways of analysing the formation of social identities? Is it sufficient to make reference to the process of socialisation in order to analyse the different attitudes developed for instance by the immigrants of the second and third generation, towards the values and lifestyle that characterize the majority of the people in the society in which they live? The recent critics against multiculturalism as an unsatisfactory integration model that would undermine the very cultural values and moral norms of the society of the host country, show us how this model has been mainly considered as a matter of political choice. In this sense, multiculturalism as well as assimilationism, could be seen as phenomena essentially regarding the macrosociological analysis. But what are the real processes that involve – on a micro sociological level – the specific attitudes developed by single individuals concerning their system of values? Can we outline a sort of phenomenology of the principal many-sided processes and attitudes on which the constructions of social and cultural identities in this kind of societies is based? Communitarianism, universalism, interculture or the claiming of a cultural identity separated from that of the host country's society, could also be seen as attitudes developed from the bottom, i.e. as outcomes of a constant process of negotiation and redefinition of the aspects that constitute the identities of the members of societies in which different cultural traditions and habits coexist – even if not necessarily in a conciliating way. Along with the importance of the crossing of social circles for the definition of social identity or with further classical social theories of the self, other theoretical approaches such as those elaborated by Post-colonial Studies, cultural psychology or anthropology may offer some significant contributes to the comprehension of the specific dynamics that affect the construction of cultural identities in contemporary societies

Papers

I) *Canadian Francophone Minority, Health Network and Solidarity*
Louise Bouchard, Université d'Ottawa

There are important transformations underway in globalising societies regarding modes of governance, engagement and participation of citizens in public affairs, increase in the rights of minorities, trans-border exchanges and the influence of networks. The objective of this presentation is to question how the French-speaking minority in Canada (a population of 1 million living outside Quebec, the only French province in Canada) will seize these mobilizing opportunities to accelerate its objective of institutional completeness (Breton, 1964) by the addition of the health system to the existing Francophone systems of education and justice. Profiting from the Federal government`s action plan for the official languages (2003), the "Société Santé en Français" is seeking to support the creation of networks as an action strategy to ensure the development and organization of health services in French in a linguistic minority context. The assumption advanced in this communication is that the networks, as a new social morphology (Castells, 1996), contribute to create a new public space and citizenship. It follows Durkheim's view that the survival of solidarity is based on social change and solidarity through the development of networks. It is this solidarity which leads to increased efficiency of social action based on the community of practice which enlarges the capacity to grasp opportunity and access resources to lobby for individual needs, to establish legitimacy and to find solutions for problems. Networks can increase the means of action, reflection, decision, personal mobilization and engagement.

II) *What Do Teachers Think about Acculturation of Immigrant Children?*

Claudia Portioli, University of Ferrara
Dino Giovannini, University of Reggio Emilia
Loris Vezzali, University of Reggio Emilia

We conducted a field study to examine acculturation orientations endorsed by Italian school teachers, together with the factors promoting positive acculturation tendencies within the school setting among children. To examine acculturation strategies, we relied on the interactive acculturation model (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997). Specifically, we tested the acculturation strategies that teachers would apply within the school environment with Italian and immigrant children. The results revealed that participants preferred individualism, followed by integration. Thus, they evaluated as most important the individual qualities and abilities of immigrant children, rather than their cultural origin and their willingness to adopt the Italian culture. Moreover, teachers rejected negative strategies such as assimilation and exclusion. Interestingly, they accepted the strategy of segregation, so recognising the importance to maintain one's own culture without the need of adapting it to the culture of other people. Participants moderately supported social policies favouring immigrant children, that were considered as a heterogeneous group. As for the factor facilitating smoother intergroup relations, positive contact with immigrant parents fostered empathic feelings toward immigrant children; in turn, increased empathy was generally associated with reduced endorsement of negative acculturation strategies and adoption of positive strategies (with the exception of integration). Positive contact and empathy were also associated with more agreement with social policies aimed at favouring immigrant children and perception of immigrant children heterogeneity. Theoretical and practical implications of findings are discussed.

III) *Toward a Multiethnic Community by Constructing a Social and Cultural Identity: A Case Study of Little Tokyo in Los Angeles*

Kumiko Tsuchida, Tohoku University

How can different ethnic groups coexist in a community without cultural and political hierarchy among them? Based on this research interest, this study examines how a community can be built by several ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds by focusing on the case of Little Tokyo, Los Angeles, U.S.A. Little Tokyo is a historical ethnic town for the descendants of Japanese immigrants. Since its establishment by first-generation Japanese immigrants, who settled there in the late 1880s, Little Tokyo has been one of the places that represent the Japanese American culture. Over the centuries and generations, however, their ethnic town has changed: the original size has reduced because of the city's urban redevelopment and the number of the residents has decreased because of suburbanization. Little Tokyo, nevertheless, is valued as a tangible ethnic heritage thatshould be preserved and passed on to future generations in order to continuously construct a social identity for the descendants of Japanese Americans. Yet, Little Tokyo is at the crossroads owing to recent demographic changes. It has been diversifying more rapidly than ever before by influx of the other ethnic and immigrant groups for the residential and commercial purposes. The more diversified Little Tokyo brought about a question: how Little Tokyo can be preserved as a symbolic place for Japanese American community and can be existed as a multiethnic community consisting of different cultures at the same time? By analyzing the case of Little Tokyo, this study considers howa common culturaland social identity can be constructed for different ethnic groups, beyond a single collective identity constructed based on the culture of a single predominant group in the area. This study examines the process of building a common social identity by focusing on the role and attempts of community organizations that work to connect different ethnic groups in Little Tokyo. This case study can provide insights into the coexistence of different ethnic groups in a community without the cultural and social hierarchy of a single ethnic group.

IV) *Interculturalism and Hybrid Identities*
Claudia Portioli, University of Ferrara

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