



Seminar

PIOTR SZTOMPKA

Fellow, SCAS.
Professor of Theoretical Sociology, Jagiellonian University, Kraków

Modalities of the Interpersonal Space

Tuesday, 21 April, 11:15 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
www.swedishcollegium.se

S W E D I S H
COLLEGIUM
for ADVANCED STUDY

ABOUT PIOTR SZTOMPKA

Piotr Sztompka was born in 1944, graduated in law and sociology and received his Ph.D. from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. He spent a year of his postdoctoral studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and Harvard University and since 1974 he has been at the Jagiellonian University, where he is now Professor of Theoretical Sociology. He has been a visiting professor at universities in the United States (17 times), Mexico, Argentina, Australia and Europe, and has been awarded Fellowships at five Institutes for Advanced Study. He is a member of Polish, European and American Academies of Sciences. From 2002 to 2006, he served as elected President of the International Sociological Association (ISA).

In 1995, he was awarded the New Europe Prize by the SIAS group, and is also an FNP (the Foundation for Polish Science) Prize laureate and a recipient of the Polish Prime Minister's award. In addition, he has received the Pitirim Sorokin Prize and an honorary doctorate from the Russian State Social University in Moscow, and recently the title of *doctor honoris causa* from Södertörn University in Stockholm.

Sztompka's most important books include *System and Function: Toward a Theory of Society* (1974); *Sociological Dilemmas: Toward a Dialectic Paradigm* (1979); *Robert K. Merton: An Intellectual Profile* (1986), published also in Chinese; *Society in Action: The Theory of Social Becoming* (1991); *The Sociology of Social Change* (1993), published also in Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese; *Trust: A Sociological Theory* (1999), published also in Chinese and Russian; and *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (co-authored, 2005). The Polish textbook *Socjologia: analiza społeczeństwa* [Sociology: Analysis of Society], which also came out in Russian, became a national bestseller, selling approx. 60,000 copies.

Apart from sociological theory, philosophy of the social sciences, and social change, his recent academic interests include visual sociology and sociology of everyday life. At SCAS, he will work on completing a major theoretical monograph on the Anatomy of Interhuman Space.

ABSTRACT

Twenty four years ago I have proposed a model of "social becoming", i.e. transformation of society by society, from below (*Society in Action; The Theory of Social Becoming*, Cambridge 1991, Polity Press). The model was general but it was inspired by the breakdown of communism and post-communist developments in Eastern and Central Europe. The main claim was that social change at a macro-historical scale is a product of human agency, i.e. the micro-practices of the people acting in their everyday life within constraints and facilitations provided by inherited institutions, organizations and structural arrangements, in turn the products of earlier practices. The crucial notion of agency, the driving force of change was left unspecified except for indicating that it is a creative potential which may manifest itself at the level of charismatic leaders, actors empowered by the statuses and roles, and masses of common people.

The book I am completing now at SCAS titled "Interpersonal Space; the Anatomy and Functions of Social Relations" is a long delayed sequel to the earlier one, attempting to go further in the explication of the mechanism through which agency-driven change occurs in society. The main claim is that the agency is located in the network of relations among the people. Not in the actors themselves but in-between them. Hence the central concept of interpersonal space is introduced, as either an individual, unique set of important others with whom an individual is linked by social ties, or the network of ties characteristic for social groups, communities or wider society. All that is human in us is taken from other people, the changing social convoy surrounding us from birth to death. We are

whom we have met in life. And all that we do, our practices are usually taken together with others, side by side with others, against others, in cooperation, competition or conflict. Our personalities and our attitudes are the product of our interpersonal space. The same is true of human groups, communities and societies; their cohesiveness and potential to act is the outcome of the type of relations linking members together. The most important for the transforming potential (agency) is the network of moral relations i.e. the quality of moral space. By moral social ties I mean the following six: trust, loyalty, reciprocity, solidarity, justice and respect. The moral space is a precondition for innovative, bold actions by the individuals. It is equally a precondition for the successful collective actions of human collectivities; teams, associations, social movements etc. .

The interpersonal space in action, when put to use, turns into a social capital, an individual or collective intangible resource whose importance is often bigger than that of the tangible material goods. The most valuable resource is derived from the moral space, which once used turns into a moral capital. Individuals rich in the social and particularly moral capital have best chances for self-realization and reaching their life goals. Societies rich in the social capital and particularly moral capital are shown to be successful in economy, democratic governance, as well as the level of well-being of the citizens. Such societies are most adaptable to changing circumstances, resilient to adverse events, and are themselves able to be involved in creative, transforming collective actions.