Introduction: The Role of Social Relations in Human and Societal Development

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Development of the individual and society

Human development is mostly concerned with the sociomoral and cognitive development of a person during their lifespan. Societal development involves varying changes in resources, societal institutions, the spheres of the economy, education and health, technologies, values, social and gender relations, and power distribution, in historical time. The questions posed by human development, concerning the path, rate, breadth, variability and source of individual change, are also important issues for societal change.

Discussion of societal development is more contested, with the direction, outcomes and mechanisms being less certain. Although child development is far from predictable, it is nevertheless given direction by the fact that children are socialized into a society (they invariably become competent actors in their own culture, not an alien one). Societies, on the other hand, do not have a macroguidance structure into which they are socialized; rather, they must find their own way in the world. Debate about societal development focuses on distinguishing regressive from progressive change, and the extent to which change is driven by structural, cultural, religious, economic or scientific and technological processes. An exploration of the links between human and societal development is, however, the main thrust of this volume, which focuses on the role of social relations (i.e. forms of social interaction) in human and societal change.

From the social to the individual

Directionality between human and societal development is one of the most controversial and longstanding – but also exciting – issues in social science. The dominant sociological approach is to move from the social to the individual. That is to say, broad societal changes at the macrolevel have their effects on individuals through the way in which they affect the quality of social relations between individuals and groups in societies. A number of researchers from the sociocultural tradition of psychology took a similar stance when they argued that changes in the sociodemographics and the socioeconomic structure of a society (Rogoff, 2003; Greenfield, 2009) affect its cultural values; and these in turn change the learning environment and form of social relationships which eventually influence human development at the individual level.

Greenfield (2009), for example, draws on sociological writings about modernization going back to Durkheim, with the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity, and Tonnies (1887/1957), with the difference between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). Her argument is that changes in the economic structure and sociodemographics of societies precede changes in values and learning environments for children, thus constituting new developmental pathways for children (Greenfield, 2009). The kinds of societal shift which she considers include industrialization, urbanization of rural communities, the move from informal to formal education, and recent technological changes. Social relations in her theorization thus vary between societies. In *Gesellschaft*, she argues, individuals have multiple ties to the outside world and many opportunities for transitory relations with strangers, whereas, in *Gemeinschaft*, individuals are closely related to their kin in more stable and lifelong relations.

The emphasis on the role of the socioeconomic conditions in human development through the mediation of social relations is particularly relevant in exploring the repercussions of the current financial crisis on human development, which is one of the timely themes that are tackled in this volume. For example, the financial crisis which began in around 2008 has not only reduced economic growth rates and resulted in more people in unemployment and poverty in various countries, but also exacerbated individual prejudice against minorities and marginalized groups and the breeding of conspiracy theories against powerful groups (Becker et al., 2011; Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). Thus macrolevel transformations can lead to antagonistic and even anti-democratic social relations or internal tensions and strife, with grave consequences for all spheres of society.

Another type of change with dire consequences, which is rarely discussed in sociocultural theories of development, is ethnic or religious conflict and state-to-state violence and war. The international community is increasingly coming to a realization of the importance of responsive and fair institutions, and increased social cohesion, to building community-level resilience and to reducing the potential for conflict to break out, as attested by the conclusions of the latest Human Development Report published by the UNDP (2014).

From the individual to the social

A second, more psychological approach to the general topic of this volume moves from the individual to society. For example, it has been argued that changes in individual values lead to political and structural changes through changes in our orientation to others (Ingelhart & Wenzel, 2003). The models of modernization and democratization, proposed by political scientists such as Ingelhard and Welzel (2003), challenge elitist and institutional notions of democracy. They argue that democracy, gender equality and responsive government are elements of a broader human development syndrome (Inglehart & Welzel, 2003). They attribute a central importance to values of self-expression for societal change, suggesting that change in democratic values and attitudes measured at the individual level predicts the establishment of democratic institutions in societies (see Muller & Seligson, 1994).

Underlying efforts to resolve issues of the directionality of change between the individual and society is the perennial tension between the individual–society antinomy and the agency-structure debate, which becomes particularly relevant in discussions in the public sphere during times of radical societal change and crisis.

This volume will offer a third way in such discussions, transcending the individual–society antinomy by looking at the role of social relations and social interaction in processes of individual and societal change. Interdisciplinary work between psychologists and cultural anthropologists (Haslam & Fiske, 1999) called for a paradigm shift that will focus on the role of social relations. However, such formulations failed to depart from methodological individualism to the extent that they argued that people in all cultures use just four relational cognitive models, as schemata, to generate most kinds of social interaction, evaluation and affect. The four models proposed by Haslam and Fiske (1999) are communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching and market pricing. People, it is argued, use these four structures to organize labour and to endow objects, land and time with social significance. Such an

approach is reducing co-constructed social relations into relatively static descriptions and cognitive schemas, thus failing to recognize that the diversity and valorization of such schemas are dependent on ideological struggles and on particular sociocultural configurations. In this sense, for example, these four types are not written in stone, and a fifth type might be formed in the future by societies.

Social relations in genetic epistemology: Beyond psychological or sociological reductionism

An early attempt to transcend the debate of "psychologism vs. sociologism" was the genetic epistemology programme of Jean Piaget. He avoided the perils of both sociological holism and individualism by proposing to take as social facts of study the interactions between individuals and their social relations (Kitchener, 2009). Simplifying somewhat, Piaget (1932/1965) described social relations as occurring on a dimension from constraint to cooperation. In his sociological studies (Piaget, 1977/1995) he also offered a more subtle social exchange theory of values, but still it was based on reciprocity and social relations of cooperation as a significant departure from cost–benefit or game theoretical individualistic economic models. The distinction that he offered, inspired by Bovet (1925/1951), is between social relations of constraint, premised on unilateral respect, with relations between adults and children as the prototype and social relations of cooperation premised on mutual respect with peer relations being the prototype (Piaget, 1932/1965; Psaltis, Chapter 5; Duveen & Psaltis, 2008; Psaltis et al., 2009). Piaget clearly privileged relations of cooperation, with the free exchange of points of view, as the basis of decentration, knowledge construction, and cognitive and moral development of the individual.

Piaget argued that if we knew all possible types of social relation, then we would have the so-called composition laws that would allow us to explain not just individual development but also societal development (Kitchener, 2009). He claimed that societies that were characterized by their rigid adherence to traditions and strict hierarchies were constraining the development of rationality and autonomous morality, and once such societal obstacles were removed there would be predictable development through which logic and morality would develop. This was his orthogenetic principle of development. In that way, Piaget was making a very clear link between the forms of asymmetrical social relations in a society and a form of thinking that had been identified before him by Lévy-Bruhl (1910/1985) as magical thinking in traditional societies (for a detailed discussion of this issue, see Psaltis & Zapiti, 2014).

This emphasis on the social relations of cooperation as promoting decentration and avoiding egocentrism at the individual level, and sociocentrism at the group level, runs through all of Piaget's work. It was certainly a basic premise of his contribution as the director of the International Bureau of Education (IBE) in Geneva from 1926 to 1967, which was later incorporated into the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), his endless calls for international cooperation, and his critique of nationalism and ethnocentrism. This basic idea, that cooperative, symmetrical and essentially democratic forms of social relation are a basis for non-distorted knowledge construction, was further developed and applied to the societal level more recently by Habermas (1983/1990).

Part I

This part comprises four contributions – by Edelstein (Chapter 2), Keller (Chapter 3), Perret-Clermont (Chapter 4) and Psaltis (Chapter 5) – all inspired by Piagetian theory and with direct relevance to educational processes. All of them offer a more complicated and nuanced discussion of the role of social relations and social interaction for both the cognitive and the moral development of the child compared with the original Piagetian theorizing.

Edelstein sets the scene for a discussion of direct links between human and societal development through the mediation of democracy education for students. His discussion hales from the long vistas not only of a deep and assimilated understanding of Piagetian theory but also of a practical and broad understanding of the policy of international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the EU, and their emphasis on democracy education and cooperative relations as an integral element of promoting societal development in both developing and developed countries.

It is worth remembering that 2015 is the deadline for reaching the millennium development goals (MDGs) and the year of their replacement with a new set of goals. In support of this effort, the EU decided to name 2015 as the European Year for Development. It is hoped that the unique perspective developed in this volume, and the emphasis on social developmental aspects of social relations, will contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the setting up of new goals in the post-2015 period. Indeed, the recent 2014 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2014), which is highly dependent on developmental psychological insights,

makes clear the fact that discussions about societal development keep drifting away from the application of crude economic indices, such as the gross national income per capita or years of study in formal education to a more human-centric conceptualization of strengthening the capabilities of individuals.

Thus the identification of the constraints and facilitative conditions of the development of human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) needs to take centre stage in any future discussions of societal development, and we argue that an understanding of social relations and social interaction is crucial in this endeavour. As various researchers in this volume suggest, from a social constructivist perspective, human capabilities could be seen as the outcome of both specific forms of social relations and forms of external and internal dialogue, but also in turn as supportive of particular forms of social interaction.

Keller (Chapter 3) reviews her research programme, discussing a crucial element of social relations and social interaction – that is, the development of intersubjectivity through the lens of a "naïve theory of action". She addresses children's understanding of actions and relationships, and the rules and expectations governing them. In her work, the ability to differentiate and coordinate the perspectives of the Self and the Other is seen as a core capability that develops in childhood. The naïve theory of action interconnects social (descriptive) and moral (prescriptive) reasoning and integrates cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. The development of the components of the theory is exemplified in reasoning about close relationships (e.g. friendship) on the basis of longitudinal and cross-sectional data from childhood to adolescence in different cultures. Her data reveal universal and differential aspects of sociomoral development. It is further shown that sociomoral reasoning is relevant for interaction, and that the theoretical framework provides a teaching method for discourses about conflicting claims in relationships and for broadening moral awareness beyond close relationships and ingroup boundaries.

Perret-Clermont (Chapter 4) traces the historical roots of Piagetian genetic epistemology in Switzerland and the way it influenced his work in international organizations of education. He and his colleagues, in a time of worldwide international conflicts, were committed to contributing to educational perspectives that could promote international understanding and peace. Perret-Clermont suggests that this has something to do with the innovative perspective of Piaget positioning the social relations of cooperation as central to his theory. She also draws on her experience from her years in Geneva as a student of Piaget,

and later her work on the first generation of research on peer interaction and cognitive development along with Willem Doise and Gabriel Mugny (Doise et al., 1976). Finally, she discusses the more recent work that she initiated and led in Neuchâtel, to offer some critical theoretical insights beyond Piaget's legacy. Cooperation, she says, does not happen in a "social vacuum". In consequence, she addresses the following question: What types of social relationship and institutional frame are supportive of the development of cooperative social skills, for thinking, learning and citizenship? The question is open and more complex than it might seem at first glance because she convincingly explores the issue at various "levels of analysis", as originally suggested by Doise (1986).

Psaltis (Chapter 5) extends the discussion by Perret-Clermont and the tradition of post-Piagetian work on social interaction and cognitive development as he draws on Piaget's social psychology, Moscovici's social psychology and the later work by Doise, Perret-Clermont and Mugny and the work in Neuchâtel by reviewing a research programme termed "the Cambridge strand" of a third generation of research on peer interaction and cognitive development. The theoretical approach is called genetic social psychology, the aim of which is to explore the articulation of the microgenesis, ontogenesis and sociogenesis of both social representations based on belief and social representations founded on knowledge (see Psaltis & Zapiti, 2014) in the field of cognitive development, but also peace and reconciliation in relation to intergroup contact in post-conflict societies. The work of Psaltis introduces a crucial role of gender and ethnic identity dynamics into our understanding of how representations are transformed through social interaction, making the case that microgenesis is the motor for both the ontogenesis and the sociogenesis of representations. At the same time, from this perspective it becomes clear that any microgenetic process is itself constraint by the social representations that were previously formed by sociogenetic processes.

Part II

The role of intergroup relations in peace and conflict has been recognized by the international community as one of the more important vulnerability factors for the development of human capabilities. The impacts of conflicts on human development are felt by individuals, families, communities and countries: higher mortality, productive resources diverted to destruction, losses of economic infrastructure and social capital, insecurity and uncertainty (UNDP, 2010).

The international community has not yet fully appreciated the role of intergroup contact and social interaction as a factor that could potentially diminish the possibility of future conflict as well as facilitate the peace process and conflict transformation in the post-conflict period. However, there is evidence of increasing recognition of this fact. For example, the UNDP-ACT in Cyprus has funded the construction and validation of a social cohesion and reconciliation (SCORE) index in collaboration with the non-governmental organization (NGO) SeeD,[1] which aspires to be an innovative tool that will serve as a barometer, an early-warning tool and a policy-oriented application for social cohesion and reconciliation with global aspirations. A large part of SCORE is measurements at the individual level of the quantity and quality of intergroup contact between various groups in a single society.

People in any interaction have a partially shared understanding of their respective group memberships (Tajfel, 1978) and positioning in terms of gender, occupation, age and other status asymmetries (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990; Psaltis & Duveen, 2006, 2007). The dynamics of communal sharing, as described by Fiske (1992), can be seen in various domains of social life in the way in which people orient to ingroup and outgroup members differently (Dovidio et al., 2009).

Intergroup relations are Janus-faced. One can see the benign face of group cohesion when ingroup members have an increased sense of solidarity, sharing and commonality or sense of collective continuity in time, which could promote a sense of wellbeing (Sani et al., 2008). However, communal relations also have a negative face when it comes to cultivating internal dynamics of conformity (Asch, 1956), "blind patriotism" (Staub, 1997), intergroup essentialism depicting members of other groups as subhuman (Moscovici & Perez, 1997), or the identity processes of differentiation and deindividuation (Tajfel, 1978). The positive and negative faces of intergroup relations can be seen in the experience of the reunification of Germany and societal change in Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement, when heightened solidarity between former foes was combined with increased xenophobia towards new outgroups (Kessler & Mummendey, 2001).

Most of the findings of intergroup relations research converge on the central role of categorization and social identification processes (Tajfel, 1978), as well as the role of emotions in the form of threats – either realistic physical threats or symbolic threats to identities, worldviews or values (Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Such threats are often highly correlated, suggesting that behind any essentialized or reified difference

between categories one can detect an asymmetrical configuration of ingroup-object (power/money)-outgroup (Psaltis, 2012a), where other groups are seen as controlling material resources that the ingroup should justly own. Recent theories of collective action suggest that subjective injustice, strong identification with the ingroup, and efficacy are key predictors of collective action on behalf of the ingroup (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). It was even argued that the promotion of such strategies of emancipatory action are incompatible with the promotion of cooperative relations between the groups and the well-established paradigm of research on prejudice reduction through intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Tausch et al., 2010) because prejudice-reduction interventions might be working towards regimenting an unequal structural inequality in society by reconciling the oppressed with the oppressor (Dixon et al., 2012). Indeed, the same mediators of prejudice reduction through intergroup contact (threats, intergroup anxiety, stereotyping) (Stephan & Stephan, 1985) could be used in the collective action paradigm to enhance solidarity and cohesion within the dominated group, thus facilitating sacrifices for the ingroup. In that sense the revolt model of social relations that is implied by the collective action paradigm (probably applicable to dictatorships as we have recently seen in the Arab Spring revolts) is also different from the Moscovician formula of minority influence since Moscovici's model was largely based on convincing the population (and potential voters in Western democracies) of the stance of the minority in a struggle for recognition, and a change of social representations (Psaltis, 2005b) that results in democratic reforms rather than the overturning of an authoritarian regime.

What collective action theorists failed to discuss is the applicability of such a model to Western democracies, post-conflict or divided societies, and the similarities of forms of representation produced through collective action with historically well-rehearsed doctrines and ideologies, such as nationalism, fundamentalism and extremism. For example, in divided societies such as Northern Ireland and Cyprus, "two can play the game of collective action" that will eventually either lead to stalemate or the escalation of conflict, without compromise or reconciliation (Psaltis, 2012a). The critics of the "prejudice reduction" paradigm also failed to recognize the existence of joint ingroup-outgroup collective action for the benefit of both groups by segments of both groups, which is actually premised on intergroup contact and cooperation (Psaltis, 2012a; Chapter 5). Still, intergroup contact is not a panacea for the reduction of prejudice (Hewstone, 2006), and Gillespie (Chapter 6) takes up the task

of exploring the ways in which people and groups protect themselves from being changed by intergroup contact.

In particular, Gillespie argues that social interaction does not lead inexorably to either individual or societal development. While we often focus on the factors in social interaction that lead to change, it is also important, as he says, to understand the ways in which social interaction can be blocked from achieving its transformative potential. He examines non-transformative social interaction – that is, how people can meet and interact without being changed by the interaction, where differences are assimilated in pre-existing representations and do not require transformation or accommodation in Piagetian terms. Gillespie begins by examining the contact hypothesis, and the conditions under which social interaction can lead groups in conflict to change their representation of the Self and the Other. Then the concept of "semantic barriers" that was originally proposed by Moscovici (1976/2008) is theoretically further elaborated, as means of representing the Other in such a way as to make what they do or say explicable in terms of pre-existing representations, such that nothing the Other does or says demands a change in existing representations. Gillespie draws on ideas of inoculation theory from McGuire to develop the idea that distrust is a powerful semantic barrier to genuine engagement with the perspective of the Other. In contrast, the existence of trust within a social interaction can be conceptualized as an openness to being changed by that social interaction.

Constantinou (Chapter 7) makes a bold attempt to reinvigorate the field of diplomacy and international relations through a genealogy or archaeology of ideas in various religious traditions and classics. He suggests that conflict transformation would benefit from an alternative culture of diplomacy, an everyday diplomacy between lay people that often remains unacknowledged, and one that constantly seeks to mediate conflictual relationships and deeply held views about dangerous Others through Self/Other transformation. Constantinou reframes diplomacy as the mediation of estrangement, where estrangement includes not only alienation from other people and other cultures but also from one's labour, environment and god(s). His proposed concept of homodiplomacy would be about the mediation of sameness, internal mediation, as a condition for, as well as a neglected aspect of, the mediation of the estranged. In homodiplomacy not only the Other but also the Self become strange, a site to be known or known anew. This notion of transformation as the result of self-reflection is a crucial element of Piagetian genetic epistemology discussed by Gillespie (Chapter 6) and

the pragmatism tradition of George Herbert Mead. In Constantinou's notion of homodiplomacy, self-reflection is successfully inserted in the problematic of international relations and diplomacy.

Zittoun (Chapter 8) deepens the discussion about internal reflection through semiotic means. She examines under which conditions learning can lead to a better recognition of the Other, and vice versa. She argues that if the teacher recognizes the student as Other, as an individual with their own experience, thoughts, emotions and so on, then the student makes much more out of the symbolic resources that are offered by the teacher.

Zittoun argues that teaching-learning situations can lead to transformative results when they conjugate the meeting of two persons together with a cultural artefact, such as a novel or film. This might then become a symbolic resource that allows, through imagination, to expand one's understanding, and therefore to overcome a simplifying representation of the Other. Drawing on classroom observations and interviews with adolescents, Zittoun shows that young people might learn to use symbolic resources when they are both taught by a teacher in an asymmetric relation, and recognized as unique and full sense-making persons in a symmetric relation.

Part III

This part reminds us that social relations are part and parcel of valorized structured activities and practices in society. Thus human and societal development is always mediated by the use of cultural resources, which can be material or symbolic (Gillespie & Zittoun, 2010), in the context of both intragroup and intergroup contact that could take the form of external or internalized dialogue. These questions resonate with the rationale of the work of Greenfield (2009), which was discussed earlier, and which made links between the sociodemographic structure of societies that reach the level of human development through the mediation of changes in values and learning practices of societies.

Uskul (Chapter 9) focuses on how the economic environment may shape social interdependence, thereby leading to certain ways of thinking and behaving. Summarizing two lines of research, she discusses the role of social interdependence that is shaped by economic requirements for consequences for cognitive tendencies in three economic groups (fishermen, herders, farmers), and for responses to others' social exclusion experiences among children in two economic communities (farmers, herders). In a third line of research, she highlights the important

role that certain individuals play in the economic livelihood of certain groups (e.g. strangers) by demonstrating relevant psychological consequences thereof for responses to social exclusion. The summarized research provides evidence that economic activity, shaped by ecology, is associated with important differences in different aspects of human psychology and that it contributes to the limited psychological research that is conducted with understudied communities outside Western cultural contexts.

Downing Wilson and Cole (Chapter 10) present an innovative methodology describing a ten-weeks cultural simulation involving two groups of university students. After a period of autonomous development, the groups interacted with each other as "strangers". The activities were organized to ensure that all participants provided documentation of the invention of group artefacts, narratives, cultural practices and shared values as they collectively created and performed their micro-cultures. This research/teaching methodology provides an insight into the ways in which culture weaves together individuals, the role of social interactions in larger "societal level" processes, and the development of individual identity during intergroup and intragroup interactions. The use of such simulations shows how people create social worlds and actively shape their own development, as well as the sources and challenges of intergroup interaction.

In the final chapter of Part III, Passini (Chapter 11) explores the corrosive effects of financial downturns and crises as a societal change with significant effects on human development through the mediation of changes in the quality of intergroup relations within a single society. Indeed, he shows how people may be driven to see others as a threat with the consequence of an exacerbation of intergroup hostility under such conditions. Moreover, concerns about the economic situation may lead people to distrust the authorities and to support those extremist movements that promise social change even to the detriment of other social groups. Passini also brings to the surface a negative aspect of economic development in a society as he is critical of the recent consumer boom which he sees as having some negative effects on everyday interactions with others as well. Consumerism often enhances those individualistic tendencies that see others as a restriction to personal achievement. Passini finally discusses how overcoming the negative effects of the ongoing financial crisis may be possible by creating new forms of intergroup solidarity and enhancing a sense of common responsibility.

In the concluding contribution (Chapter 12), Psaltis, Gillespie and Perret-Clermont return to the importance of social relations and social interaction for human and societal development, which are seen as the bridge from human to societal development and vice versa. They do this by discussing two overarching themes and three topics that correspond to the three parts of the volume. It is concluded that all contributions offer a process account of development, opening the "black box" of social relations and social interaction as they mediate between societal and human development. This analytical distance inserted between the macro and the micro, the authors claim, is essential to rendering intelligible bidirectional influences between the two types of development in various spheres of our social life (education, economy, conflict transformation). Finally, as they argue, there is a need to understand the processes of change at various levels of analysis and to get a better grasp of the ways in which microgenetic, ontogenetic and sociogenetic processes are articulated, or what Gerard Duveen saw as the vision of genetic social psychology (Moscovici et al., 2013; Psaltis & Zapiti, 2014).

Across the volume, underlying the dynamics of both individual and societal change, is social interaction. Yet what social interaction is remains heterogeneous. The forms of social interaction vary between social contexts, cultures and ongoing projects. The outcomes of social interaction for both individual and societal development are not linearly related to inputs; what people are trying to achieve, the resources that they use and the contingencies of the situation all mediate the outcomes. Thus, while we can confidently assert that social interaction underlies human and societal change, we also discover that the process through which this occurs is not suited to prediction or control. Rather, understanding human and societal change as arising through patterns of social interaction requires, in each case, a distinct contextual, cultural and historical analysis.

Note

1. http://www.seedsofpeace.eu/index.php/research/score/blogs.

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