



*Università degli Studi di Firenze*

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **BEYOND DICHOTOMOUS THINKING: THE SOCIETY OF INDIVIDUALS**

#### **THE LEGACY AND CONTINUING RELEVANCE OF NORBERT ELIAS'S SOCIOLOGY**

Firenze, Polo delle Scienze Sociali

Università degli studi di Firenze

7-8 October 2010

Cambio is pleased to announce the first Italian conference on Norbert Elias to be held at the Polo delle scienze Sociali, Facoltà di Scienze Politiche 'C. Alfieri' in Florence on 7-8 October 2010.

The conference will mark the twentieth anniversary of Norbert Elias's death on 1 August 1990.

The central focus of the conference will not be on the most widely known aspect of Elias's work, the theory of civilizing and decivilizing processes, but rather on his characteristic rejection of polar dichotomies.

Contemporary sociology, still greatly embroiled in the endless debate on the relationship between individual and society – often carried on through the opposition between 'micro' and 'macro' sociology – seems to be orientated towards interpretations in which the fragility of 'the individual', his or her solitude, and the weakness of social bonds on one hand, and the multiplication of affiliations and of the cleavages of inequality on the other hinder the possibility of finding consensus on the interpretation of the social. Readings that seem to embrace the individual/society dichotomy, stressing the prevalence of the first term, consequentially weaken the second.

Nethertheless one can find many examples of new and contemporary forms of social needs for belonging, both as response to the solitude of individual and as inevitable response to the need of survival of human beings as social beings. Norbert Elias dedicated his whole scientific work to attempt to promote a sociology free from dichotomous and dichotomising approach, especially with reference to the relationship between individuals and societies so central in most of sociology's founding fathers. To focus on his work may present an opportunity to reflect on the standing of sociology. Twenty years have passed from Elias's death in 1990. This great twentieth-century sociologist directly experienced the great social changes that occurred from the stage of mature industrial society to the traits that we see before us today. The conference is intended to draw the attention of the social scientific community – in particular, but not only, in Italy – to the work of this author, in many ways precursor to epistemological and theoretical developments that have attracted attention in the last decades: social figuration and its clear analogy with the concepts of social network; the process of individualization; social habitus; the interrelations between socio- and

psychogenetic processes; the reconstruction of the nature/society dichotomy; power as relational; the making of individual identity as social process; the embeddedness of social actions in time and space – these are only some of the ideas that the work of Elias offers.

## **WORKSHOPS**

The focus will be on overcoming dichotomous approaches through figurational sociology, in particular how Eliasian categories can (or cannot) be a contribution to sociological analysis of contemporary phenomena. In these sessions applications of Eliasian categories to various empirical and theoretical topics are welcome. The point of synthesis is the figurational approach.

- INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY  
Figuration, relations of power, established and outsiders, the process of individualisation, the survival unit, social habitus
- NATURE AND CULTURE  
time, emotions, civilization/decivilization, socio- and psychogenesis, the body, the sport, genius
- GLOBAL AND LOCAL  
chains of interdependence, micro–macro, modernity/post-modernity, everyday life
- ORDER AND CHANGE  
ongoing process, against instant sociology, civilisation of parenthood, power imbalances – social conflicts, *The Germans*

We welcome paper proposals on any of the workshop topics.

Proposal from young researchers and scholars are very welcome.

Please send abstracts of about 30 lines, in English or Italian to

[convegnoelias@unifi.it](mailto:convegnoelias@unifi.it) before 30 March 2010

Please include complete name, institutional affiliation, and e-mail address.

Conference languages: ITALIAN and ENGLISH

Conference organiser:

Laboratorio CAMBIO, Dipartimento di Scienza Politica e Sociologia, Università degli studi di Firenze.

Registration fee: € 50

