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Note from an Editor: Futurity and The Politics of Imagination

The imagination has emerged as a central concept in recent years, as scholars in socio-economics and social theory contend with the vicissitudes of new technologies of prediction and speculation that increasingly shape our social worlds (Beckert 2016; Bottici 2014; Bottici and Challand 2012; Geuss 2009). Indeed, the question of imagination – of what figures are thinkable, to borrow a term from Cornelius Castoriadis (1999) – is perhaps the central question of politics. Whose policy proposals, whose political programs, whose visions for a future society can be imagined; that is, conceived of as possible, as enact-able, and not merely dismissed as outlandish and unfathomable? Given the 2019 Annual SASE Conference’s themes, “Fathomless Futures: Algorithmic and Imagined,” this year our group of editors has decided to assemble our contributions under the theme of futurity.

It is quite difficult for me to reflect upon the themes of futurity and imagination without noting that this past year marked the passing of a writer who stretched the limits of our understanding of both: on 22 January 2018, Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018) bid farewell to this world, leaving behind a legacy of literary texts that forcibly bring the question of imagination to the front of politics. Discussing the characterization of her fictional novels as utopian, Le Guin wrote:

*In the sense that it offers a glimpse of some imagined alternative to ‘the way we live now’, much of my fiction can be called utopian, but I continue to resist the word. [...] To me the important thing is not to offer any specific hope of betterment but, by offering an imagined but persuasive alternative reality, to dislodge my mind, and so the reader’s mind, from the lazy, timorous habit of thinking that the way we live now is the only way people can live. It is that inertia that allows the institutions of injustice to continue unquestioned. [...] The exercise of imagination is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary. (Le Guin, “A War Without End”)*

Like Castoriadis, Le Guin saw the imagination of possible futures as a primary site of the struggle between settled powers and progressive politics. As the sites and mechanisms of power in advanced industrial societies become increasingly financialized (Palley 2016; Epstein 2005), and indeed, more complex (Sassen 2014), the imagination of political alternatives and possible futures confronts new challenges. Our hope is that the pieces gathered in this issue contribute to sparking that human faculty that Castoriadis saw as essential: the creative imagination, through which the institutions of society might be questioned and refigured anew.

Agatha Slupek, Editor-in-Chief
Meet the Editors

The SASE Newsletter is created by a dynamic group of graduate students and early career scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, aided and abetted by the SASE staff. We are pleased to introduce the Newsletter’s 2019 editors:

**Agatha Anna Slupek** is a doctoral student in political theory and comparative politics at the University of Chicago. Her dissertation, tentatively entitled "Feminism, Political Responsibility, and Democratic Justice," develops a theoretical account of how political actors confront changing institutional paradigms in light of historical and enduring injustices. Of particular interest to scholars of socio-economics is Agatha’s work on the so-called ‘feminization of labor’ in advanced industrial societies. Surveying recent work in critical social theory, feminist theories of reproductive labor, and the historical entanglement of femininity with the ‘social’ rather than ‘political’ spheres, she interrogates the novelty of this phenomenon, which is often associated with the rise of women’s formal entry into labor markets in the 1970s. Agatha’s Master’s Thesis, "Beyond the Fragments: Feminism, Work, and Freedom" was awarded the Joseph Cropsey Prize for Best Master’s thesis in Political Philosophy at the University of Chicago. In 2017-2018 she was a Sciences Po Doctoral Exchange Fellow and she hopes to continue her research in France. Her additional research interests lie in the fields of gender studies, political aesthetics, and the political thought of Louis Althusser and Cornelius Castoriadis.

**Valerie Arnhold** is a doctoral candidate at the Center for the Sociology of Organization in Sciences Po, France. Her research interests combine organizational, political and risk sociology in order to understand the changing role of nuclear accidents for the evolution of the nuclear industry and nuclear politics in France and, to a lesser extent, in Germany and the EU more broadly. Her dissertation is tentatively entitled "Beyond Apocalypse? Sociology of Nuclear Accidents and their Governance, 1986-2016". Based on a multi-site ethnography accompanying the work of experts and regulators on the accident of Fukushima Dai-ichi in 2011, her dissertation shows how these public actors worked with sector-specific procedures and rules to progressively challenge the apocalyptic images of nuclear hazards, showing that they could be rendered “manageable” through the tools of nuclear safety. Her research therefore helps scholars to understand the ways modern states manage major hazards and crises: by transforming them into ordinary events. In addition, it uncovers several mechanisms regarding the role of the industry and sector-specific agencies in strategically shaping policy areas such as nuclear energy. Valerie holds a MA in European Studies from the University of Bath, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, and Sciences Po as well as a BA in German-French studies.
**Assaf S. Bondy** is a sociologist studying the political economy of industrial relations systems in advanced economies, combining New Institutional and neo-corporatist theories with theories of intersectionality. Currently he is a Lady-Davis Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel. His work so far has been dedicated to the study of changing conditions for collective action in labor markets, focusing on the context of the Israeli labor market. His latest publication, on the outsourcing and regulation of cleaning work in Israel, was published in 2018 in *The Journal of Industrial Relations*. His future project employs a sectoral perspective to the analysis of union revitalization strategies across different countries and sectors. He aims to develop research in the area of comparative industrial relations and union revitalization, emphasizing the intertwining of sectoral socio-economic features and workers’ social position on developing trade-unions’ strategies and workers’ inclusion and agency. For the past ten years, Assaf has also worked with NGOs and trade unions in Israel, as a union organizer and the co-founder of “Power to the Workers – Democratic Trade-Union,” later serving as the head of its transportation union.

**Alaz Kilicaslan** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Global Health at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater since 2018. His research bridges medical sociology, economic sociology, and organizational studies to understand how healthcare is delivered, and who has access to it, in a global context. More specifically, he studies the moral economy of healthcare by examining how government agencies, medical professionals, and clients negotiate and ultimately shape the healthcare delivery through interactions in organizational settings. His dissertation, entitled “The New Economy of Doctoring: The Populist Restructuring of the Turkish Healthcare System and the Organizational Politics of the Reform”, is an ethnography of healthcare reform in Turkey. It explores the organizational dynamics of the reform by focusing on the shifting work patterns of medical professionals and doctor-patient relationships. It shows that the reform process, which combines neoliberal logics with an expansion of access to services culminated in a model involving a rapid expansion of outpatient care at the expense of inpatient care, an intensive and uncontrolled use of diagnostic technologies, a decline in the quality of healthcare encounters, overworked doctors, and a gradual marketization of services. Thus, it indicates a case whereby populist rhetoric and policies legitimate neoliberal reforms that hollow out the public system and introduce profit-oriented agents and mentality into hospitals.

**Kostiantyn Ovsiannikov** is a postdoc at the University of Tsukuba, Japan. His research deals with corporate governance, labor economics, and determinants of innovation from the varieties of capitalism perspective. His dissertation explores how the pursuit of shareholder-value by management has affected labor policies at large Japanese enterprises listed in the Nikkei 400 index. He focuses on the issue of labor bifurcation, which refers to the division between standard and non-standard employees. Drawing on a political economy view of institutions, he argues that increased returns to stockholders during the last two decades can be explained with changes in the related domains of management and labor. In order to become ‘eligible’ for economic benefits, stakeholders of a firm must form a ‘political bloc’ that lobbies management to consider their interests. Differences in political power thus explain why increased returns have benefited shareholders but have been disadvantageous to non-standard employees. His findings suggest that companies with a higher degree of managerial entrenchment have more pronounced labor bifurcation. His paper entitled “Impact of shareholder-value pursuit on labor policies at Japanese joint-stock companies: Case of Nikkei Index 400” received the 2018 FFJ/SASE Best Paper Award.
Interview with SASE President Akos Rona-Tas

SASE: Can you tell us about yourself and your academic career?

Rona-Tas: I grew up in Budapest and began college as a literature major interested in literary theory and philosophy, but I soon became drawn to sociology. At that time sociology was a young discipline in Hungary, as it had been banned for decades as a bourgeois pseudoscience by the Communist state. In 1981, I was invited by my distant relative, one of the founders of behavioral economics, George Katona, to spend a year in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Katona, who was a cousin of my grandmother, the first female Ph.D. in economics in Hungary, left in the 1920s to study psychology in Berlin with Max Wertheimer, the father of Gestalt psychology. As the Nazis gained power, both Katona and Wertheimer fled to the United States and landed at the New School for Social Research, with other famous refugee scholars. During World War II, Katona worked for the federal government doing survey research on economic issues and went on to be one of the founders of the Institute for Social Research, at the University of Michigan. He is best known for inventing the Consumer Sentiment Index (now, it is also known as the consumer confidence index). He was very critical of neoclassical economics and its assumptions about human psychology. He demonstrated that in a completely rational world, all inflations would inevitably become hyper-inflation, as the rational reaction to the smallest signs of rising consumer prices is to spend one’s money before it loses its value, which would lead to more inflation, in an unending vicious cycle. As hyper-inflation is the exception not the rule, Katona argued that people feel about the future matters, not the way they calculate rationally immediate gains. In many ways, it is quite appropriate that our 2019 meeting will be at the New School for Social Research, where Katona started his American career in 1935 and on the theme of the future, a topic he wanted to liberate from rational choice economics.

Katona died shortly before I arrived at Ann Arbor, but my one-year stay got extended indefinitely. At the University of Michigan, I got interested in statistical models and the intersection of economic sociology and social stratification. My first book, Great Surprise of the Small Transformation was based on my dissertation. It was a statistical and historical analysis of the creation of the private sector in Communist and post-Communist Hungary as a corrective to an economy dominated by large-scale enterprises. It was also a polemic with Karl Polanyi, arguing that the social devastation Polanyi describes in his classic book, the Great Transformation, and that he attributed to a laissez-faire market, happened under Communist industrialization too with the complete suppression of the market. What proved to be detrimental to the social fabric in both 19th century England and post World War II Hungary was the creation of large-scale production. By the late 1990s, my attention turned to consumer credit and the way uncertainty is handled by economic actors in assessing creditworthiness. I started a large project on credit card markets that involved in-depth field research in several countries that resulted in a book, Plastic
Money, written with my colleague, Alya Guseva. Currently, I am a Professor of Sociology at the University of California, San Diego, in a department that values intellectual curiosity and creativity over methodological dogma.

What are you working on right now? Could you tell us about your active research projects?

As an extension of my work on credit, I am doing research on consumer surveillance and the way credit assessment has expanded into a general assessment of character and become a new tool of governmentality. I am also working on a new project on predictions, on what is new about recently developed predictive technologies based on computer algorithms and big data, and how they reshape the social world around us. I have a few other, smaller projects as well. I agree with the late Arthur Stinchcombe, who said that he found working on multiple projects easier, because if he got stuck on one, he could turn to the other.

You are primarily an economic sociologist. How has economic sociology evolved since you’ve entered the field and in what directions do you see it moving in the coming years? More specifically, what role can economic sociology play in public policy debates?

When I began graduate school in Michigan in the 1980s, American economic sociology as a subfield was invisible. There were many areas of U.S. sociology that studied topics related to the economy. Organizational sociology was one, and I used one of its textbooks as a reliable sleeping aid until new institutionalism reinvigorated the field in the late 1980s. Social mobility research was a lively area of research, but its increasingly sophisticated statistical methodology intent on finding patterns between origins and destinations largely ignored the labor market that connected the two. A dwindling number of Marxists were interested in political economy, but they were overly fixated on the working class’s failure to fulfill its historic mission of overthrowing capitalism. The turn is commonly dated to Mark Granovetter’s seminal 1985 piece on embeddedness. Many important articles and books soon followed. This first period of economic sociology developed as a critique of mainstream economics. Having a strong opponent had its advantages. It forced economic sociologists to offer sharp counterarguments against clear theoretical claims by economists, it created a core of common concerns for the discipline, and it pressured economic sociologists to deliver high-quality empirical research. Unlike in other fields, sociology could not just preach to the converted, it had to convert. Yet arguing against an opponent also locked us into the questions economists wanted to ask and made it difficult to reframe issues and offer new solutions.

There were at least two great cataclysms that shook the self-confidence of economics and created an opening for economic sociology. The first one was the collapse of communism. Initially, this looked like a big victory for mainstream economic theory that always claimed that socialist, planned economies were doomed to failure. Their collapse was taken as proof that free markets were the only way to the future and legions of Western economists, armed with their charts and equations descended on the post-communist world to instruct locals in proper market behavior. However, it was soon discovered that before people can truck, barter, and exchange, they need markets and those are not the natural order of the world that emerge spontaneously once state tyranny is peeled away. They are social and political constructions that rely on economic, political and social institutions, technology, cultural norms and practices, and particular forms of social inequalities. Constructing a market is different from running a market once it is built. Economic sociology, however, not
much interested then in policy, was unprepared to step up to this task.

The second crisis was the collapse of the housing and financial markets in 2007-8 and the subsequent Great Recession. This was the second time in two decades when economic theories proved to be inadequate and led to deep soul searching among economists. Economic sociology, even though this time had a much larger arsenal of research, still remained on the sidelines. For economic sociology to play a larger role in public policy debates it needs to do at least three things. First, it needs to do good, solid research that is convincing to skeptical outsiders. Many of us are doing just that, as any issue of *Socio-Economic Review* would demonstrate. There is a role for keeping arguments within the community of likeminded people. This helps develop theories and arguments in their early phase but to matter in policy debates, one must break out of intellectual insularity and speak to opponents. Second, as the public becomes increasingly fragmented, we have to find the parts of the public that our work can address. This works differently in the U.S. and the EU, as their political institutions and policy regimes are different. And third, public policy is always about the future. Few policy makers are interested in creating a better past. Socio-economics must be forward-looking to be heard by political actors. Understanding how things happened or are happening is very important because it helps us frame problems and allows us to ask the right questions. But policy debates are about competing answers not about brilliant questions.

Having said that, economic sociology is a large ecosystem, where research with direct policy relevance is only one of many things we do. Not everyone, not even the majority has to address policy concerns, just enough people have to do it, and they will benefit from work of the rest of the discipline.

*SASE as an organization promotes interdisciplinary research on socioeconomics. Are there any recent interdisciplinary works that you find particularly exciting?*

Almost all work in SASE is interdisciplinary. Work linking science studies, sociology of emotions or anthropology with economic sociology proved to be extremely fertile combinations. More recently, works combining cognitive science (how we form categories and expectations), computer science (the way AI, big data and digitization are revamping the labor market and societal governance) and law (consumer protection and privacy) with socio-economics have been promising directions. I think we will also have to reach out to literary theory and rhetoric, building on Deirdre McCloskey’s work, if we want to understand how future expectations become persuasive.

*This year’s conference theme is “Fathomless Futures: Algorithmic and Imagined”. Could you unpack this for us?*

Today the future is hard to fathom. Every day we are reminded how poor our capacity is to predict our future. The social sciences have not been much of a help. Western political scientists were shocked to see the Soviet empire crumble. Now with Brexit, the 2016 U.S. elections and the EU teetering on the edge of political abyss, their inability to foresee momentous changes even closer to home is painfully obvious. Economists had to come to a similar realization after the collapse of global finance ten years ago. If sociologists and anthropologists avoided public humiliation over bad predictions, it was not because they have a better measure of the future, but because they tend to avoid talking about it.

The main problem, however, is not so much that we can’t guess correctly what inevitably will happen to us. The
interesting component of the future is always the part that is not fixed, that is still undecided, that we can still influence and change. To know for certain that the stock market will collapse is useful only if one has options to profit from it or can mitigate the damage. Of course, in real life we know only likelihoods and then our interest is either in preventing or securing the predicted but uncertain outcome. What the social sciences lost was not so much their ability to peek into the inescapable and therefore potentially predictable future – they have never been very good at that – but their capacity to ponder alternative outcomes and to offer options for action if certain things happen. They could not imagine that the Soviet Union would vanish or that the global financial system could collapse. And once the unthinkable happened, they were unprepared. It wasn’t just that they could give no counsel on what options we had, initially they could not even articulate just what had come to pass.

The central theme invites people to think more seriously about the future-facing aspect of economic and social action in general, and about future challenges posed by powerful forces such as automation, information technology, genetics, and the environment.

Our 2019 annual meeting will also celebrate the 30th anniversary of SASE. While the theme is forward-looking, we will also acknowledge the three decades of work that went into the creation of what is now a very successful scholarly association.

It also just so happens that our partner and venue, the New School for Social Research, will celebrate its own centennial. This will be a festive meeting.

*This summer, during the annual meeting in New York, SASE will organize its fourth Early Career Workshop. Could you tell us what SASE wants to accomplish with this workshop? Why should early career researchers participate in it?*

The Early Career Workshop was created to identify and support talented young scholars at the start of their careers. In recent years, we selected around 20 from 60 to 80 applicants. For those chosen, we pay registration, lodging and contribute to their travel expenses. Our goal is fourfold. First, we try to give them the most valuable academic commodity scholars can get: attention and constructive and critical intellectual engagement with their research. Two senior scholars and four or five of their peers discuss their work in one session. Second, we give them career advice on publishing and other aspects of the academic profession. Third, we want to connect them to each other so that they become members of an international community of young scholars of socioeconomics. And finally, we would like to provide SASE with fresh ideas and energy that come from young generations. Those are vital for the long-term success of the association.

Our exit surveys show that the workshops are successful and the participants appreciate them and are enthusiastic about the experience. They also provide insightful comments that are useful for developing the program.

**Do you have any specific goals for your presidency? What do you hope to accomplish?**

SASE has grown steadily since the economic crisis of 2008. With over a thousand members worldwide, we are now a midsize scholarly association with biennial regional conferences, and we have to adjust to this new situation. We have to decide how far we want to grow. We can be a bit more selective and we must provide more services to our members. Until recently, SASE lived only during the days of our annual meetings, then it went dormant for the rest of the year. SASE was mostly a conference venue with a journal.
My goal is to make SASE serve its members beyond the hectic days of our conference. SASE is an international and interdisciplinary organization, its main goal is to create and maintain an academic community of diverse scholars. We have started two years ago this new newsletter which is a tool to keep our conversations and community alive between meetings. We are installing a new membership database and a visualization software to access it to make it easier for members to find and network with each other. We will start a new book award, named after Alice Amsden, the world-renowned political economist, to acknowledge every year the best book published in our academic domain. It will be awarded first in New York. As SER is crucial for our association, and it also grew along with SASE, we will find ways to improve the working conditions for our journal.

As president, my role is also to facilitate and support member initiatives that promise to benefit our association.

Diversity has emerged as an important concern and I will do everything I can to make SASE a more inclusive organization in its membership, governance and activities. I appointed a Diversity Committee and asked them to submit a report next June to the Executive Council, on what SASE can do in this regard. Another initiative has come from network organizers, who would like to have a more active role in the life of SASE. Connecting our 18 networks and turning them from boards of judges of conference submissions into dynamic organizers of their respective intellectual fields is another initiative I support. I would very much like to avoid the balkanization of SASE. Another creative initiative tries to craft a venue to deliver our expertise to civic organizations connecting SASE and its members with people active on issues we study.

Interview conducted by Alaz Kilicaslan

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SASE Regional Conference 2019: Costa Rica!

SASE’s 4th RISE Regional Conference, Productive Transformation, Regional Asymmetries, and Social Exclusion in Ibero-America, will be hosted by the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica from 20-22 November 2019. Click here to find out more!

In the meantime, take a gander at the photos from SASE/Kyoto 2018!
SER Special Issue: Call for Papers

A special issue on the topic of Socio-Economic Dynamics in new Digital Markets is now accepting submissions. The aim of this Special Issue is to better understand the socio-economic dynamics structuring the platform economy, with a focus on new “sharing” and gig labor platforms. Cross-national research and studies of this sector in emerging economies are particularly welcomed. Papers can be submitted immediately, but no later than 15 March 2019.

Find out more here.


In 2018, the Annual SASE Conference took place in Kyoto, Japan. This was the first major SASE conference to take place in Asia, representing a move on the part of SASE to increase the Society’s global reach. As part of SASE’s continuing effort to compose a truly global community of socio-economics research, one of our editors, Kostiantyn Ovsiannikov, reports back from the 3rd Japanese Political Economy Workshop. The workshop took place on 15 October 2018 at Musashi University, Japan, where Saskia Sassen was its keynote speaker.

The Japanese Political Economy Workshop: Some Background

The launch of the first Japanese Political Economy (JPE) Workshop in March 2018 was devoted to the rejuvenation of a journal of the same name, previously known as “Japanese Economic Studies” and later “Japanese Economy”, whose history dates to 1972. The first two JPE meetings featured one of the most renowned Japanese political economists, Makoto Itoh (Kokugakuin University, Tokyo, Japan), the new Editor-in-Chief Nobuharu Yokokawa (Musashi University, Japan), as well as the ‘eurosceptic’ economist Costas Lapavitsas (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, U.K.). These two workshops were mainly targeted at editors and patrons of the journal, in addition to young scholars interested in publishing their thematically appropriate research. These initial
meetings mapped the scope of the project of reviving JPE, which is intended as “a resource for scholars, students, policymakers and practitioners who seek to better understand the contemporary and historical, transnational and internal processes of social and economic change in Japan, Asia and the world.” The third JPE Workshop, which took place on 15 October 2018, was quite different from the previous two. From a cozy gathering of committed supporters of the journal, it moved toward a format that involved a wider audience of professors and students working in various fields of socioeconomics. It resonated with themes taken up at the recently held 66th Annual Conference of the Japan Society of Political Economy (JSPE), entitled “Transforming Capitalism and the Perspective of Political Economy”. Both the conference and the workshop featured lectures and discussions with Professor Saskia Sassen (Columbia University) – a world-famous scholar in the study of globalization and political economy.

3rd Meeting: Saskia Sassen on Urban Spaces as Cradles for Intermediation

The topic of Professor Sassen’s talk at the JPE Workshop was “The Global City: Enabling Economic Intermediation and Bearing its Costs.” The main argument of the lecture was that, against the general tendency of capitalist flows to deterritorialize, certain cities have increasingly gained renown as ‘knowledge hubs’ well-suited to a globalized economic environment. From the 1980s to the present, Professor Sassen has been closely observing the series of stunning changes to the urban and economic landscapes of what would eventually become Global Cities. “Global City,” as she uses the term, does not simply refer to a geographic entity: in her view, it is “a production function inserted in complex existing cities” (Sassen 2016: 97). In other words, in modern New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Sydney, and Hong Kong, for instance, strong legacies of economic intermediation that constitutes these cities’ “global” dimension clashes with a variety of locally rooted communities (Sassen 2000).

Importantly, for Sassen, the Global City function also has a tangible spatial dimension. One feature of the growing demand for high-profile small companies that offer business know-how in operating in various national environments across the globe has been a rapid concentration of urban property in the hands of a wealthy few. Acting in a mutually beneficial alliance with multinational corporations (MNCs), together they have woven a dense net of offices in urban downtowms. “One example is the acquisition of Atlantic Yards, a vast stretch of land in New York City, by one of the largest Chinese building companies for $5bn. Currently, this land is occupied by a mixture of modest factories and industrial services, modest neighbourhoods, and artists’ studios and venues that have been pushed out of lower Manhattan by large-scale developments of high-rise apartment buildings. This very urban mix of occupants will be thrown out and replaced by 14 formidable luxury residential towers – a sharp growth of density that actually has the effect of de-urbanising that space.” (Sassen 2015).

This has ultimately led to the displacement of lawyers, consultants, and even retailers not affiliated with the MNCs, and to the formation of relatively homogenous oligopolistic clusters furnished with globally recognizable franchises. From a socio-economic perspective, the consequence has been a rapid shrinking of middle classes. The rise of new wealthy owners has been accompanied by a rise in “low-wage manual and service workers.” (Sassen 2000: 83)

Financializing materiality

Upon completing their material expansion within cities, thus reinforcing their global function, MNCs and their specialized consulting partners have moved to more financialized types of wealth
accumulation. Nowadays, one can frequently observe numerous empty buildings in some of the most prestigious districts of large U.S. and European cities. For example, “a survey conducted by Douglas Elliman found that about 20 percent of all retail space in Manhattan is currently vacant, compared with roughly 7 percent in 2016.” (Kilgannon 2018).

Bearing in mind the devastating consequences of the 2008 U.S. subprime mortgage crisis for the least wealthy groups, proliferating images of abandoned and empty urban space constitutes glaring evidence of increased social inequality.

But the story gets even more complicated. As Professor Sassen stresses in her analysis of this conjuncture, “material assets lose their ability to speak”. In short, the massive glass boxes that shape the image of Global Cities are increasingly turning into abstract “fields” of material wealth. High-priced real estate concentrated in the hands of MNCs since 1980s is increasingly turned to asset-based securities, which involves sophisticated financial intermediation. The ownership and value of these properties are determined through complex mathematical patterns and therefore require exclusive financial expertise. Hence, the alliance of MNCs and specialized consulting services is reinforced with refined knowledge of financial instruments that can only be comprehended by a dozen of specialists. Indeed, thinking back to 2008, obscure schemes leading to the financial crisis were designed by these very same high-profile economists from Wall Street. Along with top CEOs, these actors have been bailed out by the government, thereby reassuring their status as untouchable, lucrative business-partners. In a nutshell, having taken on a financial dimension, the Global City becomes more pronounced in its extractive rather than just commercial role.

Tokyo as a Global City

Professor Sassen first visited Japan in the 1980s. Identifying Tokyo as one of the largest and fastest-growing property sites in the world meant that it could be an extremely significant case of a Global City. The upcoming trip felt like an adventure: “I was not ready for this, especially the notion of having to go to Tokyo and learn Japanese. I had never been in Japan, and the ethnographic side of it all was only one aspect. Mostly I was doing an analysis of structures. But I could not escape the need of having to go and spend time in... Tokyo to get at the heart of the matter . . . to have, so to speak, lunch at midnight with the cleaners of buildings in the financial center [of] Tokyo.” (Sassen 2016: 104). Sassen told the JPE meeting that she conducted her field research in Tokyo, Yokohama, and Osaka, observing processes such as business consolidation and the shrinking of the middle class, which had parallels with New York City.

The memories of the strong opposition movements of the 1960-70s were still alive. The most significant protests were against the amended U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1960, anti-Vietnam War movements, activities against the construction of Narita Airport in 1968, and violent protests during 1970-71 such as the Koza riot against the U.S. military presence in Okinawa. These events were echoed by the intense discussions on immigration policies amid the shortage of the domestic workforce during the so-called “economic bubble” period from 1986 to 1991. Workers from Southeast Asia as well as from countries such as Iran and Pakistan were in high demand, particularly due to the construction boom. However, the large majority of these laborers were illegal. Professor Sassen spoke to these “illegal immigrants in Tokyo and in Yokohama in an attempt to learn how and why they decided to migrate to Japan, given its reputation as a closed society.” (Sassen 2001: 314).

In her works, Professor Sassen mentions Tokyo as one of the Global Cities. However, its role is quite different from New York, Chicago, or even Hong Kong and Singapore. Let us recall that the most common Global City function is
intermediation based on complex financial instruments. Tokyo has acquired this role thanks to being a home to numerous large companies that have been on the rise due to successful export-oriented efforts aimed at American, as well as European and East Asian, markets. In addition, Tokyo occupies the third place in the list of cities with the highest rates of national and foreign investment in property acquisitions.

Professor Sassen’s lecture was followed by a discussion that involved both students and professors. In this respect, the extended comment by Professor Itoh was particularly useful for the critical positioning of Tokyo in the context of global cities. Firstly, he pointed at such global city features as the polarization of inhabitants into “wealthy specialists and low-wage workers.” Whereas, according to Itoh-sensei, this tendency has been apparent in London since the 19th century, Tokyo did not experience such developments until very recently, although it was already the most populated city in the world during the Meiji era (1868-1912).

Secondly, although the observation concerning the predominance of low-paid jobs among migrant workers of global cities holds true for Japan, the situation differs considerably in the U.S. and the U.K. Professor Sassen documented the influx of labor migrants to Japan during the “Heisei Boom” in the late-1980s. However, the regulations for foreign laborers were subsequently severed, impeding their integration into Japanese society. Against this background, the major socio-economic divide in Japan (regardless of migrant background) is between regular and non-regular employees, with the latter group having considerably lower wages and poorer benefits. Professor Itoh reminded us that the phenomenon of labor bifurcation is a common consequence of neoliberal policies across various states, rather than just an attribute of a global city.

Finally, Itoh-sensei provided some detailed insights into the role of Tokyo as a money exporter to the U.S. Differently from companies in London and New York that accrue substantial profits from financial intermediation (the function of a global city), Tokyo-headquartered firms mainly receive funds from productive activities as well as via employees’ pension and insurance plans. In addition, despite massive corporate investments abroad, including with the establishment of subsidiaries, these latter are not considered “a proper place to work in the main route career escalator for top managers.” In other words, the international expansion of MNCs supported by intermediation in the U.S. and the U.K. context is different from the case of Japan, whose companies place strategic value on their headquarters located back home. Lastly, the rise of urban land prices in Tokyo is largely driven by the pace of a national economic development rather than a concentration of financial intermediaries. In a nutshell, Professor Itoh’s comments revealed that the exact profile of Tokyo as a global city like others still remains to be seen.

Such discussions at the third JPE Workshop came as a valuable platform for discussing socio-economic problems in their comparative context. In particular, they prompted participants to critically reassess the mechanisms of globalization in play in urban transformations. The main issue at stake was the role of the Global City in transforming urban landscapes and in influencing wealth redistribution both among city dwellers and on a larger, national scale. It remains a challenging task to link Tokyo to Global City narratives, but the rich theoretical and empirical base developed by Professor Sassen will certainly come in handy for future researchers dealing with this topic.

Report by Kostiantyn Ovsiannikov
The Futures of Solidarity: A Discussion with Professors Virginia Doellgast (Cornell) and Michael McCarthy (Marquette)

Our understandings of possible futures inevitably rest in some measure on concepts and institutional formations that we have inherited from the past and continue to perceive in the present. ‘Solidarity’ is one such concept; indeed, it has been a central concern for progressive and social democratic movements and political parties around the world. Is solidarity a thing of the past? Or will it carry forward into the future, and if so, how? What are the institutional and social arenas for and forms of contemporary solidarity?

In this feature, editors Agatha Slupek and Assaf Bondy discuss these issues with Professors Virginia Doellgast (Cornell, USA) and Michael McCarthy (Marquette University, USA), respectively. Both scholars have recently published books with solidarity as their central theme: McCarthy’s Dismantling Solidarity: Capitalist Politics and American Pensions Since the New Deal (Cornell UP, 2017) and Doellgast’s edited volume (with Nathan Lillie and Valeria Pulignano) Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour Unions, Precarious Work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe (Oxford UP, 2018) both represent important studies of solidarity, past and present.

SASE: What was the motivation to work on this book?

Doellgast: Nathan Lillie, Valeria Pulignano, and I started talking about the idea of Reconstructing Solidarity at workshops organized by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) to discuss research on union responses to outsourcing – which was published in the book: The Outsourcing Challenge: Organizing Workers Across Fragmented Production Networks. One motivation we discussed at the time was the need to compile and curate employment relations industry studies comparing union responses to precarious work. A growing body of research challenged ‘dualism’ arguments that European labor unions were defending privileged core workers at the expense of those in more peripheral, precarious jobs.

Findings showed that unions were seeking to organize and represent these precarious workers, but with uneven success. We felt a weakness in these studies (as in our own industry-based work) was the difficulty generalizing findings or drawing out common lessons, given the range of variables and theoretical frameworks used by researchers. So we set out to develop a more broadly generalizable framework that explained different patterns of outcomes, across what ended up being 9 industries and 15 countries.

McCarthy: I attended graduate school in sociology at NYU intending to study the politics of labor and labor movements. Two years into my training, global capitalism experienced the largest crisis since the Great Depression. Though it led to havoc in productive sectors as well, that
downturn was triggered in the sphere of circulation—finance. The financial meltdown made it immediately apparent to anyone looking just how deeply the fortunes of ordinary working people were tied to speculative financial markets. Over the year, the U.S. stock market plunged downward by 37.5 percent, revealing how the decades of legislative deregulation and institutional tinkering mattered for people far away from Wall Street and the City of London.

And nowhere was this more evident than in retirement funds. In a blink of an eye, workers saw their retirement savings vanish. OECD countries together lost 5.4 trillion in savings. In the U.S., 401(k) retirement plans and IRAs lost 2.4 trillion. In crucial ways, the system still has not recovered. Ideas for my book really began to develop in the context of the Great Recession. In writing it, I tried to offer some thoughts on two very different worlds and literatures, labor and finance, with a particular emphasis on the politics of each. But it was motivated, above all else, by a historical puzzle. How did the fate of workers come to be so intimately tied to the up and downs of speculative financial markets? This puzzled me because even though it was highly inchoate and reproduced gendered and racial inequalities, the New Deal offered the possibility for the realization of a more solidaristic approach to retirement.

**Why have you decided to center solidarity as a main concept?**

**Doellgast:** Solidarity is a term that is commonly used in the labor movement as well as by academics and policy makers, but that has different meanings depending on the context. It is useful in analyzing how and why a group decides to make a collective commitment to mutual aid, and where that group’s boundaries are drawn (e.g., workplace, industry, class, nation). Much theorizing in comparative political economy focuses on the economic interests and political power of well-defined groups to explain the origin or persistence of different national models. The concept of solidarity helps to analyze the collective—one might say ideational or identity-based—process through which groups articulate a common interest; typically in a way that involves some moderation of short-term self-interest ‘for the common good’. Of course, solidarity can also be more narrowly defined, in a way that is exclusionary and tied up with defense of insider interests at the expense of outsiders. In our book, we distinguish between inclusive and exclusive forms of solidarity, with inclusive solidarity grounded in forming common cause across groups of workers holding diverse material interests and identities. This has a historic link to traditions of solidaristic bargaining in Northern Europe. We find many examples of this inclusive form of solidarity, and argue that it is essential for unions to fight the erosion of security in core jobs as well as to bring up conditions for currently precarious jobs.

**McCarthy:** The distinction between public and private tends to overwhelm the conceptual terrain on which we make sense of the state and society. This is also true in research on the welfare state, where the public/private distinction in social policies has long been a key way to make sense of the welfare state itself. My book shows, however, that if we analyze social policies with respect to the degree to which their allocation of support is determined by market processes, we find that both public and private programs can be more market oriented or more solidaristic. To me, solidarity versus the market captures something more fundamental than public versus private about the ways in which people organize themselves and their institutions to meet their needs. Throughout the whole of my life, though, we have been on a long march toward the market.

**What is its current relevance?**

**McCarthy:** In my work, solidarity describes institutions and social arrangements in which the costs of addressing various social risks we all face
are pooled across the population. It is quite the opposite of market-oriented institutions in which people increasingly confront life’s uncertainties alone. In the U.S., the strategies that working people are forced to adopt to survive are highly atomized and increasingly situated in market processes. Middle-class workers increasingly take on debt to meet their consumption, education, housing, and health needs. And at the bottom of the labor market, as systems of welfare provisioning have been retrenched, poor workers turn to check cashing outlets, payday loans, and pawn shops that charge extraordinary rates of interest. So in my view, solidarity is relevant today mainly as an object of aspiration. The dominant institutions of modern financialized capitalism have dismantled and eroded solidaristic forms of risk pooling and have installed marketized versions in their place. But that aspiration certainly exists – though a right-wing populism has emerged, so has a left platform and alternative. Never before have ideas like Medicare for All and democratizing finance been more popular in the U.S. Even the idea of socialism itself has been rescued from popular insignificance.

Who should read your book and why?

Doellgast: The book speaks to debates in the employment relations, sociology, and public policy literatures on why precarious work is expanding in the Global North, as well as the institutional conditions for reducing employment precarity. We also hope that our colleagues in comparative political economy, who can sometimes be dismissive of industry-based employment relations research (particularly that which is not focused on the auto industry), will see some value in our attempt to develop a more generalizable framework out of a large number of sectoral case studies. One concrete insight, which draws on a long tradition of employment relations research, is that employer strategies are central to understanding the politics of labor market liberalization, dualization, and union decline. We thus seek to pull macro-theorists away from their focus on producer coalitions at national level, and toward the differentiated (but patterned) politics of restructuring within sectors and across the production chains of firms.

McCarthy: Although it engages in seemingly esoteric issues like pension financing to contribute to debates in state theory, one doesn’t need any kind of special expertise to read and understand this book. Most readers’ personal experiences will make the broad themes very familiar. 45.1 percent of retirement income comes from highly financialized private pensions in the U.S., the OECD average 19.5 percent. I think that the book will be useful both for those that want to understand why this is the case but also those interested in the ways that policymaking is constrained by the demands of capital.

What is one thing you hope readers take away from the book? What in your findings tends to fuel or undermine solidarity?

Doellgast: Our main argument, and the organizing principle behind our framework, is that there is a positive feedback loop between inclusive institutions and inclusive solidarity – which together influence the respective power resources of unions and employers. In our framework and findings, we emphasize the importance of inclusive institutions, which we define by the degree to which welfare state protections, labor market legislation, and collective agreements extend the pay and conditions secured by employees having relatively stronger bargaining power to those with weaker bargaining power. Of course, the movement in Europe is in the opposite direction: many governments are considering or have recently passed legislation making it easier to exit industry-level agreements or to further decentralize bargaining to the workplace level – building on a trend that has unfolded over some decades. Unions and policymakers concerned with the expansion of precarious work should really
be making a concerted (and solidaristic) effort to rebuild more inclusive institutions at national and European levels, and to close loopholes in these institutions where they exist.

Our findings show solidarity is stronger where institutions and union structures make common interests easier to see and act upon; and where it is more difficult for employers to exit encompassing institutional protections. Those are the most obvious structural conditions distinguishing the case studies that succeed from those that fail. However, unions and other worker representatives can also be creative in escaping from the tyranny of structural constraints. Unions build coalitions within the labor movement and beyond; invest scarce resources into organizing migrants and other precarious groups of workers; and engage in campaigns that close loopholes in regulations and collective agreements at the sectoral-, national- and EU-levels. Workers and citizens forge new bonds of solidarity on the front line, as it were, as they fight back against labor market deregulation and company restructuring through strikes and protests. Where these efforts face the most severe constraints in actually institutionalizing their demands – for example, in Greece under ongoing pressure from the Troika – a shift toward more exclusive and exclusionary forms of solidarity is likely.

**McCarthy:** Using a comparative historical framework, *Dismantling Solidarity* analyzes three critical episodes in the decades-long marketization of U.S. retirement security: (1) After WWII, as an alternative to expansions of the public system, the U.S. turned to private employer pensions; (2) after they were established, employer pension funds were then financialized and retirement assets were directed into the stock market, hitching workers security to financial markets; (3) finally, the traditional defined-benefit plans that were won after WWII went into decline and many employers turned to defined-contribution plans, which further offset risk from firms onto their employees.

The aim of this book is to re-center capitalism in discussions of policymaking. To that end, it makes three broad arguments that together form a theory that I term “structural contingency”. The first is the state-regulated marketization argument. I show that the marketization of retirement security in America was political in its most proximate causes, in each case it was triggered by politicians. The second argument of the book is the managing capitalism argument. Policymakers were not motivated to intervene because of their party affiliation, their political ideology, or interest group influence over them. In fact, policymakers weren’t primarily concerned about retirement security at all in the episodes that I studied. Above all else, they intervened to manage perceived crises in capitalism and to encourage capitalist accumulation. The final argument is that how the state matters and what policymakers do is contingent on the balance of class forces in society. State action and the effects of that action quite simply cannot be reduced to the political aim of managing capitalism. Capitalism demarcates a range of possible policy options, class struggle selects from within that range. In the history I study, solidarity is eroded as an inadvertent outcome of this process of structural contingency.

**Besides academic endeavors, do you seek to influence trade union strategies?**

**Doellgast:** The short answer is: Yes. The arguments and framework in *Reconstructing Solidarity* build on research that the editors and chapter authors have presented to or carried out in collaboration with unions – and have been shaped quite a bit by those two-way discussions. We also have begun to engage with union audiences on the book’s argument and findings. My co-editors organized a book launch at the ETUI, and over the past year the book was featured in presentations and debates with union researchers, organizers, and representatives in the U.S., Germany, and Korea. In one example, the Korea
Labor Institute published translated summaries of the book’s introduction and a few of the chapters in their *International Labor Brief*. We have a simple message for unions, which tends to resonate with their experiences: precarious work expands when employers exploit divides among groups of workers and within the labor movement; and when they are able to exploit loopholes in collective agreements and regulations. These are overcome through inclusive forms of solidarity, which bridge those divides to mobilize the collective power of workers to maintain or rebuild inclusive institutions. Actually overcoming these divides is of course a challenge; but we can point to a number of cases where unions succeed (or at least fail less badly).

*We are living in an age of considerable declining solidarity. How can solidarity persist in the face of increasing liberalization of labor markets and pensions, and increasing gaps between worker earnings? Does your book leave us with hope for the future of solidarity? Why or why not?*

**Doellgast:** I am not sure that solidarity is declining, but rather that its form is changing – and in some cases shifting from more inclusive to exclusive forms. However, this is not universally the case: for example, most European labor unions have rejected past policies that sought to exclude migrant workers from their industries and labor markets, and moved toward a more (if imperfectly) inclusive set of strategies to organize and represent these workers. When we started talking about the book, we initially were going to frame it around ‘new’ forms of solidarity. However, the chapter authors pointed out that their success cases were more often drawing on ‘old’ forms of solidarity, or mobilizing it for new uses, under changing conditions – typically characterized by more concerted employer resistance and the need to extend past structures to new or formerly excluded groups.

I think the book does give hope for the future of solidarity. The more common pattern in our case studies is a ‘vicious circle’ of expanding precarity associated with declining or more exclusive solidarity and increasingly fragmented institutions. However, the advantage of comparative research is that you can also identify the common features of those cases that move against the more typical ‘neoliberal trajectory’ (to borrow a phrase from Lucio Baccaro and Chris Howell). Labor unions and newer worker groups are mounting successful campaigns that show how divides can be overcome: we find examples of these successes in countries as diverse as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden, and the U.K. – and in sectors that bridge manufacturing, the public sector, and lower-skilled services. I probably would agree with the more pessimistic analysis that things are likely to get worse for the global labor movement before they get better. But the research findings in our book do show that unions can be creative in building new forms of power across old and new divides. An inclusive labor movement that tries in a concerted way to overcome its own internal conflicts – to unite around a common set of social demands -- is probably the best hope for challenging the growing imbalance of economic and political power in Europe and globally.

**McCarthy:** Though my book emphasizes the ways that solidarity is dismantled, it concludes with a chapter that gestures toward what kinds of labor strategies might be necessary to rebuild solidaristic institutions and relations between people. Capitalist crises, or the perceived threat of one, push policymakers to intervene to support capitalist accumulation and growth. Some of these capitalist crises are the result of collective action failures, mismanagement, or deeper structural changes in the economy itself. Others, however, are driven by the opposite, collective action. Protests, strikes, boycotts, and riots are effective precisely because of their potential to grind things to a halt – sometimes in the relations of the economy itself.
If there is a prospect for reversing the present market-oriented course, my book suggests that one route toward solidarity lays in these latter forms of crisis. But this is no easy feat. To actually reverse the course in this way, ordinary people need to be strong enough to make a crisis through their disruption of the institutions they find themselves within, but also positioned well enough within the context of that crisis to exact concessions from politicians when they intervene. That working people are able to force policymakers to act through disruption by no means guarantees that those policymakers will intervene on their behalf. The long history of strikes and protests being beaten back with clubs and tear gas suggests quite the opposite.

By most accounts today, labor traditionally conceived is weaker than it has ever been before. But union density in the U.S. during the first five years of the Great Depression, 1929 to 1934, was about ten percent of the workforce. That is nearly the current U.S. density. And what followed in the halls of policymaking was sharp turn toward solidarity. It might be very unlikely, but in the context of crises, if working class social forces are organized both outside and inside of the state when policymaking interventions take shape, more just institutions and programs might be installed.

*Discussions with the authors conducted by Agatha Slupek and Assaf Bondy*
forms of future knowledge range over a very wide area of social engagement, from the scientist to uses of the radical imagination. For SASE scholars, the book has an interest in its contribution to a growing field around the problem of uncertainty and expectations, which in the book is taken as historic problems to do with the complexity of governance and order in an evolving global space after 1945. Many of the predictive technologies and forms of knowledge discussed in the book were direct reflections on an evolving socio-economic world order, in which the uncertainty of markets, behavior, democracy, and capitalism was key.

The topic of the next SASE conference will be “Fathomless Futures: Algorithmic and Imagined”. Futures are also one of the most obvious areas of “uncertainty” for our lives. However, different attempts to rationalize and understand our future have probably been going on for a very long time. From a historian’s point of view, what is distinctive for the social imaginaries and relation to the future – and to uncertainty – of the period you are interested in, that is, the Cold War period?

What is very important about this period I believe is the way that the problem of the mass society, which had been discussed since industrialisation, became transposed to the global level and thought of as a question of world development. The problem of the future was in many ways a problem of how to bring order to an emerging and unknown situation in which there was no longer an established East-West or North-South dimension, but a multitude of new actors and temporalities on the world stage. This problem is triggered by decolonization, which seems to unleash a form of disorder both in terms of global value revolutions and commodity markets. Predicting the future thus developed from a form of surveillance of East-West relations in the 1950s and 1960s, to a reflection on a much larger problem of the potential open-endedness of the world future. The notion of uncertainty in the period immediately after the oil shock refers exactly to this feeling of a global unravelling of the future, and it is important to historicize it, since the much debated ‘shaping of expectations’ that in many ways exploded in the period afterward – with forecasts and scenario tools, etc. – was precisely in reaction to this understanding of global economic disorder. This is partly in the book and partly in my on-going projects.

The more “professionalized” attempts to understand and predict the future are described in your book to be mainly related to reflections stemming from security and military concerns. Have you seen, maybe more on the margins of your fieldwork, relations to other types of actors inside or outside of academia, who were interested in or have taken up some of the predictive instruments? For instance economists?

Economics began experimenting with forms of prediction and modelling earlier than the other social sciences, and by the 1950s and 1960s, macro-economic modelling is an established field. It was interesting to me that the first experiments in so-called conjecture by the French political theorist Bertrand de Jouvenel were understood as ways of transferring predictive claims to other disciplines and in particular political science and international relations. There is the idea that social science in order to be explicative has to be able to make predictive claims. This is a key notion in international relations theory in the 1950s and 1960s, inspired by what is also known as modernization theory in a larger field of the social sciences in the U.S. and Europe. Such predictive claims on the social world were very far-reaching in scope – to ideas of the accurate prediction of individual behavior in mass society, to ideas of the behavior of nation states or whole world systems. Quickly, however, forms of modelling are discarded in favor of methods and technologies that act as narratives or images of the future, for instance conjecture, the scenario method, or so-called Delphi exercises.
In the third chapter of your book, you describe the contribution of futurology to the construction of liberalism as opposed to Marxism as foundation of the new world after 1989. Could you tell us a little more about the specific role of future conceptions that were used to promote economic liberalism? And to what extent do they remain present in the contemporary liberal ideology?

Economic and political liberalism here are complicated distinctions, as futurologists were not mostly economists or free marketeers, but rather concerned with the political future of liberalism and in defending a Western model of liberal capitalism. This included for instance ideas about the plurality of interests, and also, in the 1960s, the necessity of certain forms of limited long-term planning. I do indeed suggest that this was exactly the relevance of futurology to a certain group of liberal thinkers including the American sociologist Daniel Bell: it was to plan ahead with the specific purpose of keeping social trajectories open for individual choice and market mechanisms. In the present, I believe it would be very fair to say that this version of futurology has endured, and that through networks such as the Global Business Network and the World Economic Forum, such a conception of the need to strategically think the future in order to retain a temporal space for entrepreneurial capitalism is central to contemporary liberal ideology.

Your work has a strong international dimension, both in terms of the construction of issues as transnational and in terms of comparisons between different countries. Especially, you describe a difference between the role of futurology in the U.S. and several European countries. How can we understand this transatlantic difference?

My work does not only describe a transatlantic effect, but also highly complex transeuropean and in fact at least partly global networks of futurists. Futurology in the U.S. had a very strong military and industrial orientation – in Europe it developed in a much more welfare statist and planning orientation and became highly concerned with the so-called problems of growth and quality of life after 1968. That is not as such very surprising – more interesting in my view is the role of futurology as a form of developmentalism in Japan and India for instance (and this is where the transnational method has been key to my work).

In the context of the 10th anniversary of the economic and financial crisis [at the time of writing], this SASE newsletter also collects impressions and points of view of scholars regarding State intervention in (financial) markets. We would be glad to have your thoughts on the more recent transformations of State action (based on your previous work on the transformations of social democracy and the third way or on your current research). To what extent do you think this crisis transformed our future(s)?

I believe that the financial crisis in 2008 showed very clearly something that in fact was not new but debated in future research since the 1970s, having to do with the unforeseeability of consequences of action in a global space consisting of a multitude of economic decision-makers. It also showed us to what extent the deregulation and privatization logics at hand since this period have triggered fundamental forms of instability and chaos for social life. The welfare state was a stabilizing influence on capitalism and does not today have this role anymore, or at least to the same extent. Social democracy in my view was a mediator of key conflicts between labor and capital, economy and society, democracy and capitalism – and cannot today play this role any longer. In my view, the financial crisis has not been mitigated in the social and political arena – where its effects are enormous.

Our last question refers more to the role of the future for academia and the upcoming SASE conference. The interest in futures is
huge and a very dynamic and expanding research area. What is your view on the reasons of this recent interest? What are the prospects of this field, maybe also based on your own current research projects?

My frank feeling is that there is a problem of over-theorizing this future field, and that a more fruitful path would be to very carefully situate forms of future knowledge, prediction, and expectation in precise historic, social, and economic circumstances. I think that futures are potentially absolute everywhere, and they are not by definition either ‘open’ or ‘closed’, but how we construct futures and how we collectively choose among the many potential futures that exist at each given point in time is a problem of power and knowledge and should be studied as such. I am interested in the links between forms of future thinking and big economic interests – it seems to me that since the 1970s at least large corporations have been as concerned with the construction of future images as public entities have. This is because they understood the powerful use of images as a way of de facto management of social expectations, and that, as demonstrated both in the financial crisis and in the climate context, has genuine effects on the future and on our capacity to imagine (or not) alternatives to current paths.

Interview conducted by Valerie Arnhold

What Kind of Futures in Academia? Postdoctoral Experiences

For current graduate students, recent PhDs, and early career scholars hoping to pursue a career in academia, the futures on offer tend to look bleak. A recent data snapshot compiled by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) shows how the majority of instructional positions in the United States have become casualized (i.e., are off the tenure track). Similar trends have been reported in the European Union, as well as in Latin America.

In these uncertain times, many scholars begin their careers in postdoctoral positions. Our editors asked five early career scholars about their experiences in postdoctoral fellowships. We hope to illuminate for our readers what a future in academia might look like and what considerations they may wish to take into account while they pursue careers in the field of socio-economics. We thank Steven Klein (Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Florida), Ronen Mandelkern (Assistant Professor of Political Science, Tel-Aviv University), Efrat Herzberg-Druker (Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison), Marie Piganiol (Postdoctoral Researcher, Max Planck Institute), and Caterina Froio (Assistant Professor of Political Science, Sciences Po) for sharing their experiences with us.

Our editors have chosen to speak with a diversity of scholars – some on the tenure track, some not – in order to provide a glimpse into the varied trajectories that can follow the postdoctoral experience.
**SASE: What professional considerations led you to apply for a postdoctoral fellowship?**

**Herzberg-Druker:** I believe that the time in a postdoctoral fellowship allows a researcher to think what are the main fields of his expertise and to develop a research plan and identity that is more coherent than just after graduation. I think that during the last years as a doctoral student most of my focus was in completing the research and writing of the dissertation – the time in a postdoctoral fellowship allowed me to rethink the topics I dealt with during my grad-school life and to establish more foundations for a longer period of research.

**Mandelkern:** The first consideration was obviously to change academic environments and to have the opportunity to engage with the international research community in my field. Additionally, a postdoctoral fellowship was a necessary bridge between my doctoral studies and getting a position in a university, during which I could work on publishing my research and improve my job market prospects.

**Froio:** After my PhD, I was mostly interested in expanding my competences on topics and methodologies that were close but not fully overlapping with what I did in my dissertation on political parties. For these reasons I did a first postdoctoral fellowship in the framework of the ANR Project SOG-PRO at the CERSA (Paris 2) and then at the CEE (Sciences Po) on the “Structure and organization of governments” whose principal investigator was Philippe Bezes. Subsequently, I looked for a fellowship that would allow me to develop a personal project and strengthen my theoretical and methodological skills on right wing extremism, radicalism, and populism. To do this, I applied and received a VOX-Pol fellowship at the Oxford Internet Institute (Oxford University).

**Klein:** The reality is that postdoctoral fellowships are an increasingly necessary stepping stone to a permanent position. However, I also wanted to expand my professional world to include more of the European scholarly community. I also wanted additional time and support to develop my book manuscript out of my dissertation.

**Piganiol:** When I finished my PhD, I had exhausted my teaching position opportunities since I had already been an ATER (temporary junior lecturer/assistant professor) for two years. This is the maximum you are allowed to do in France if you are not a civil servant. Besides, getting a postdoctoral fellowship is the best way to enhance your curriculum vitae: it gives you time to write papers, present your work, and start a new project.

**What employment conditions (length of contract, teaching load) were most important to you in choosing a fellowship?**

**Herzberg-Druker:** The most important thing to me was a program that would enable me to dedicate most of my time to research.

**Mandelkern:** I looked for a postdoctoral fellowship around 2009-2010, that is, at the height of the economic crisis, which had significant effects on the academic job market. So I must say that I knew I could not be very picky. I did however have a preference for fellowships which had no, or at least minimal, teaching obligation. When the time came and I could choose between a fellowship at a North American University and the MPIfG, I decided to take the latter since I preferred the intimate environment of a research institute. The fact that Germany was closer to Israel and allowed our families to visit us more often, made this decision easier.

**Froio:** In both cases, my primary concern was the length of the contract and a balance between research and teaching activities. I was lucky enough to have the possibility to privilege contracts that were not too short. Short contracts do not really allow for improving your skills and joining research communities in a tangible way. Additionally, they have very high costs in personal terms, as changing contracts regularly (often across different countries) can be really time consuming in terms of bureaucracy! During my first postdoctoral fellowship I was also teaching 3 courses. These courses were not all
in my primary fields of expertise, but the teaching experience was crucial to enriching and diversifying my academic profile.

**Klein:** I was particularly attracted to fellowships that promised a low teaching load and a strong scholarly community. I ended up receiving a fellowship – the EUI Max Weber Fellowship – that combined both with a short length of contract (one year) with extensive research time. There was also a large cohort of Fellows with whom to talk and collaborate.

**Piganiol:** In this market, very few people get to choose a fellowship. I knew about the Max Planck Institute’s postdoctoral programs and they were a perfect fit for my research since I work on economic sociology and political sociology. It was also important to me that it is a two-year program, so I knew I would not have to spend the first year looking for my next postdoctoral position. Moreover, the Max Planck Institute programs give postdoctoral fellows complete freedom to do research according to their own interests. Actually, I applied to this postdoc twice and was accepted the second time!

**Could you describe, for our readers, what your time in a postdoctoral fellowship looked like?**

**Herzberg-Druker:** I work on a few projects at the same time, so I am trying to divide my time between the different projects. Each week, I devote some time to each project. I think it is more productive way to handle multiple tasks and projects. I spend time during the week attending seminars – this way I am updated on what other researchers are engaged in. I think these seminars are highly important and they are an opportunity to broaden my horizons.

**Mandelkern:** I was firstly focused on trying to edit my PhD dissertation (which dealt with the role played by Israeli economists in Israel’s economic policymaking and economic liberalization) into publishable articles. I also began developing a new research agenda, namely studying the macroeconomic policy responses to the Great Recession in advanced economies, and the role played by economists and economic ideas in explaining them. So beyond the vast amount of enriching academic events at the Institute, I was mainly writing and doing research. But I confess, hanging out and drinking beer with new friends and colleagues was also an important part of my schedule…

**Klein:** During the first few months of the fellowship, I was focused on job market considerations. I wrote a new chapter for my book manuscript and develop an article. My best experience, though, was co-organizing a workshop on recent research on gender inequality.

**Piganiol:** Being a fellow at the Max Planck involves taking part in a number of collective activities, such as research group seminars, public lectures, methodology workshops, and conferences. But mostly, I have a lot of time to develop my own projects. This has especially allowed me to launch collective projects, including with other fellows at the Max Planck.

**How has this experience promoted you, as a researcher, for the next step in your career?**

**Herzberg-Druker:** I think this period is extremely important. It provided me with the time to develop my research identity and I have now more goals and research plans I want to achieve in the next few years. Moreover, my research plan is more organized and focused than it was before. I also gained more experience in research methods and worked with more datasets, which of course have contributed to my professional abilities and skills.

**Mandelkern:** At the practical level, my postdoc fellowships gave me the time to get my research published and become a ‘viable’
candidate in the job market. At a more substantial level, the postdoc period was crucial for my ‘maturation’ from a PhD student to an academic researcher, giving me time to develop my research agenda and to gain more clarity about it.

**Froio:** Both fellowships and the teaching experience were crucial to my personal and professional development. They pushed me to expand my research agenda on political parties in other related core fields in comparative politics. At the same time they allowed me to get in touch with outstanding colleagues in different universities. I am still collaborating with them today.

**Klein:** I feel like the greatest benefit of the postdoc is the distance from and perspective on the dissertation project it provides – all without the pressure of a tenure-track or teaching and research position. I was able to further develop the project for an audience beyond my committee. Moreover, the fellowship introduced me to a whole range of academic debates and discussions that have helped orient my future research projects.

**Piganiol:** I have no clue so far! We’ll see if I get a position at the end of the year!

*Last question! Do you have any advice for other young scholars entering postdoctoral fellowships?*

**Herzberg-Druker:** Plan your time wisely. List your goals for the long term and the short term and after doing that, build a work plan which can be met in the time you have and other responsibilities such as family.

**Mandelkern:** A first piece advice is don’t give up and submit a lot; I got many more rejections than acceptances throughout the process. A second piece of advice would be to focus on your research and to fit, as much as possible, all the other academic activities you need to engage in (most prominently teaching) into your research agenda.

**Froio:** Mmm. I have never been good at giving advice, but from my experience, there are at least two things. First, although the conditions on the academic job market are harsh, I believe it is important to do what you like. The ideal scenario would be to do what you like in existing research communities. For me, it has always been easier to learn from more experienced colleagues. Second, I found it really useful to use my research to inform my teaching. Teaching at different levels (BA, MA, PhDs) is an excellent opportunity for me to challenge my existing ideas about certain topics.

**Klein:** Set realistic goals – don’t overestimate how much you can get done. Seek out scholars at the institution with whom you think you can have useful conversations. Spend some time to plan ahead in terms of conferences or workshops that may be easier to attend because of the location of the fellowship.

**Piganiol:** Thinking about a new research project while finishing your PhD is of major importance. It motivates you to finish and start the next step of your career!

*A joint contribution by the SASE Newsletter editors*

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Have you finished your PhD project? Is the end in sight? Do you want the world to know about your research? The SASE newsletter is looking for presentations of finished, or nearly finished, PhD projects on socio-economic topics. Let us know about the theoretical insights and empirical results that have resulted from those years of hard work. Wherever you come from or whatever your topic, as long as it is related to socio-economics, we would love to hear from you. Send us an abstract of approximately 400 words sketching the research and results, and we will feature it in the newsletter (space permitting).

Send submissions to saseexecutive@sase.org
Honors and Distinctions

**Gregory Jackson and Richard Deeg Win 2018 JIBS Decade Award**

Congratulations to Gregory Jackson (Freie Universität Berlin) and Richard Deeg (College of Liberal Arts at Temple University) on having their paper “Comparing Capitalisms: Understanding Institutional Diversity and its Implications for International Business” selected as the winner of the 2018 JIBS Decade Award. Read the abstract [here](#).

**Network I Organizer Lara Monticelli Garners Marie-Curie Fellowship**

Lara Monticelli, co-founder and co-chair of the SASE research network “Alternatives to Capitalism”, has been awarded the prestigious Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellowship. Her research project, funded by the European Commission, will be conducted at the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School where Lara was been appointed Assistant Professor in September 2018. Her Marie Skłodowska-Curie project (2018-2021), titled ‘EcoLabSS – Ecovillages as Laboratories of Sustainability and Social Change’, focuses on the (re)emergence of community-based, prefigurative social movements (e.g. sustainable communities, eco-villages, transition towns, solidarity networks) as living laboratories experimenting with practices of resilience and resistance to environmental, economic, and societal challenges. Lara is especially interested in how these movements re-politicize and re-configure everyday life, thus representing radical attempts to embody the critique to contemporary capitalism and prefigure alternative, sustainable futures. Lara is also involved in a number of parallel research and editorial projects in collaboration with non-governmental organizations like the Global Ecovillage Network and ECOLISE – the European Network for Community Led Initiatives on Climate Change and Sustainability.

**Marie Piganiol Awarded RIODD-VIGEO EIRIS Prize 2018**

Marie Piganiol, Centre de Sociologie des Organisations (CSO) Sciences Po Paris, was awarded the “Prix de thèse RIODD VIGEO EIRIS 2018” for her work entitled Reconnecting Districts: The Genesis and Production of a New Urban Model. Read an abstract in English [here](#).

**ECW participant Barbara Kiviat Recognized with 3 Awards**

The paper “The Art of Deciding with Data: Evidence from How Employers Translate Credit Reports into Hiring Decisions” by 2018 SASE Early Career Workshop participant Barbara Kiviat was recognized with three awards at the 2018 annual American Sociological Association meeting. Barbara’s paper received the Ronald Burt Outstanding Student Paper Award, given by the Economic Sociology Section of the ASA; the Best Student Paper Award, given by the Consumption Section of the ASA; and the Outstanding Graduate Student Paper Award Honorable Mention, given by the Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity Section of the ASA. Read the thrice-laureled (and now unpaywalled) paper [here](#).
Career Opportunities

Doctoral Positions at the MPIfG

The International Max Planck Research School on the Social and Political Constitution of the Economy (IMPRS-SPCE), jointly conducted by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), the Department of Management, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Cologne, and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Duisburg-Essen, invites excellent candidates to apply for its doctoral program.

The graduate school features a unique curriculum of courses, research methods, and summer school sessions. Its research explores the social and political foundations of modern economies and examines the interrelation between economic and social action. The positions begin on October 1, 2019.

The deadline for applications is 28 February 2019.
For more information, see the announcement; application instructions may be found here.

Doctoral Fellowships at MaxPo

The Max Planck Sciences Po Center on Coping with Instability in Market Societies (MaxPo) in Paris invites applications for doctoral fellowships. Fellowship recipients will work under the supervision of Prof. Jenny Andersson or Prof. Olivier Godechot and are required to apply for formal enrollment in the doctoral program in sociology or political science at Sciences Po in Paris.

Applicants’ research interests should fall into the area of MaxPo’s research program, and their PhD project proposal should fit into one of the two research groups at MaxPo. We welcome original and independent proposals. Research topics should be situated in economic sociology, political economy, or economic or political history and can include:

- The intellectual, political, and economic history of neoliberalism; elite and mass politics; the marketization of social life; concepts of democracy, politics, and progress since the 1970s; the consequences of neoliberalism;
- Labor markets and inequality; segregation at work; team dynamics and team splits in organizations, firms, and political parties; the sociology of financial markets; the political and social consequences of economic crises.

The deadline for applications is 15 March 2019.
For more information, see the announcement.

Summer School on European and Transnational Rulemaking

The Amsterdam Centre for European Studies (ACES) and Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence and the Amsterdam Centre for European Law and Governance (ACELG) are organizing a summer school to be held at the University of Amsterdam, 8-12 July 2019 on the subject of European and Transnational Rulemaking.

Proposals are invited from PhD candidates, advanced masters students, and postdoctoral researchers interested in participating in this workshop. The workshop is open to junior scholars within and beyond the EU. The organizers reimburse up to €500 for travel and accommodation costs for a maximum of 10 accepted participants from outside Amsterdam.

For more information, see the announcement.
Doctoral Fellowships at the Copenhagen Business School

Copenhagen Business School invites applications for two vacant PhD fellowships within the fields of economic sociology, political economy, and the sociology of professions, at the Department of Organization. The two doctoral fellowships are in connection with the new project “Expert Niches: How Local Networks Leverage Markets”, funded by the Velux Foundation. Information on the project can be found here.

The deadline for applications is 1 March 2019. For more information, see the announcement.

Funded Opportunities for Early Stage Researchers at the University of Exeter

Two funded opportunities are available at the University of Exeter for early stage researchers as part of a project called MISTRAL, funded by a Marie Curie Innovative Training Network grant under the EU’s Horizon 2020 programme. Successful applicants will be part of a cohort of 15 researchers working on the broad topic of social acceptance of renewable energy across 6 European universities with a range of non-academic partners. The titles of the two Exeter based research project are: Social equity and distributive justice in renewable energy deployment and Public policy, procedural justice & participation in the low carbon transition.

The deadline for applications is 5 March 2019. For more information about the MISTRAL project, see: http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/MISTRAL/

Doctoral and Postdoc Positions at the Université de Lausanne

The Swiss National Science Foundation is currently accepting application for one doctoral position and one postdoc position as part of the Bypassing the Nation State? How Swiss Cantonal Parliaments Deal with International Obligations project at the Université de Lausanne.

The deadline for applications is 15 February 2019. For more information about the project, see: http://wp.unil.ch/ilsp/

A Host of Calls and Various Opportunities

Our resourceful friend Oleg Komlik, who runs the Economic Sociology and Political Economy blog, continues to do the community a huge service by, among many other things, aggregating interesting calls for papers and career opportunities from around the world. See the latest batch here!