# Connecting 'Human' and 'Social' Discourses:
## The Human Development, Human Security, and Social Quality Approaches

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## Introduction

The human development approach emerged in the late 1980s in response to the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes applied to countries in the South. Led originally by two South Asian scholars, Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen, in cooperation with a large international network, the approach is comparative in perspective and global in reach and has been incorporated into parts of the United Nations (UN) system, including the United Nations Development Programme. Over the years this approach has integrated three dimensions – human development, human rights and human security –, and looks at people's well-being or ill-being, security and insecurity, in the context of issues arising from global interconnectedness and inequities. It has had significant influence, but one constraint has been that its focus on the 'human' is accompanied by a widely recognised gap in respect of 'the social' (Apthorpe 1997, Gasper 2011, Phillips 2011).

In this paper we emphasise the human security wing of the UN human development approach, for that provides the most opening from this family of 'human' discourses to issues of the 'social'. Human security discourse looks at the human impacts of globalisation and the consequences of interrelated economic, socio-political, cultural and environmental change. Many international agencies, governments and social networks have taken up human security language. These include, besides UN agencies, the Human Security Network that includes Canada, Norway, The Netherlands, a dozen other countries and many NGOs; the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and development cooperation agency; the Thai government; and, to some extent, departments in charge of EU foreign policy.

The social quality approach emerged in the late 1990s within the European Union (Beck *et al.*, 1997), seeking to change the conventional asymmetrical relationship between a dominant (nowadays neo-liberal) economic policy and all other public policies, which distorts the daily life of citizens in the EU and indeed indirectly the lives of people around the world. The Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality was signed by 1,000 European scientists, who could not 'countenance a Europe with large numbers of unemployed, [and] growing numbers of poor people and those who have only limited access to health care and social services' (Beck et al., 2001: 385). A European Foundation on Social Quality was established, based in The Netherlands (see: http://www.socialquality.org/ ). By renewing the scientific debate on the nature and concept of 'the social' – a theme that partly vanished from scientific agendas in the mid-twentieth century – the social quality approach has sought to connect different sciences in order to address societal (including economic) changes in Europe in a comprehensive way. In recent years similar and connected work in Asia and Australia, involving a series of annual conferences and research workshops, has led to an Asian Consortium for Social Quality (see: http://www.socialquality.net/ ).

This paper outlines the human development and human security discourses and the social quality approach, and the challenges to which they respond, and provides a preliminary picture of similarities, differences and likely complementarity. First, we sketch the historical background and theoretical state of the human development discourse and the related human security discourse (we will refer to these jointly as HDS). Then we present the historical background and current theoretical state of the social quality (SQ) approach. We look in particular at its exploration of ontological and epistemological aspects of 'the social', which may help to strengthen HDS thinking in some areas. Finally, we make suggestions on how to continue the discussion.

### The Human Development and Human Security Discourses

#### The Human Development Approach

'Human Development' means 'development of, by and for people' and extending the range of favourably valued life-paths that people can choose. In contrast to seeing societal or global development centrally as economic growth, the human development approach offers a wider and re-focused conception of development. It has been popularized since 1990 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)'s Human Development Report Office, in the annual global *UN Human Development Report* (HDR). This conception and the practice of human development reporting have been widely adopted by national and sub-national governments and other development organizations.

Like, for example, the traditions of humanistic economics and Aristotelian thought, which are amongst its sources, the human development approach sees societal development as the promotion and advance of human well-being. In other words, it uses 'a welfare standard explicitly expressed in terms of human welfare rather than "economic welfare"' (Lutz, 1992a: 103) and does not centre on a 'utility' category imputed from market choices. Its conception of human welfare / well-being is broad. We have already mentioned the most condensed version: human development as the extension of the range of welcome options that are accessible. More elaborately, it concerns also a series of other values, from fulfilment of basic material needs, through empowerment, to a range of higher aspirations for expression, self-realization and dignity. Lutz summarised this welfare standard as 'material sufficiency and human dignity for all' (1992b: 166) and summarises it further as respect for basic human rights. UNDP's fuller definition covered empowerment (including a humanly normal life-span in a satisfactory state of health; possession of valued opportunities; community membership and participation); both equity and physical and economic security in access to those goods; and sustainability of this equitable, sufficient and secure access (UNDP, 1996). Further, UNDP too has edged towards an integrative conception of human development as fulfilment of basic human rights. While integrated in that way, the concept of human development is fundamentally multidimensional with respect to ends.

Besides multidimensionality, the approach is people-centred, concerned with development not only for a sub-group of society. First, to take the term 'human' as the basic category implies that humans have the most important things in common; these include vulnerability and potentials for concern and caring for others.

Second, the approach rejects change that excludes or victimizes some persons. The predominant emphasis on economic growth has neglected questions of income distribution, the differing abilities and needs of people, the way in which expenditure on products and activities is distributed (e.g., whether on education or on arms purchases), and public goods like peace and security which are not commodities and not primarily dependent on commodities. Third, the approach highlights empowerment. It often speaks of people as the key means as well as the key end of development; or, more elegantly put, people are acknowledged as actors and authors of the trajectory of their own lives and the development of their societies.

The human development formulation consciously draws on diverse intellectual traditions, starting at least from Aristotle, and including Adam Smith and Karl Marx. It came to the fore in the 1980s in response to various influences, notably including negative experience with the extreme focus on monetary variables in economic programs of 'structural adjustment'. Mahbub ul Haq and his collaborators also drew on several sources of contemporary inspiration: new theories of economic growth, which indicate a primary importance of human capital; the record of dramatic success in some East Asian countries that combined sustained rapid growth with increased equity; and evidence of aspects of low or declining quality of life in some high-income or fast-growing countries. The resulting conception of development focuses on ends – improvements in the content of people's lives and in their access to valued 'be-ings and do-ings'– not only on means and especially not only monetized (proposed) means and their ever-expanded production and disposal. Development is understood as a normative concept distinct from economic growth or social change. Attention to the content of people's lives leads to a disaggregated approach, looking at health and housing, work and recreation and diverse other aspects, as seen in the wide-ranging tables of indicators in the HDRs.

Only a small part of this conceptualization of 'ends' has been captured by UNDP's Human Development Index, which has combined (i) the conventional indicator of national per capita income (adjusted to reflect real purchasing power) and measures of (ii) basic education and (iii) life expectancy and gives equal weights to relative performance in these three areas. (The Index has undergone some updating in 2010.) Even such a simple and incomplete measure of human development gives rankings that show many striking divergences from rankings according to GNP per capita alone and that highlight the latter's inadequacy as a measure of progress.

Human development gives a comprehensive and hence quite often radical, framework for policy analysis: not only economic, not only 'social' (in the residual, 'non-economic', sense), and not only concerned with human resource development or basic material needs (Drèze and Sen, 2002; Gasper 2008). The framework is radical too in its geographical field of attention. The HDRs treat all countries in the world on an equal basis and addresses the responsibilities of rich countries and the impacts of their policies, such as those of agricultural and industrial protection. The Reports have stressed the need to promote global social stability by structural adjustment in the West, including by opening markets, rather than by sending expensive and ineffective military and peacekeeping forces to low-income countries that have been excluded from opportunities and become mired in conflict. The 1994 Human Development Report argued that rich countries should see development assistance as an investment in their own human security, rather than as charity. This HDR, with its stresses on two fundamental aspects of being human – basic needs and global interconnections

– and on the ramifying negative implications of inhumane systems that marginalise basic needs fulfilment, has generated a sister field of work to that of human development: human security studies.

### *The Human Security Perspective*

Haq added the 'human security' theme for purposes of prioritisation within the open-ended space of human development. The prioritisation purpose leads human security thinking to probe further into the textures and interconnections of daily life and of exceptional events. It brings more substantive thinking about human personality and identity and their social bases. It leads to a synthesis of concerns from thinking on basic needs, human development and human rights. 'Human security' proves to be an integrative theme that subsumes what basic needs analysis covers and adds more emphasis on subjectivity and feelings. It gives also a sense of priority within rights language, which is otherwise only about the form of a priority claim not about its content or rationale; and it adds more substance to the language of 'development', a language of valued change that yet tells us too little about the contents and meanings of change.

Haq took the distinction between the security of states and the security of persons and extended it. Security of persons comes to be seen as not only the physical safety of individuals but their ability to secure and hold basic goods. The human security concept as elaborated by the 2003 study *Human Security Now* (prepared for the United Nations by a Commission led by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen) therefore stresses, first, giving priority to truly basic functionings, to be guaranteed accessible for everyone; second, these priorities are recognised as human rights. Third, among these basic functionings is 'freedom from fear', both for intrinsic reasons and because physical violence and insecurity have such ramifying negative effects. Fourth, the concept requires stability of these basic capabilities, not merely adequate average levels, for everyone.

Human security, in this broad 'United Nations' formulation, means the security of people against important threats to the fulfilment of their basic needs. It refers to the security of all people, not just of the security forces or the state or people endowed with wealth. It covers more than only the physical, bodily security of persons, let alone only their bodily security against intentional physical threats. It is broader too than, but close in spirit to, Picciotto's definition: security in terms of quantity of years lived adjusted for life quality, thus including security against all threats to life, whether physical or not and intentional or not (Picciotto *et al.* 2007); and broader than the widely used slogan 'Freedom from fear and freedom from want' (Gasper 2005, 2010).

Even the narrower formulations of human security are radical in relation to traditional security studies thinking, since nowadays overwhelmingly most of the victims of violent conflicts are not members of armed forces and most violent conflicts are not between states. Security studies must look at the security of persons, not only the security of national boundaries (ICISS, 2001). People seek security of various sorts: physical, material, psychological (in terms of their relations to family, friends and associates) and existential (in terms of systems of meanings). 'Human security' language expresses the dangers of triggering fundamental damage when we lapse below certain thresholds; and it gives attention to feelings and subjectivity as well as to objective life circumstances. Losses can include not only the loss of things but the loss of major meanings and even identity.

These broader associated messages imply that human security discourse contains not just a single concept. Underlying the definitional elements we mentioned are a series of other features. First, a focus, for both normative and explanatory purposes, on individuals, their life routines and life emergencies and on stability and instability in fulfilment of their basic needs and mitigation of their felt insecurities. Second, special attention to 'tipping points' of various sorts, points beyond which something 'snaps'. Third, an explanatory agenda that stresses the nexus between freedom from want and indignity and freedom from fear, and, more generally, employs a holistic perspective on individuals' lives, on societies and on world society and that recognises the interaction of numerous types of factors that are conventionally but artificially separated between different academic and organizational mandates.

Human security thinking often has a stronger concern with directly felt experience than has been found in some of the legal-led work on human rights and economics-led work on human development. It adds not just a supplementary interest in the stability of people's basic rights and capabilities, but a foundational concern with the (partly context-specific) priority capacities and vulnerabilities that form the grounds for claims of basic rights. Human security thinking adds also to more individualistic human rights thinking an emphasis on the human species as a whole and its shared security, insecurity and fragility. By encouraging thinking deeply about individuals, all individuals, the human security perspective thus grounds human rights language in a way that helps to counter dangers that can arise otherwise through selfish or myopic use of rights language.

Whether to define human security in relation to a broad or narrow range of threats and possible types of damage declines in significance once we recognise that environmental insecurity, health insecurity, economic insecurity, military insecurity, psychological insecurity and more can all strongly affect one another. If users of a narrow physical violence definition of human security adopt a transdisciplinary causal perspective that is open to such linkages, they too are led to consider many other types of insecurity and harm and how people value and react to them. Which connections are strong, and are considered most important in a particular case, remains a matter for investigation and evaluation, case-by-case. Jolly and Basu Ray (2007) show this from the different national human development reports which have taken human security as their theme. A human security perspective is differently elaborated each time, rather than being an instruction to study the effect of everything on everything or to follow any other fixed research design.

The result is to help us break from the fixed habits of the traditional scientific disciplines concerning which factors should be analysed in relation to which others. The Gulbenkian Commission on the future of the social sciences warned that the existing organization of social science, which was established in Europe and North America in the late nineteenth century, as a series of distinct and disconnected disciplines, was shaped by a number of historical and political circumstances that in many ways no longer apply. In particular, each of the disciplines was moulded by and within a nation-state framework, which is now to an important degree superseded (Wallerstein *et al.*, 1996). 'Human security' thinking offers a framework for connecting the deep but often narrow and unbalanced disciplinary knowledges to each other and to everyday knowledge that is not captured within formal sciences. It may help similarly to span the boundaries between different organizational cultures and bureaucratic 'empires', such as those of 'security' forces and 'development' departments.

***The Need for Deeper Attention to 'Social', 'Human' and Caring Relations***

As the debate on human security deepens, attention increases to: (1) this approach's treatment of the 'social'; (2) the place it accords to caring relations in the enhancement of security and human fulfilment; and (3) underlying both issues, the way it conceives of human beings and situates them as subjects: its conception of the person.

One source of the idea of human security was the Brandt Commission Report (Independent Commission on International Development Issues, 1980). The report saw a world in which state and inter-state institutions failed to address human deprivation, environmental stress, political repression and the spread of armaments and disease. The global crisis in the 1970s demanded a deeper understanding of 'security', to consider multiple referents of security – institutions, communities and persons, not only states – and the relationships that link them. The report brought to the fore the multi-dimensional and interconnected character of the vulnerability of human beings and their societies. Achieving people-centred security (human security) must be a collective endeavour that recognises the significance of the quality of relations between nations, their citizens and the ecosystems on which they depend. It leads to an understanding of the 'social' as something multi-layered, which transcends the boundaries of nation-states and requires a correspondingly multi-layered conception of 'justice'. Feminist critiques of development have felt particular resonance with human security discourse – its shift of security concerns from the state to society, its emphasis on democratization to build a meaningful commitment towards universal well-being, and its attention to the specifics of security issues in particular geopolitical contexts and to the different framings and selection principles used by different actors (Hudson, 2005; Hyndman, 2003).

Deepening the human security approach along these lines benefits from a connection to ethics of care (Gasper and Truong, 2010). Much of that has come from feminist thinkers. Hutchings (2000) argues that feminist politics – seen as an ever-evolving normative struggle against the gendered construction of society – when grounded in an ethic of care has great potential for social transformation. Caring as thinking/acting is oriented towards concerns and commitments that arise from relationships. A care ethic regards caring as relational and as a responsibility and need of persons. In this light, human beings are responsible for how relationships emerge and evolve. However, the practice of care is deeply tainted by essentialized gender constructs, which use the male prototype as the benchmark to validate ethical judgements. An ethic of care – embedded in relationships and responsibility – is marginalized in national and global affairs, because it goes against the dominant conception of a fixed and stable human subject, and since it remains persistently relegated to the private sphere. Yet, an ethic of care can inform intra-national and international relations by facilitating a notion of a 'relational self' – a 'self' constituted by its relations to others.

Baker *et al*. (2004) integrate care in an alternative vision for an egalitarian society grounded on four key policy objectives derived from a species-specific relational ontology. They treat dependency and autonomy as different moments in the human life-cycle rather than as binary opposites. In this perspective an egalitarian society must pay attention to: (a) equality in economic relations and access to resources; (b) equality in the social and cultural domains where systems of communication, interpretation and representation (media, education, religious organizations) must ensure equality of respect and recognition

of differences; (c) equality of power in public and private institutions (in formal politics, governing boards, committees, in work and family/personal relations); and (d) equality in affective relationships (being able to receive and provide on equal terms love, care and solidarity, which operate at different sites: personal relationships, work relations, community and associational relations). Their proposed concept of affective equality integrates the concepts of dependency and interdependency into our understanding of equality and 'citizenship'; it recognises the citizen as economic, social, cultural and political actor as well as universal caregiver and care recipient.

Engster (2007) similarly acknowledges interdependence as a feature of being human, with care giving and care receiving as universal and permanent features of human society. Echoing Hutchings, Engster demonstrates how Western political theories are deeply gendered and create a dichotomy between supposedly 'particularistic' care and 'universal' justice. Yet, care facilitates the most fundamental goals in life: survival, development and basic functioning. Bringing care back to moral reasoning is imperative because its erosion has the potential to generate chaos. Engster offers a 'rational theory of obligation' to provide care, going beyond the dominant practice and provision of care only for one's immediate group. It seeks to produce collective caring arrangements and practices that address the needs of society as a whole, including the global society. This obligation is grounded in the realities of interdependence.

In contrast, as Giri (2000) points out, one key absence in the concept of human development from UNDP and Sen is a deep conceptualization of self and self-development. Sen's idea of 'development as freedom' (Sen 1999) needs to be accompanied by a meaning of development as responsibility. Self-development means also an openness to 'otherness': something that cannot be totally dominated and controlled, nor made to acquire features of the self. 'Otherwise there is no one with whom to have a relationship and our own identity is jeopardized because it requires this relationship' (Slife, 2005: 167). A friendly reading of Sen's recent work suggests that he seeks a thicker conception of the self, in which human subjects have 'plural affiliations' (Sen 2006). These 'plural affiliations' involve, however, historical and social dimensions that need to be made explicit.

Inter-paradigmatic communication is required in order to enrich understandings of the concept of human nature and offer a 'thicker' version of a concept so central to society yet for which it is so difficult to find meanings suitable to all creeds at all times. We require a conception of human nature--being human--as a social and historical product, without abandoning awareness of the biological imperatives of interdependence and the life cycle. Security must be seen as more than just a problem of the state but also as a societal issue involving cognition, re-cognition and caring relations. A socially embedded approach emphasising relatedness rather than atomism is required.

Slife (2005: 159) defines 'ontological relationality' as an approach that views each and every entity as a nexus of relations: all entities have a shared being and are mutually constitutive. Applying such ontological relationality requires a different approach to, first, the notion of the 'self', which must be seen as encumbered rather than unencumbered, embodied rather than disembodied, and second, to the philosophy of humanism, to be seen as something embedded in society and not abstracted from it. A key message of this approach is epistemic humility as a condition for mutual respect. The task ahead, such authors suggest, is to find an alliance of ontological positions capable of reorienting securitization processes so that the values of care play

a central role – reclaiming their place in interactions between humans and the interactions of humans and their ecological environment. The significance of caring as a fundamental feature of human life and social institutions must be given full recognition.

### The Social Quality Approach: Historical Background and Current State Of Theory

#### A Response to the Imbalance Between Economic Policy and Social Policy

The European Foundation on Social Quality emerged out of two lines of activity in the 1990s. The first was the work of two European Commission Observatories, on Social Exclusion and on Ageing and Older People. These networks of scientists connected research on the social conditions of different marginalized groups in the EU with findings on the whole range of societal policies, including economic policies, in the Member States. The second line was a series of expert-meetings to discuss processes of socio-economic transformation in western and central Europe and the consequences for older people, organized by SISWO, the then Netherlands Universities' Institute for Coordination of Research in the Social Sciences. From such work arose a recognition of the dysfunctional asymmetrical relationship between economic policy and so-called 'social policy'. Social policy, or more precisely all 'non-economic policies' at the national level, have traditionally been subordinated to economic policy and dominant economic values. In the European context 'social policy' is equivalent to administration by national states and regional and local authorities concerning income transfers for maintaining the socio-economic security of, originally, employees and later of all citizens. It concerns in fact just one aspect of the range of policies emanating from national states and non-profit organizations, NGOs, companies and groups of citizens, that affect the domains of socio-economic security: financial resources, housing, health and social care, work, welfare, and education. The relationship between economic policy and this whole range of policies has been severely unbalanced (Walker, 1984; Beck et al, 2001).

Related to this, the separation between economics and other social sciences from the late 19th century led to the development of economics in isolation from an understanding of social relations (Gough, 1979). Furthermore, not only did the dominant Western economics unilaterally determine the sphere of its own supposed competence, it defined also the boundaries of its opposite: the 'non-economic' sphere (Donzelot, 1979). Problems that arose in the operation of the economic system were often conveniently defined as 'social problems'. Critique of the subordination of the above mentioned range of policies and (by implication) of the 'social' to the objective of economic growth was behind the initiation of work on social quality. A similar sort of critique of the equation of national welfare with economic welfare and the exclusion of social relations in development planning, including questions of distribution, produced the human development approach (Seers, 1969; Walker, 2011).
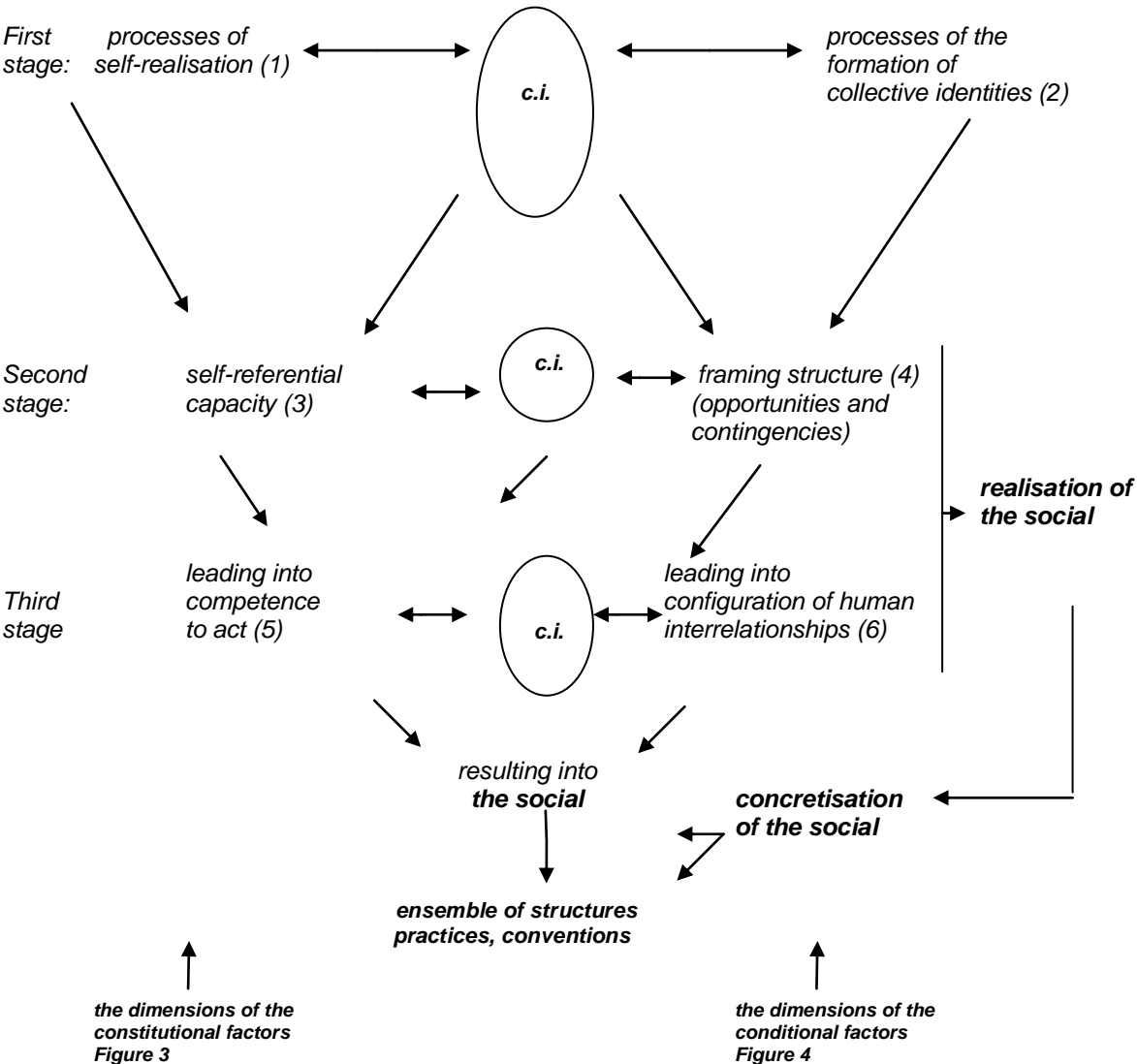
The subordinate relationship to economic policy was reinforced by the ascent of neo-liberalism to a commanding position in Europe by the 1990s. The neo-liberal transatlantic consensus holds that rising inequality is the inevitable result of technological change and the associated liberalization of international trade and increased competition. From this perspective the nation-state is powerless in the face of rising market inequality and can only intervene to offset its worst effects. In this discourse the state must not go

'too far' in such redistribution because that will endanger competitiveness; societies should be managed so as to stimulate competitiveness and economic growth. This subjugates 'the social' (see below) to a narrow conception of the economy, namely monetized growth (Van der Maesen and Walker et al., 2011). It paved the way for the Lisbon objective of making the EU the most competitive part of the world economy, and for an interest in social cohesion as a productive factor for economic growth (European Council, 2000).

***Theorising the social***

A first main point of the social quality approach is that it takes as its subject matter the social relations of people. Its basic assumption or principle is that people are essentially social beings. This implies a rejection of the ideas that people are atomistic parts of societies, and communities are merely a sum of individuals who maximize their own utility (Taylor, 1975). Understanding this assumption requires a clarification of the adjective 'social', as for example essayed by Sève (1978) in his theory of the psychology of personality. Social quality theory's clarification derives from a conceptualization of the noun 'the social'.

***Figure-1: The constitution of the social based on constitutive interdependency (c.i.)***



*First stage:* *processes of self-realisation (1)* — **c.i.** — *processes of the formation of collective identities (2)*

*Second stage:* *self-referential capacity (3)* — **c.i.** — *framing structure (4) (opportunities and contingencies)*

**realisation of the social**

*Third stage* *leading into competence to act (5)* — **c.i.** — *leading into configuration of human interrelationships (6)*

*resulting into* **the social**

**concretisation of the social**

**ensemble of structures practices, conventions**

**the dimensions of the constitutional factors** **Figure 3**

**the dimensions of the conditional factors** **Figure 4**

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'The social' may be conceived as the result of the dialectic (constitutive interdependency / c.i.) between processes of self-realisation and the formation of collective identities. Figure-1 illustrates first that individuals may develop their self-referential capacities to participate in the praxis of collective identities. These capacities and openness for collective identities (families, communities, movements etc.) are conditions for playing different roles. This activity will change the nature and diversity of collective identities in the long run and, therefore, the nature of conditions for processes of self-realisation. In other words, this part concerns the first stage of the constitutive interdependency between processes of self-realisation (1) and processes concerning the formation of collective identities (2). This will contribute to the self-referential capacities of human beings (3) and to the framework of potentials and contingencies, here labelled the 'framing structure' (4). This paves the way for the second stage of the constitutive interdependency, between self-referential capacities and the framing structure, contributing to the competence to act (5) and the configuration of human interrelationships, as organisations and institutions (6). The third stage of the constitutive interdependency will contribute to the social as people's productive and reproductive relationships.
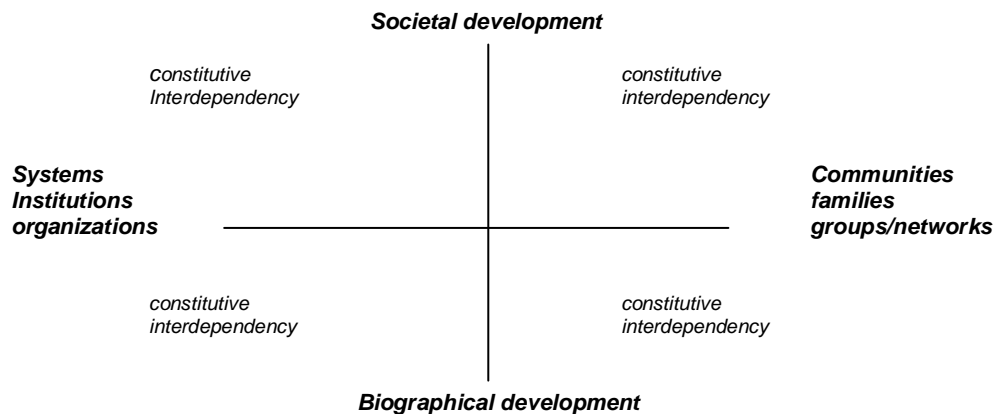
This presentation attempts to incorporate Bhaskar's conception of 'critical realism', arguing that a societal totality must be regarded as:

> *an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism) (….) It is important to stress that the reproduction and/or transformation of society, though for the most part unconsciously achieved, is nevertheless still an achievement, a skilled accomplishment of active subjects, not a mechanical consequence of antecedent conditions*. (Bhaskar, 1979; 45-6)

In Figure-1 not the concept of societal totality but the concept of 'the social' is used as an expression of the always changing totality as an open process, as illustrated with the three circles. They symbolize the first, second and third stages of the constitutive interdependencies. This presentation transcends three traditional social science conceptions: of human actions as outcomes solely of individual motives, drives or instincts (Paretian utilitarianism); of a duality between agency and structure (Weberian voluntarism); and of the dominance of collectivities (Durkheimian structuralism) (Van der Maesen, and Walker et al, 2011). A frequent comment on the social quality approach is that it accentuates the collective aspects of human relationships, but this misses the main emphasis on the dialectic between processes, shown in Figure 1.

A second main proposition in social quality theory is that 'the social' is realised as a result of the interplay of two core tensions (Figure 2). The first tension is between the world of systems and institutions with the world of communities, families and personal networks. The second tension is between societal and biographical developments. The concretisation of the social takes place in the form of people's relationships and, therefore, as the non-material equivalent manifestations in structures, practices and conventions. The theory has much affinity with Roy Bhaskar's critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978; 1979; 1993; 1994) but differs from the theoretical approaches of Jürgen Habermas, Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Amartya Sen or Martha Nussbaum (as explained in vd Maesen, Walker et al, 2011).

*Figure 2: The interplay of two core tensions*

**Societal development**

*constitutive                           constitutive
Interdependency                       interdependency*

**Systems                                              Communities
Institutions                                           families
organizations                                          groups/networks**

*constitutive                           constitutive
interdependency                       interdependency*

**Biographical development**

The social is realised thanks to the interaction between processes of self-realisation and the formation of collective identities and the interplay of the core tensions. This may result into bad, normal or good social quality of daily circumstances. With this in mind the current definition of social quality is: the extent to which people are able to participate in social relationships under conditions which enhance their individual well-being and potential (Van der Maesen and Walker et al, 2011).

A major impulse behind the development of the social quality theory is the recognition that a clear understanding of the social had vanished from social sciences. Gradually a distinction between the social and the individual has become entrenched: 'faits sociaux' versus 'faits individuels'. In recent decades the latter have taken strong analytical precedence over the former. According to Ferge, in Central Europe this has caused the individualisation of the social and leads to legitimating the decline in solidarity (Ferge, 2001; also Juhász, 2006). As a consequence, individuals, seen as the real 'core' of life, are confronted by a society that is seemingly superior and appears as an external power (Herrmann, 2005, 2006). Not surprisingly, therefore, Western social sciences today are preoccupied with individual life styles, individual happiness, preferences, consumption, well-being and quality of life of people as autonomous individuals, rather than as individuals-in-communities. Consequently the 'individual' – as a citizen with full rights or as a person who is excluded from mainstream society – has gained the centre stage in economic, educational, health, sport and cultural policies. Through her or his demands, needs and participation, the individual comes to be seen as the shaper and target of such measures. Discourses on life styles, consumption, living patterns, living conditions and well-being have taken on highly individualistic tones in line with utilitarian thinking. The unanswered challenge for both analysis and politics is how to address the current disjunctions in conceptualization. The rich texture of the 'social' is neglected and yet it is presumed that the concept can still fulfil the task of ensuring that people respect and help each other.
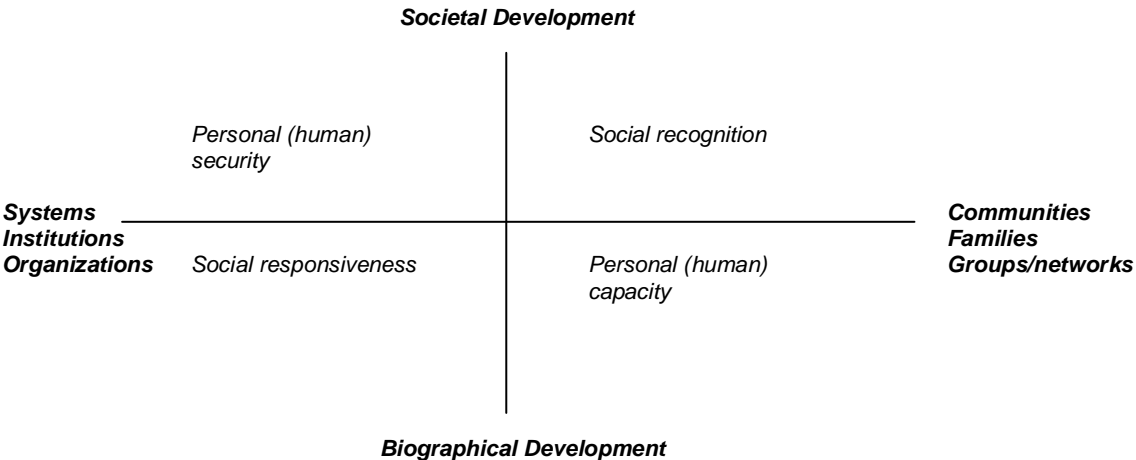
Given that people are social beings, social quality theory explores what meanings should be accorded to that adjective and how should they be translated into policy templates such as 'social justice', 'social protection', 'social security', 'social inclusion', or 'social cohesion'? It argues that the social does not exist as such but is the expression of the constantly changing processes by which individuals realize themselves as interacting social beings (Beck et. al, 2001: 310). The entrenched distinction as in neo-liberalism between the social and the individual is based on a false premise. In the words of Elias, individual and society are

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not in contradistinction: "one of the peculiarities of the traditional human self-image is that people often speak and think of individuals and societies as if these were two phenomena existing separately – of which, moreover, one is often considered 'real' and the other 'unreal' – instead of two different aspects of the same human being" (Elias, 2000:468).

One approach to try to transcend the accent on individuals as isolated entities is to think in terms of dual interactions between (individual) agency and (societal) structure, categories which remain separate and different (Giddens, 1979, 1984). In another approach, Latour seeks to redefine 'sociology not as the science of the social, but as the tracing of associations. In this meaning of the adjective, social does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a type of connection between things that are not themselves social' (Latour, 2007:5). He refers to the etymology, namely, that the Latin 'socius' denotes a companion, an associate. In contrast, the social quality approach follows Elias' rejection of the separation of individuals and society, but nor does it conflate the two. In social quality theory the duality between agency and structure is overcome by stressing dialectical relationality, as in the work of Bhaskar (1993). This position is congruent with Archer's idea of analytical dualism that refuses to separate or to conflate agency and structure (Archer, 1995:66).
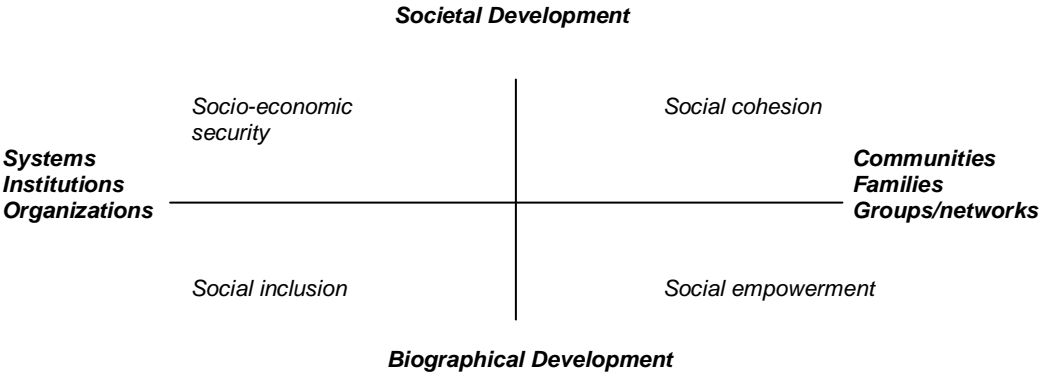
Three sets of factors help us in understanding the nature of social quality. They are derived from our ontological interpretation of the social. First are the *constitutional factors*. These include: personal (human) security, that requires, amongst other things, the institutionalisation of the rule of law; social recognition, concerning interpersonal respect between members of the community; social responsiveness, concerning the openness of groups, communities and systems; and personal (human) capacity, concerning the individual's physical and/or mental ability. These result in the constitution of competent social actors, hence the name 'constitutional factors'. They are an outcome of the interaction between processes of self-realisation and processes concerning the formation of a diversity of collective identities (Figure 1) and the interplay of the two core tensions (Figure 2). Each factor is mainly influenced by certain components of life and is, therefore, indicated in one quadrant of the field of the constitutional factors (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: The Field of the Constitutional Factors*



*Societal Development*

Personal (human) security       Social recognition

**Systems**
**Institutions**
**Organizations**    Social responsiveness      Personal (human) capacity      **Communities**
**Families**
**Groups/networks**

*Biographical Development*

The second set concerns four *conditional factors*: social empowerment, that delivers the conditions for social interaction; social inclusion, that paves the way for the accessibility of the infrastructural context; socio-economic security, that concerns the availability of material and other resources necessary for daily living; and social cohesion, that concerns collectively accepted values and norms that will enable community building. Also in this case each factor is an outcome of processes related to the interaction of the processes of self-realisation and the formation of a diversity of collective identities and the interplay of the two core tensions; so each is therefore also for ease of recall indicated in one quadrant of the field of the conditional factors.

*Figure 4: The Field of the Conditional Factors*

*Societal Development*

|  |  |
|---|---|
| *Socio-economic security* | *Social cohesion* |
| **Systems Institutions Organizations** | **Communities Families Groups/networks** |
| *Social inclusion* | *Social empowerment* |

*Biographical Development*

The third set of factors in the social quality approach are *normative factors*. In the theory of vd Maesen, Walker et al. (2011), the following normative factors are emphasised: social justice, a criterion to judge the existing nature of socio-economic security (at a certain place and time) as an outcome of interventions by social actors reflecting their personal (human) security; solidarity, a criterion to judge the existing nature of social cohesion (at a certain place and time) as an outcome of interventions by social actors, reflecting social recognition; equal valuation, a criterion to judge the existing nature of social inclusion as an outcome of interventions by social actors underpinned by social reponsiveness; and human dignity, a criterion to judge the existing nature of social empowerment as an outcome of interventions by social actors with personal (human) capacity.

*Figure-5: The 'social quality architecture' for understanding the state of affairs of social quality at a specific time and place*

| Constitutional factors (processes) | Conditional factors (opportunities + contingencies) | Normative factors (orientation) |
|---|---|---|
| personal (human) security | socio-economic security | social justice (equity) |
| social recognition | social cohesion | solidarity |
| social responsiveness | social inclusion | equal valuation |
| personal (human) capacity | social empowerment | human dignity |
| profiles as instruments | indicators as instruments | criteria as instruments |

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Figure 5 gives an overview of the three sets of factors: the 'social quality architecture'. In comparison to most 'quality of life' and 'social capital' approaches, the social quality theory distinguishes the three dimensions, as well as their respective methodological instruments (Phillips, 2006; van der Maesen, Walker et al. 2011). It hypothesises that there will be different 'social quality regimes' depending on the varying interactions between the constitutional and conditional factors, and on the particular normative context.

The theory does not claim that these three sets of factors create or constitute 'the social'. Instead they propose that they help us to analyse processes of constitution of 'the social'; that they may influence the processes by contributing to politics and policies to enhance the outcomes; and that they create the basis for normative judgements of the results of these processes, politics and policies. Furthermore, whereas many quality of life approaches lack theoretical groundwork (Hunt, 1997; Raphael, 2001; Fahey *et al.*, 2002), here for the first time in social research all twelve aspects of this architecture are based on the same conceptualization of the social and, therefore are intrinsically related to each other (Van der Maesen and Walker et al., 2011). Thus the indicators of the four conditional factors, across their domains and subdomains, are also intrinsically related with each other, which is new in indicators research (Gordon et al., 2005).

The interaction of biographical development and the genesis of groups, families and communities – as an aspect of the dialectic between actions towards self-realisation and those leading to the formation of collective identities – inevitably influences the nature of both the constitutional factors and the conditional ones. These dynamic interactions lead to the emergence of new relationships, societal structures and, therefore, new expressions of the social. The concept of emergence comes from natural sciences and refers to a characteristic of dynamic systems that leads to structural changes and new complexities, as in evolution. Actions by people as social beings cause emergent processes leading to new complexities called societies. Thus the two fields (Figures 3 and 4) are not in practice separate but interact to generate the dynamic nature of the constitution of the social (Figure 1) and its realisation (Figure 2). For example, we may hypothesise a vital relationship between personal (human) capacity at the individual level and the possibilities presented by social empowerment at the societal level.

### *Evolution of the Social Quality Orientation: Empirical and Theoretical*

Empirical work started with the application of the conditional factors to the area of employment, leading to the idea of 'flexicurity' (Walker, 2000). The balance of flexibility and security is the heart of the partnership for a new organization of work. The European Foundation's research project, with university partners from nine European countries, analysed the employment situation in different EU Member States and one candidate Member State (European Council, 2001; Gordon *et al.*, 2002; van der Maesen, 2002; Nectoux *et al.*, 2003).

Currently, priority is given to the construction and application of indicators, in Europe, Asia and Australia. Indicators are necessary though not sufficient for making conclusions about the state of affairs of social quality at a certain time and place. In 2001 to 2006 the European Network for Indicators of Social Quality (ENIQ) undertook theoretical and empirical work for construction of a coherent set of social quality indicators (Van der Maesen et al, 2005; Gordon *et al.*, 2005). The outcomes are published in fourteen

national reports (www.socialquality.org); and overall reflections appear in vd Maesen, Walker et al. (2011). Since 2007 the Asian Consortium's research group on social quality indicators made major methodological steps while adjusting the indicators to Asian and Australian circumstances, with huge surveys in Australia, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand, and in comparing the outcomes. The research has been discussed in five Asian conferences (see: http://www.socialquality.net/ ). A related study on changes in social cohesion in South Korea received first prize at the Third OECD Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, for showing new advances in understanding and mapping 'social progress' (Yee and Chang, 2009).

In the next stage it will be necessary to analyse how, in different countries, regions or communities, processes lead to social quality: how the constitutional and conditional factors are linked. For example, the meaning of family differs enormously across Europe. This has consequences for the way people operate as social actors in the context of the conditional factors. The linking of both sets of factors, together with application of the normative factors, is required in order to understand the nature of social quality at a specific place and time.

### *The Need for a Holistic Framework*

Recent years have seen a huge expansion in the statistical data available to policymakers and the general public, not least in Europe. Such information is part of the life-blood of democracy, but its explosive growth has a paradoxical aspect. It tends to reinforce policy fragmentation, making it hard for policymakers to tackle problems in a holistic way and for citizens to comprehend what is happening to society. New answers on recent processes of transformation cannot be found as long as the old questions are asked and as long as the context is considered to be fundamentally the old one. The avalanche of theory-less indicators are part of responding in a fairly helpless way to social complexities and processes. This traditional indicators research does not deliver new perspectives for politics and policies. The social quality approach aims to overcome this type of politics by creating a coherent, theoretically grounded concept that embraces all policies and all stages of the policy process. It is intended to furnish policymakers and the general public with a framework with which to better understand the complexities of society and to influence them.

Thanks to the work done thus far in Europe, Asia and Australia we may distinguish three functions of the indicators research: (i) for recognising conditions and trends at national and local level (see the ENIQ work and most of the work in Asia till now); (ii) for comparing effects of policies over time with regard to the four conditional factors in different policy areas (health care, education, housing, etc.); and (iii) to connect the effects in various policy areas to each other, paving the way for an understanding of their interconnectedness. Such research is necessary for knowing how specific social groups experience their daily life.

The application of the theory to the urban context is vital. Global transformations – economic, political, cultural, and demographic – are realised especially in urban spaces. Large cities are the centres of global economy, knowledge and technology. They are also locations for extreme poverty, exclusion, crime, and pollution. The European Commission has said that in large cities traditional forms of solidarity are decreasing, inequalities between the rich and the poor are growing, and that to address these negative

phenomena is the most urgent challenge for the EU (European Commission, 1996, 2003). The social quality approach presents a heuristic instrument with which to address this complexity.

Questions about socio-economic security, social cohesion, social recognition or social justice increase in relevance as a result of ongoing processes of transformation which are realised in the urban context. These include the revolutionary new technologies and new forms of communication; increasing mobility; the related changes in financial, production and distribution systems; migration in and between countries as a response to these changes; and new forms of human exploitation and other criminal behaviour at international and national levels. These changes are not a matter of 'natural development'. They are largely driven by the application of one type of utilitarian worldview, paving the way for politically determined neo-liberal guidelines that aim to add on some principles of welfare to rigidly unilateral principles of competition seen as a presumed condition for economic growth and welfare. The social quality approach's conceptual framework provides a way to connect different disciplines to address interrelated aspects of urban policy areas and urban categories by exploring the domains of the conditional factors with help of the social quality indicators. It also delivers possibilities for analysing the cognitive, emotional and rational experiences of citizens, by linking exploration of the constitutional factors to exploration of the conditional factors. By applying the normative factors a judgement can be made on these outcomes, to assess policies by public, private and commercial agencies. This analytic architecture transcends the fragmentation of social research as well as the fragmentation of policy areas.

Similarly, most work on 'sustainable development' talks in terms of a balance between the economic, the social and the environmental, yet has no clear, conscious or coherent conceptualisation of what it means by 'the social'. Tacitly that remains a vague residual, comprising whatever is not economy or environment; and operationally it remains a ragbag of disparate unintegrated concerns ('social sectors', 'social capital', 'social inclusion', etc.), as in the conventional formulations of 'social development'. It may make more sense to see 'the social' as encompassing the economic, socio-political, cultural and environmental/ ecological aspects; and to highlight that the interactions involved occur within geographical space, and not least within cities.

### Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Work

We see several important parallels between the social quality approach and the human development and security approaches. They share a similar spirit:
o   a human focus, a focus on the well-being of persons, rather than a primary focus on 'the economy', the sphere of monetary values;
o   an explicit normative basis, that considers not only values expressed through wants backed by purchasing power in markets;
o   strong multidimensionality in their conception of human well-being, rather than a reduction to a single denominator of money or 'utility';
o   a holistic analytical style; which leads to concerns about interconnections which overstep boundaries and threaten sustainability;
o   a dissatisfaction with the nineteenth century pattern of disciplinary and professional divisions;

- an underlying preoccupation with relationality: an open or implicit realisation that every entity is a nexus of relations and that entities are mutually constitutive.

In sum, both streams can be seen as reactions to a utilitarian worldview and both try to bring integration across boundaries, with reference to priority criteria of human well-being.

Apart from the benefits to both the HDS and social quality perspectives from partnership, their cooperation holds out a promise of contribution to the global challenges of conceptualising and acting on 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' (see, e.g., Van der Maesen and Walker, 2011) The global perspectives of HDS work combined with the systematic theorising of 'the social' by social quality research can together contribute to better thought-through, and more socially situated, realistic and relevant, approaches to social and environmental sustainability.

They have emerged, however, for different contexts and levels. The social quality approach emerged within the world of EU social policy and, therefore, reflects concerns with long established welfare regimes and ideas about how to build and maintain 'the good society'. The human development-and-security perspective has emerged on a larger and less fortunate stage. It is guided by concerns with critical threats and risks of life-destroying crises. The boundaries it crosses are also national and inter-continental. It aims to bring integration within the thinking of international organizations, including of the United Nations, which are vested with multilateral tasks of negotiation for a better world. It contains correspondingly strong attention to themes of human rights and democratisation. In contrast, most work on social quality has not been directly guided by concerns about threats of war, pandemic, climate change, or massive population movements driven by different forms of human insecurity. The citizens it describes are not the people fighting to enter Fortress Europe, sometimes in container trucks and small boats. In fact, it developed within that fortress and has only recently been extended to contrasting conditions in Asia.

The approaches could have a worthwhile potential complementarity, beginning from their respective concentrations on 'the human' and 'the social'. How does each approach understand the notions of 'human' and 'social' and bring this understanding to bear in its vision of 'development;' and 'security'. (For more extended comparisons see Gasper, 2011; Phillips, 2011; Van der Maesen and Walker, 2011.) This paper has given more space to social quality theory, because of an interest in how human-development-and-security theory needs to draw on a richer conception of the social. Humanism must think in terms not of abstracted individuals but of humans who are embedded in societies. While HDS work has stressed interaction and even relationality, it has perhaps not yet sufficiently acknowledged that this interaction involves processes of co-learning and co-transforming among persons, not merely responses to 'sticks' and 'carrots' by fundamentally unchanging human atoms. Social quality work offers a deeper conceptualization of the social and its relation to the human, and a structured investigation of the constitution of the social. It can perhaps help in placing HDS work in the real, social world.

At the same time, the social quality approach has emerged in high-income countries in a historical phase of more covert than overt conflict and it has much to learn from thinking about other societies and eras. The social quality approach is beginning to extend intellectually beyond Europe. It will benefit from further excavation of its ontological grounding, to identify roots of commonality and difference with Asian scholars who may inherit an ontology or ontologies that accord different meanings to 'state', 'human', 'social' and

'security'. HDS thinking pays central attention to global context and to prioritisation in the face of vulnerability and fragility; and it gives more attention to fundamental issues of emotions and of caring (not only 'care' as in the social quality indicators). So HDS work can in turn help to place the social quality approach in a wider real world, in which there is global society, not only national societies, a world that includes tipping points and explosions as well as evolution and emergence. It offers an understanding of the social which is not pre-determined but evolves with the monitoring of ongoing societal changes.

Thus one necessary direction for understanding the social is through comparative sociology and comparative ethics. Previous understandings of the social did not, for example, describe a world with the internet as a conduit for social construction of meanings. Many of the features of the social that are being formed by the new technologies are: new. We have to explore the 'social' as a multilayered entity open to transformation by diverse transnational forces, such as transnational families, transnational social activism and new transnational spaces of communication.

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