CRESC News

Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change

Welcome to this first issue of the CRESC newsletter, published twice a year to provide an important link between CRESC and our stakeholders and users, including especially those outside the academic communities. The University of Manchester and The Open University are partners in this new Economic and Social Research Council funded centre whose interdisciplinary research will develop and disseminate new knowledge and perspectives on socio- cultural change.

This issue of our newsletter begins by looking back at CRESC's launch event in mid January and ends by highlighting coming events including our first conference in July this year. The central pages then serve to introduce the four CRESC research themes around which we organise our research into socio cultural change. These pages provide a guide to what's new and distinctive about our approach.

Tony Bennett, Mike Savage, Karel Williams (CRESC Co-Directors)

Tessa Jowell opens CRESC

The importance and relevance of our new venture was demonstrated on 12 January 2005 when the Rt Hon Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, formally opened the new Centre at an event attended by nearly 200 guests, including students and academics from many universities, as well as representatives from interested institutions, public bodies, and the private sector.

Centre Director Mike Savage emphasised CRESC's interest in nurturing the methodological expertise which will allow us to produce empirically informed interdisciplinary research into the pace and nature of contemporary socio-cultural change. In saluting the ESRC's decision to fund CRESC, Tessa Jowell observed the need for further research into the media, the cultural and creative industries which would recognise the intrinsic value of culture as well as policy uses of research.

Professor Nancy Rothwell, Vice-President for Research at The University of Manchester responded by pointing to the way that CRESC drew on key research strengths in Humanities at the new University of Manchester. Professor Alan Bassindale, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Staff and Research) at The Open University congratulated members of CRESC for their insight and originality and emphasised the OU's commitment to the Research Centre.

> *...further research into the media, the cultural and creative industries which would recognise the intrinsic value of culture as well as policy uses of research.*

Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
Photograph by Ed Swindon

The formal opening was followed by a launch debate 'The Cultural Revolution and Social Change: the Long Revolution revisited'. The aim was to bring together eminent academic guests, including Stuart Hall, Sheila Rowbotham and Huw Beynon, with CRESC respondents who would take stock of debates about culture and social change. They would do by returning to Raymond Williams's classic text The Long Revolution and evaluating his arguments today. Williams is an important figure to CRESC's research agenda for three reasons. Firstly, Williams was a precursor of cultural studies and his contribution informs subsequent debates on culture and social change in a variety of academic disciplines. Secondly, Williams concern with the relationship between three revolutions (cultural, democratic and industrial) remains one of the first sustained ways of exploring the inter-connections between realms previously seen as disconnected. Finally, we are interested in how the idea of change itself is defined in Williams' work. If change has now become almost a 'constant' in our thinking, Williams can help us think critically about claims regarding epochal change.

> "...the need to register the significance of popular identities, especially in their relationship to the state, expert knowledge, and governmentality."

Launch debate
the Long Revolution revisited

The debate was structured around contributions on the three different revolutions and opened with a magisterial overview of Williams's 'cultural revolution' by Stuart Hall (Open University). Hall situated Williams' ideas historically within English literature and emphasised the disjuncture between Williams's arguments and contemporary socio-cultural relations. Democratic freedoms had been reduced to the ability to purchase and consume, while globalisation had rendered Williams's assumptions about the bounded nature of Britain redundant. Bev Skeggs (CRESC) agreed with much of what Hall had said about Williams contribution to the cultural studies agenda. She argued that culture, so fundamental to representation and classification, has now become a central force dividing populations, and spoke also about the continued value of Williams's arguments regarding 'structures of feeling' in view of current debates about the importance of 'affect'.

In examining the democratic revolution, Sheila Rowbotham (Manchester) noted the importance of democratic practice for Williams who recognised its precarious gains. She recalled Williams involvement in various Labour causes and discussed the extent to which his vision was male-oriented. Elizabeth Silva (CRESC) noted the importance of creativity, everyday life, and the ordinary, in Williams' work. Finally, addressing the industrial revolution, Huw Beynon (Cardiff) spoke movingly about Williams's views about manual work, and the need to recognise the creativity in industrial production as well as Williams's complex relationship to Welsh identities. Patrick Joyce (CRESC) responded by noting the importance of questioning the grand narrative attaching importance to the industrial revolution and class, and pointed to the need to register the significance of popular identities, especially in their relationship to the state, expert knowledge, and governmentality.

Collectively, then, the afternoon's discussion recognised old debates and new issues, with CRESC's July conference offering the next chance to rejoin these areas of concern.

Research Theme 1
Cultural Economy

Cultural economy is a new term that threatens to confuse an audience already struggling to understand the difference between political economy and mainstream economics. Hence Paul du Gay's opening contribution on why we need cultural economy. The breadth of our research agenda is then illustrated by Karel Williams' introduction to our theme 1 work on social elites.

What is cultural economy?

The sets of processes, relations and techniques we have come to know as 'the economy' appear no longer quite as well-grounded as perhaps once they did. Many of the old certainties – both practical and academic – concerning what makes firms hold together or markets work seems less clear cut and our knowledge of them more partial. Yet among all the uncertainty and contestation has emerged – or better 're-emerged' – a claim about the importance of culture both to understanding what's happening to contemporary economic and organizational life, and to effective practical interventions in the worlds of production and consumption. The term 'cultural economy' is frequently deployed as a way of characterising these developments. It forms the main focus of the work of CRESC's Theme 1 research programme.

Like any umbrella heading, 'cultural economy' is a term that covers a multitude of distinctive and often non-reducible developments. Three in particular stand out.

First, in a number of organizational settings – public, private and third sector – senior managers have found themselves turning to 'culture' as a means of attempting to improve organizational performance. 'Culture change' programmes have become one of the most popular techniques in the managerial repertoire, often trumping more traditional concerns with reforming organizational structure or systems. This concern with 'culture' is premised, in large part, on assumptions about the imperatives driving epochal changes in the organizational environment – globalization, 'the knowledge revolution' , the network society and so forth – and the need to respond to these at the level of people's symbolic and material relationships to the

work they perform. 'Culture' occupies a privileged position here because it is seen to play a crucial role in structuring the way people think, feel and act.

Second, in the social and human sciences an increasing preoccupation with the analysis of cultural forms has occurred at the same time as a parallel growth in the sense that culture is not limited to a particular sphere or set of activities – the arts, the cultural industries – but is basically to be found everywhere. As a result, objects, practices and techniques that were previously taken to be 'purely' economic in character – money, marketing, and accruals accounting, for instance – were always, in addition, essentially cultural in character.

Finally, the term 'cultural economy' is associated with a range of grand or 'epochal' theories about the nature and direction of economic and organizational change - often associated with terms such as 'economies of signs', the 'network society' and 'entrepreneurial governance' - in which it is claimed that we are entering or have entered an era in which economic and organizational life has become thoroughly 'culturalised'.

Researchers at CRESC bring a wide range of social scientific expertise, both quantitative and qualitative, from business analysis to ethnography, to bear on each of these strands of 'cultural economy'. They do so with a view both to building, through detailed empirical work on specific sites, a multifaceted picture of how contemporary 'cultural economies' are put together and operate, and through a interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological focus, an innovative combination of political economic and cultural economic analysis.

Reviving elites research

It is time to revive elites research which was an important part of 1960s radical sociology and political science more than a generation ago when authors like C Wright Mills tried to understand Eisenhower and Kennedy's America. The study of elites was eclipsed in the 1970s as old 'establishments' were displaced and Marxisant paranoia went out of fashion. In New Labour Britain, we recognise the importance of social exclusion and study

the lowest and most marginal groups but are curiously reluctant to study upper social groups.

The widening of income differentials over the past twenty years has benefited a few, including the chief executives in Britain's 100 largest companies (the FTSE 100) who have obtained pay rises of about 25% each year for the past twenty years. In 1980, the FTSE chief executive earned an average £53,000 or just 10 times the wage of a manual worker; by 2002 the FTSE chief executive earned £1,369,000 or 76 times the wage of a manual worker. CRESC researchers from MBS has already argued that mega pay for chief executives in giant FTSE 100 firms represents 'value skimming' in firms where million pound salaries account for a very small proportion of profit or turnover.

These business researchers have now joined forces with CRESC sociologists to consider the consequences for social cohesion and the broader question of whether the changes since 1979 have created new business elites with a role in the exercise of power and the reproduction of privilege. The impact on cohesion is obvious when middle class salaries have generally increased modestly and the average income of all UK households in the top income quintile is no more than £28,000.

The researchers do not start from the traditional position that elite status and power arises from a position at the apex of an organisation, nor do they assume that elites necessarily intersect to create an inner circle. They are investigating three distinct business groups with limited overlap: the FTSE 100 CEOs, the high net worth individuals who get into the rich lists and the new City rich who have made their money from investment banking, private equity and hedge funds. But, how does all this fit together in our governance and what does the new privilege imply? In framing an answer we will draw on broader CRESC interests in capital, assets and resources theories of stratification which focus attention on the diverse resources which are used to (re)produce privilege. Maybe our new elites collectively have no public project beyond their private commitment to the enrichment of their families.

Research Theme 2
Transformations in Media, Culture and Economy

CRESC has a distinctive approach to media research where the issues of media social and economic change are already the subject of lively debate. In this newsletter Marie Gillespie provides an overview of the CRESC's approach to media research; Richard Collins provides the background to our interest in current debates concerning the future of public service broadcasting; and Farida Vis then presents some thoughts about media stereotyping based on her research into print-media and the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Overview

The media are a site of privileged access and insight into the changing relationship between culture, economy and society. But claims about the changes brought about by media technologies are often exaggerated or speculative. Questions about the nature and extent, pace and scope of change often get blurred. And, research into media policy, economics and business is seldom successfully integrated with work on media and socio-cultural change. The distinctive goal of CRESC's media research is to tackle these problems by bringing into closer dialogue perspectives from sociology and anthropology, media and cultural studies, business studies and economic analysis in order to provide a more measured assessment of change than is currently available.

CRESC's media research comprises three sets of projects on: a) media economics and production; b) media audiences, publics and users; and c) media regulation and governance. Over the course of the next few years, through the projects we will explore a series of inter-related questions. Under what circumstances do media catalyse change? How do media institutions and workers organise and negotiate the economic and cultural dimensions of their activities? What role does media consumption play in the maintenance or transformation of identities, everyday life and citizenship? How are new information and communications networks used by transnational religious, linguistic or political communities? What is the nature of media governance and regulation today, and what light do they shed on wider processes of change?

The future of PSB

The intense contemporary debate in the UK about the future of the BBC is representative of a wider, global, uncertainty about the future of public service broadcasting (PSB).

UK debate has focused on the terms under which the BBC's Royal Charter will be renewed (for non-renewal seems inconceivable) in 2006 and has widened to include a critical review of the whole of UK broadcasting. But elsewhere PSB is under pervasive scrutiny. In Eastern and Central Europe, hopes that the creation of public service broadcasters would foster a strong civil society have largely been frustrated. German commercial broadcasters have brought a European Court case against German PSB, the EU's biggest and richest. The precedent here is the judgement on state aids in the case of a bus company, Altmark Trans, which potentially puts in question established mechanisms of PSB funding throughout the EU. In other PSB heartlands PSB's role is changing, sometimes positively as in Taiwan which established its first PSB in 2004!

What has provoked this pervasive scrutiny? Several factors have combined to put PSB in question. Technological change has exposed PSB to much more competition. PSB have often responded by mimicking their competitors: were the BBC's 'Robot Wars' and Channel 4's 'Big Brother' PSB? And the terms of the policy debate have changed putting PSB on the back foot: the Peacock Report of 1986 decisively reframed broadcasting policy. PSB is now assessed as a response to putative failures in the broadcasting market as a whole rather than as something valid in its own right.

CRESC researchers are probing how far PSB and commercial broadcasting practice are congruent and situating the arguments for, and re-engineering of, PSB change in relation to wider debates about public sector reform. We are comparing the mobilisation of the concept of market failure, and potentially countervailing conceptual frames, in the PSB policy and practice of selected EU states. And we are considering both normatively and empirically the relationship between, and consequences of, mobilisation of the concepts of 'consumer' and 'citizen' in UK policy and practice.

The perpetrator/victim axis

Current debates on the study of (print) media representation within the field of media studies have not merely focused on 'what' is being represented by 'whom', but are increasingly concerned with the way in which various protagonists gain access to the media and at what cost. Within the representation of war and conflict, strikingly evident within the current occupation of Iraq and in the ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict, there is often a high price to pay for those who have very limited means of accessing the global media.

To gain access to the media, the marginalised protagonist must perform a role that is familiar and recognisable to the audience. This role is most commonly that of the deviant, the 'terrorist', and the protagonist is expected to remain 'in character' for the duration of the performance. This then leaves for very limited information about the issues such a protagonist is aiming to communicate.

However, for all those who are willing to perform such roles or those who are left with little choice but to perform in such a way, there are at the same time those who remain voiceless altogether. Within the representation of war and conflict the child often stays voiceless and without agency and remains trapped within symbolic all-encompassing phrases such as 'stone-thrower', 'child-soldier' or simply 'victim'.

Analysis focused on this perpetrator/victim axis requires a strong engagement with the relationship between text and image and can serve to enrich media studies analysis far beyond the confines of the conventional study of representation of war and conflict.

Research Theme 3
Culture, Governance and Citizenship

The interdisciplinary interest of sociologists, historians and others in liberal government has already produced innovative work. Here Tony Bennett begins by explaining how such concerns inform theme 3 research. Francis Dodsworth and Kath Woodward then illustrate the scope of the theme 3 agenda with contributions about their projects on the architecture of administration and new sporting identities.

Overview

"Culture, governance and citizenship: the formation and transformation of liberal government". This is, admittedly, a bit of a mouthful for a theme title - but it serves well as a way of indicating the distinctive nature of our approach. For we are interested in these relations over a longer historical period than most of the other research that CRESC is undertaking. We take our initial bearings from the development of new forms of liberal government, and the importance these accorded questions of taste and culture, that accompanied the development of 18th century market society; and consider how the role of culture in both making and governing citizens has been transformed in a number of stages along the way from then through to contemporary forms of neo-liberalism.

Two senses of culture inform our concerns. The first focuses on the respects in which particular cultural assumptions are coded into the material environments of cities, states and markets - with how culture is 'hard-wired' into the arrangements governing how, as citizens and subjects, we go about our everyday lives. The second concerns the ways in which distinctive kinds of cultural expertise - from those of city planning, through the work of archaeologists and anthropologists in museums, to the work of sports specialists and administrators - inform the activities of cultural institutions like museums, libraries, and football clubs and the ways in which these shape the codes and expectations of civic conduct.

Francis Dodsworth illustrates the first of these concerns in his work focused on the role of government architecture in giving the state an independent material form that also shapes how the business of government is conducted. And Kath Woodward illustrates the second concern in outlining her work on the role of cultural diversity programmes in soccer clubs.

The architecture of administration

Liberal government is predicated upon an idea of the state as a neutral agency, separate from the government and the citizens, whose task is to administer the population. The supposed neutrality of the state has been the subject of much critique; however its existence as a distinct entity and its role in government is generally taken for granted. Our research emphasises the historicity of this formation, focusing in particular on the process of the state's material construction, which defined its identity and established its durability.

The building of the first government offices on Whitehall – Admiralty House by Thomas Ripley (1722) and the Treasury (1733) and Horse Guards (1748) buildings by William Kent – constitutes the separation of the administrative state from the Royal household. Concentrating on one of these buildings, the Treasury, I explore the significance of its neo-Palladian style and its formal model in the country house.

Architecture was a vehicle through which the government could demonstrate their ability to adhere to the celebrated principles of antiquity: the Palladian allusion to Rome was used by Walpole's government to counter opposition criticism of their corruption and self-interest, making instead an architectural statement about the virtue of their officers and their commitment to the common good. At the same time the allusion to several famous country houses drew parallels with the idea of 'good husbandry' and estate management and sought to legitimise the activity of the government through its competence.

In the process the offices of administration were separated from the Court, the location of politics. Focusing the analysis on the interplay between specific political events and cultural practices allows us to develop an understanding of the relationship between the material, the cultural and the political without falling back on vague terms like 'cultural change' or ascribing to them mysterious powers of causation.

New sporting identities?

Diversity, inclusion, inequality and cohesion are increasingly the focus of government initiatives and interventions, for example as stated in recent Home Office policy statements on race equality. The ever-reformulating and reformulated discourse of equality and diversity is an important element in cultural transformation which impacts upon all areas of social life, including sport.

Sport offers an ever expanding site within popular culture, which combines routine practices, participation and spectatorship, as well as the razzamatazz of celebrity. Expertise within the field of sport takes multiple forms, for example as expressed in lay knowledge, that of the celebrity practitioners and media representatives which forms part of that lay knowledge, and the knowledge produced through policy directives covering all aspects of social inclusion, such as 'race', 'ethnicity', gender, sexuality and disability.

This research focuses on the policy and practice of sport, exploring the relations between policy statements and policy implementation, such as that which takes place at club level through initiatives designed to challenge social exclusion and promote diversity which have been undertaken by many sports providers such as football clubs. We focus on football in order to look at what kind of transformations might, or might not, be taking place within sport in Premiership clubs and a few nearer home in the lower depths.

What sort of selves are being made and re-made, or reinstated, at this key national cultural site which is so marked by competition as well as participation and collaboration? The aim is to explore the new identity positions that might be made available and how new citizen selves might be made and remade within discourses of diversity. To use the contemporary language of diversity in football, how does the sport Kick it Out?

Research Theme 4
Cultural Values and Politics

Against a background of growing concern about social disorder, isolation, and the fate of community, Mike Savage and Penny Harvey here introduce CRESC's distinctive approach to cultural values and politics which breaks with the standard assumptions of policy makers.

Against "hypodermic injection"

Hitherto, most research on social exclusion and social cohesion has focused on groups seen as particularly vulnerable, sometimes identified as 'socially excluded'. The implication is that there is something 'lacking' in these groups which might be redressed by policy intervention, so underwriting a politics of 'deficit' (or of 'hypodermic injection') where it is seen as essential to generate more of something (whether this be 'skills', 'social capital', or 'benefits') and to instil this in 'problem' groups. Expertise, sometimes embodied in technology or infrastructure, is seen as a neutral tool to aid change. The popularity of "social capital" concepts illustrates the dominance of this perspective on social cohesion. We will give major weight to developing new, more critical concepts of social capital so that we can think in deeper terms about the processes that give rise to trust and reciprocity. We also want to look critically at the kinds of knowledges that expert, elite groups deploy, so that we are able to offer critical commentaries on existing policy and research as the same time that we offer a new perspective.

We will bring together the expertise of anthropologists, sociologists, geographers and historians in an unusual inter-disciplinary team. Both our main projects will seek to develop an alternative approach to cultural values and politics. Here Mike Savage introduces our research interests in Social Cohesion, and Penny Harvey introduces The Cultural Politics of Knowledge and Expertise.

Social Cohesion

Here we are interested in developing a richer understanding of social cohesion, predominantly in the British context. Here social cohesion is not a given or normal state that is subject to external stresses and strains that can thereby exclude vulnerable groups. Rather, we see the definition of social cohesion itself as contested, and enacted in a wide array of socio-cultural practices. We need to take seriously how people themselves construe the social order, and how their routine practices exemplify understandings of cohesion and division. We are concerned to unravel the powerful nostalgia which suggests that cohesion existed in the past, and subject such visions to critical analysis.

We will seek to conduct historical analyses on post war British cultural practices to assess whether we can systematically talk about the shift away from collective to more individualistic cultures. We will seek to subject nostalgic thinking to detailed empirical work on the nature of social life in the 1950s and 1960s using neglected source material from contemporary social science studies. We are also interested in thinking about the kind of emerging social networks and solidarities associated with new technologies, lifestyle practices and political movements to see if they permit new kinds of social cohesion. Here we will probably focus on the anti-globalisation movement.

Finally, our early interests will include considering the changing nature of household relationships and family forms, and their relationship to social cohesion. How far can we trace the emergence of more privatised relationships between individuals within households, and how far do domestic technologies change people's relationship with each other?

The cultural politics of knowledge and expertise

While 'change' is generally taken as a defining feature of contemporary social life, 'culture' is more usually presumed to be an enduring set of habits and assumptions. In this approach 'culture' and 'change' are seen to work against each other. Within the context of programmes for planned social change – whether instigated by governments, NGOs, private companies, community groups or entrepreneurial individuals – the goals of stimulating economic activity, or of modernising social organisation are achieved through what is often referred to as the management of 'change'. However, such 'management' is more usually directed at the control of 'culture' – where culture is understood as a block to change (something that people have to leave behind and move away from), or as a resource for change (something that can be harnessed for the benefit of the project in question). Within this general frame, which also encompasses the opposition between natural science and a recalcitrant natural world, 'experts' emerge as key agents of change. Expert knowledge is the 'culture of no culture' yet it is also by definition partial and specialised. Experts are called on to deploy specialist knowledge in the processes of forecasting, planning, mapping, and managing social and cultural landscapes in order to facilitate change.

We will look at how the knowledges and values of experts are negotiated in practice, and at the techniques through which change is either made visible, or shown to be absent. We will also examine how particular technical developments configure 'publics' in new ways. There is a politics of recognition inherent in the contemporary focus on 'culture' and 'change' where the emphasis on identity, authenticity and appropriate agency, in practice produces gaps where those spaces, communities and individuals unable to manifest appropriate difference are not recognised as culturally relevant. These are manifestations of social exclusion which never cohere as social movements or oppositional spaces but which can nevertheless generate alternative relationships to both state power and civil society A third strand of our project on the politics of knowledge and expertise relates to the ways in which expert knowledge (and concerns over how such knowledge impacts on and engages with the everyday lives of non-experts) invokes the ethical. 'Transparency', 'accountability', 'trust', 'multiculturalism', 'cosmopolitanism', 'human rights', have become key sociological concepts of our time. Within this project we will investigate how and when society refashions itself as an ethnical project. We will also deploy ethnographic and comparative methods to think deeply about the cultural dimensions of this process by looking at alternative ways of articulating the ethical.

We will explore these issues through a series of linked ethnographic case studies ranging from road building in Peru, through the values imparted to working class residents in England, through ethnographic inquiries of responsibility and choice, and the meaning of family and religion in local English contexts. The research pursued in this theme brings together sociologists, anthropologists and geographers in an unusual interdisciplinary combination to provide a distinctive, empirically grounded approach to cultural values and politics.

News

Inaugural CRESC conference:

'Culture and Social Change: Disciplinary Exchanges'

11-13 July 2005
Hulme Hall, University of Manchester.

Keynote Speakers:

Craig Calhoun (Sociology, New York University)
Veena Das (Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University)
Ash Amin (Geography, Durham)
Nigel Thrift (Geography, Oxford)

Andrew Abbott (Chicago)
Roger Burrows (York)
Lawrence Grossberg (North Carolina)
John R Hall (California)
Emily Martin (New York University)
Jennifer Mason (Leeds)

Graham Murdock (Loughborough)
Elspeth Probyn (Sydney)
Angela McRobbie (Goldsmiths)
Andrew Sayer (Lancaster)
Liz Stanley (Newcastle)

This conference will comprise a series of key note sessions exploring the development and elaboration of our understanding of socio-cultural change, as well as papers in a series of themes focused to allow us to examine the different perspectives of academic disciplines on culture and social change. Leading anthropologists, historians, geographers, management scientists, and sociologists will talk about ways of conceiving culture within their disciplines. A particular feature will be a plenary roundtable where they debate different conceptions of culture in their disciplines with each other.

We invite papers from researchers who can contribute to discussion of these issues within any one of our four research themes:
1) cultural economy; (2) changing media cultures and economy;
3) cultural governance and citizenship; (4) changing cultural values and politics

Important dates:

28 February 2005: Abstracts submission deadline (late abstracts by negotiation with the organisers)
10 June 2005: Conference booking deadline (places subject to availability)
23 June 2005: Full paper submission deadline

SOSIG - Social Science Information Gateway

The CRESC website (www.cresc.ac.uk) has been included in the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG) Catalogue (www.sosig.ac.uk). SOSIG is a freely available internet service which aims to provide a trusted source of selected, high quality internet information for students, academics, researchers and practitioners in the social sciences, business and law. It is part of the Resource Discovery Network (RDN) (www.rdn.ac.uk).

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