



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN TIMES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Outline:

In broad terms, social change can be defined as change in typical characteristics of a society, such as norms, values, cultural products and symbols (Calhoun, 1992; Endruweit, 1989). Social change may occur gradually, as with the growing proportion of elderly in many Western societies, or may be spurred by sudden, dramatic transformation of economic, political, and social institutions, as was the case with the breakdown of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Whereas social change has been a prominent research focus in sociology over the last century, it only became a topic of interest to developmental psychology in recent decades. Because changing relations between the developing person and his or her changing context are the basic process involved in human development, psychological research on social change offers new insights into developmental processes. As social change characterizes change at the societal level or at the level of the macrosystem, developmental psychologists have to relate change at the level of society to change (development) at the individual level. For example, the effects of change at the level of the macrosystem on the lives of individuals may be mediated by changes in the immediate social systems, such as the family, the workplace and in the interplay between these systems. In addition, effects of social change on the lives of individuals may vary due to resources and coping processes and even by biological/genetic factors.

In the seminar, we intend not only to focus on rapid changes like the impact of the breakdown of the communist system on human adaptation and the development in Germany and Eastern Europe, but also on broader phenomena of social change that can be observed across the world, such as globalization of life paths. We will discuss theoretical models on the effect of social change on human development, effective research designs on studying social change, main lessons learned from the available studies on individual development in times of social change and future research needs.

Teaching Methods:

- **Oral presentation:** Students will work in pairs or alone on different conceptual, methodological and empirical papers and prepare an overview over the papers (Power-Point-Presentation). They will then meet with the course leaders to discuss questions that still remain open. In addition to summarizing the key points, the presenters are expected to present the strengths and weaknesses of the studies. Thereafter there will

be room for further discussion on how the results could be applied to other societal contexts and emerging trends.

- Furthermore, students are expected to participate in **midterm exams** as well as in a **written test** with a few open questions at the end of the term.

Target Group:

Advanced MA and PhD-students interested in human development and in interdisciplinary research in particular. Students from the FSU and PSU will intensively work together: As far as possible each preparatory group will consist of German and American students. Course language will be English.

Introductory references:

- Pinguat, M. & Silbereisen, R. K. (2004). Human development in times of social change: Theoretical considerations and research needs. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 28, 289-298.
- Crockett, L. J. & Silbereisen, R. K. (2000) (Ed.). *Negotiating adolescence in times of social change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Silbereisen, R.K. & Youniss, J. (Ed.). (2001). Families and development in childhood and adolescence: Germany before and after reunification (Special issue). *American Behavioral Scientist*, 44 (11), 1781-1971.