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# Comparative Charting of Social Change in Four Industrialized Societies

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Contemporary analysts of social change have somehow abandoned the ambitious tenet of building a general theory which could predict or explain all the contemporary forms of social change. A search of laws of history, or works on the stages of development (Rostow), are no more pertinent. R. Boudon has proposed an analysis of the reasons why such a loss of interest for a general theory on social change occurred.

According to Boudon, social systems are not regulated by general laws which are extensible to all societies. Consequently, the search for universal laws must be abandoned and analysis of social change must give up the "monologic" perspective (Boudon 1983:104). In its place, he suggests to draw some possible statements (in French, "énoncés de possibles"), i.e. relationships which have a certain probability, in a certain location and a certain time, instead of general laws of the form of conditional laws or transitional laws. From the Boudon's individualistic approach, there is no more universal laws because sociologist's observed propositions are in part the results of aggregate actions of individuals.

Almost all general propositions (laws) in social sciences are in fact situated observations which are not universal, and it could be almost possible to pose counter-examples. Otherwise, Boudon suggests to consider the existing theories of social change as formal models which need to be adapted to every specific and concrete situations.

Ted Caplos also criticized social change studies, more precisely empirical studies, saying that the parallel between social change and technological change is misleading. "Instead of being continuous, like scientific-technological progress, social change seems to be episodic, non-consultative, non-consistent and non-reversible" (Caplow, 1988:3).

Too severe a diagnosis? In fact, these two briefly referred to comments, from different perspectives, reveal or show a growing uneasiness with the traditional ways of studying social change.

A new approach is essential, which will make possible to observe and to consider the diversity of ongoing social change, and, more precisely, which facilitate the observation of non-cumulative and non-consistent change. This

can be done with social trend analysis.

## Social trend analysis

Social trend analysis is sitting between social reporting and system analysis of the global society.

Social indications "designate statistics that are supposed to have significance for the quality of life, and sets of social indicators designate a social report" (Mikalos, 1982:2). There is a normative perspective in constructing social indicators. They intend to measure goal attainment, or to evaluate and compare the respective performance of different countries. By themselves, social indicators do not form a social system. They are built to measure different aspects or dimensions of social life, or to evaluate current public policy and programmes. International comparisons of social indicators are aimed at comparing differential goal attainment from one country to another. Countries are in fact located on a continuum. Consider, for example, life expectancy in good health after 65. Behind this social indicator, there is a clear or precise objective: staying in good health as long as possible. If this indicator increases, one expects to say that the quality of life is increasing; and the quality of life is supposed to be higher in a society in which this indicator is also higher.

"Social indicators facilitate establishing social goals and policies. For example, a time series comparing life expectancy of several countries shows that life expectancy in the United States is lower than in the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan and Sweden. Such information on levels attained by other countries shows us what is attainable and stimulated action" (Ferris, 1988:609-610).

Opposed to social reporting, one finds global diagnosis which summarize, under a single heading or a macro-trend, a great lot of particular trends: post-modern society, dependent society, traditional or modern society, etc. A large number of segments are postulated to go in the same direction, and the macro-trend either summarizes these particular or specific trends, or is presented as the cause which orientate them in a certain direction: this approach raises many questions: to what extent all the trends are really convergent? For example, is France really a post-modern society? Is it possible to speak of the process of Europeanization in contemporary United States (Oxford Analytica)?

Trend analysis, in the perspective proposed here is somewhere between the two approaches stated before.

A French research team, who have published an article under the pseudonym Louis Dim, define trends in this way: The trends which have been identified are sometimes in the nature of behaviour which can be isolated and taken as an indicator of a more general movement. For example, the decrease in religious practice or the increase in participation in sport or sports-related activities. Other trends are much more global, they formulate an overall judgement on a social sector or on an aspect of society. They refer to a sociological theory by which the phenomenon is delimited and can be judged. (Louis Dim, 1985:401)

The analysis of trends is often associated with the study of phenomena which are quantifiable or which have direct relevance to government policies (income, unemployment, population, etc.). Some trends are better documented than others, mainly because they are based on data or indicators gathered by a government statistical office, indicators which have, in a way, received the lion's share of analysis. Changes in income, voting, fecundity, unemployment, for example, are better known than those in division of domestic labour or in use of leisure time. However trends can be analysed other than quantitatively, it is also possible to discern the direction of phenomena with a certain amount of accuracy by using qualitative studies or monographs: strengthening of kinship, increases in new forms of religious practice, etc. It is this broad concept of trends such as these that we are speaking of.

The trend is not an indicator nor a statistical series. It is a diagnosis on a social segment, narrowly defined (declining fertility, for example) or much more wide (increasing mobility of daily life). In the first case, the trend is in fact close to an indicator, but in the second one, it comes from the convergence of many indicators, of many statistical series.

Our unit of analysis is a trend, i.e. a series of values representing the incidence of some item of social behavior in a given population at points of time in a consecutive sequence. Guidelines, annexed).

The trend is a sector-based diagnosis of the changes in and the direction of a phenomenon or of an aspect of social reality, for example, a drop in the birth rate, an increase in disposable income per inhabitant, an increase in poverty, a decrease of the inequality between the sexes, an increase in the importance of kinship, a growth of individualism, a decrease in the practice of religion, etc.

Trend analyses are in fact studies of the present situation in light of the past. It must not be confused with prediction of the future, nor with futurology. It is a way of studying changes "en cours". This perspective is important for another reason: the comparative purpose.

## Theoretical framework and method

The array of trends to be analysed is extremely broad and we did not want to use too narrow a theoretical framework. The choice of trends cannot be firmly fixed since it will be modified somewhat as the analysis goes along, as the French experience has shown. The choice is not based on definite theoretical bases, thus we are not limiting ourselves to the study of marginal trends which may reveal tomorrow's norms, for it is far from certain that this will be the case. The critique of Reich's work, the well-known essay on the new culture published in the 60's, by Hamilton and Wright (1986) is revealing in this respect. It is no longer necessary to limit oneself to known territory, because analysis should also be able to discern new trends, especially outside the sphere of work, although this remains important. This explains why the choice of trends to be studied is based mainly on a group of hypotheses, not a single one, and remains open to change. The trends are in fact derived from sociologically driven categories.

We have agreed with the other research teams to give priority to behaviour, ritualized situations in institutions and to structures, giving lesser importance to values and social perceptions. The priority given to recently identified trends does not mean that the realm of social perceptions will be completely absent. Social representation is less "objective", for lack of a better term, than behavior, at least a priori. People's jobs, salaries, levels of education, whether they have a religious or civil marriage, their actual number of children, are things which can be observed quite accurately, taking errors of measures into account. Aspirations as to salary, the feeling of being deprived, the kind of marriage intended, the number of children desired, satisfaction in a couple's relationship, are all kinds of perceptions and attitudes. Measures of these things are not only filled with errors, they are also more unstable. The number of children, salary or level of education are characteristics which are probably more stable than aspirations, for example.

As to theory, it seems difficult to omit the domain of social imagery and to only take into account behaviour, or more factual data on individuals. Let us not forget that actors also give a meaning to their conduct. Measuring perceptions, while difficult, thus seems relevant and necessary to an in depth understanding of social phenomena and conduct.

The analysis of relations among trends is intended to be still more inductive. At this stage of the project, we want to hypothesize as little as possible about the relationships. Critical analysis of the literature shows that this inductive approach can be very fruitful. We are not starting out with a general theory about global society, such as those of D. Bell, H. Braverman and others, no matter how attractive and pertinent they may be. We intend rather to work out empirically what the overall interpretation might be, somewhat like the method of Oxford Analytica in *America in Perspective*. An example will illustrate our method. It is already possible to gather, from the analysis of several indicators, some

overall trends: an increase in individualism, mobility in daily life, a change from hierarchy to network, etc. These broad trends are the result of observation of a large number of indicators. It is now the analyst's task to interpret the, to discern all the implications, so that the process results in a tentative generalization or theory about all the data.

It must be noted that the proposed study of trends will try to work out, as far as possible, the variations in the sub-groups such as age, sex, social and cultural group and region. The trends are not consistent and enormous differences exist side by side. This has been shown in several recent studies, Bella's work, for example. The analysis of trends will not be limited to the study of average or means only.

### Studying trends in four industrialized societies

Our proposed research project intends to identify the principal trends with characterize global society by doing secondary analysis of existing data. Therefore, the first task will be to trace and synthesize published or available observations and analyses.

Up to now, nothing original, for such studies yet exist in number, on all the possible objects. For example, Canadian Social Trends publish excellent analysis on different indicators and different trends. The same for publications like British Social Attitude, Social and Cultural Report (Holland), works published by Eurobarometers, etc. There are fewer analyses of relationship between trends, and fewer again are the attempts to study systematic relationship between a large set of trends. This is precisely what we are planning to do. The level of the proposed analysis is somewhere between the social reporting and the systemic analysis of a large, global, macro-trend which summarize a very large sample of specific trends.

The Louis Dim team in France took the initiative by inviting other research groups from various countries to undertake a comparative analysis of trends, adopting as closely as possible the methods which they have worked out over the last several years. Three teams have already agreed to participate in the project, one from the USA, led by Theodore Caplow, a German team led by Glatzer and Hondrich, and an IQRC team from Quebec, led by S. Langlois. A preliminary meeting was held in Paris in May of 1987 to establish the main goals of the project and to choose which trends which would be observed. The project at hand is now part of a co-operative venture involving several teams from various countries, teams which share the same goal and approach to the study. The Quebec team, based at IQRC, has been given the secretarial role in this little group, coordinating the development of this project.

The area to be covered and the indicators are not chosen for the purpose of verifying a particular theory of social change, nor to illustrate a dominant trend (for example, the increase in individualism in contemporary society). We know as well that many of the indicators of social change which are used, in scientific analyses and in

public debate, reflect an era when the majority of the population spent most of its time working and the times when survival was a daily challenge: unemployment, standard of living based on steady income, poverty, jobs and social position were and are the indicators most relied on in studies of the social structure. We do not deny their relevance, quite the contrary, but it seems to us necessary to develop others which can reveal ongoing social changes (owning a second home, mass media consumption, touristic travel abroad, etc.), indicators which are usually outside the sphere of work which will point out new trends. Anything to do with the world of work will, however, still have an important place in the analysis of trends.

The final choice of the data to be analysed, of the trends to be examined, was based on hypotheses in existing monographs or put forward in some theories about social change, but also, relied on the observations of researchers and on research going on elsewhere, always taking available date into account.

A number of 79 trends were identified at the first meeting of the international group in which our team is participating, based on a preliminary list drawn up by the French team. We agree that the area to be covered is vast. It can be done, however. The Louis Dim group's first attempts which is going on in France showed this. Basically, it is a question of drawing up a brief synthesis of what is known, in the form of trends, about each of the things on the list.

Each team undertakes an analysis of the trends which describe its own society, while following the common method as closely as possible, basically that suggested in the article by L. Dim, 1985, in order to allow for later comparative study. The importance, or the interest, of a comparative study is obvious. It is, among other things, an excellent way to the extend the analysis of causal relations. Let us look at a known example: Has development of education promoted an increase in intergenerational social mobility? There may be a whole new light put on the analysis of relations between these two trends after comparative examination by four societies.

This comparative study of different societies poses enormous problems. Faced with these problems, there are two attitudes to take. We could do nothing, since there are so many difficulties. Or we would try to iron out the problems in order to prepare a trial method, however imperfect it may be at first. This is what we decided upon. In order to smooth out the difficulties, it was agreed that a common grid of theses for the study of trends would be drawn up and that, as much as possible, the representative data concerning the overall society would be used and the measures to be used would be clearly elucidated. But, above all, it was agreed that the proposed comparative analysis would bear on the direction of trends and the relations among the trends themselves. This approach minimizes the problems of comparison to some extent. Thus, it is not a rate or a precise measure which is to be compared (rate of unemployment, real income, etc.) but the direction of a trend and its relation to other trends.

## **The data**

We will be carrying out a secondary analysis of existing data and a synthesis of published works on a given subject. We will be trying to obtain a set of statistics, standardized as much as possible, starting from 1961 if possible, or from 1970, so as to have at least about fifteen years of observation in order to discern a trend. Where statistics may not be available, we will look for data observed for at least three separate periods of time, again so as to discern trends. This will be done mainly for the secondary analysis of data from surveys and the study of changes in social perceptions.

We have already identified about 250 series of statistics with which to characterize the trends we will deal with. Others will be added as the project advances, because the research consists precisely of identifying or even constructing such series for later analysis. The list of data is too long to include here. Examples are number of automobiles, real income per capita, circulation of daily newspapers, etc.

Priority will be given to quantitative data which can be compared in a given society and later between societies. Preliminary examination indicates that for the majority of trends in the attached list it is possible to find out at least one set of statistics. This preliminary data base will be completed by qualitative observations and analyses or by monographs concerning "phenomena portending the future", always working from secondary sources. These observations will clarify the process of some extent.

### **Scientific and social significance of the project**

This project may seem ambitious to some. However, the French experience during the past four or five years proves that it can be done and the results can be fruitful. The scope of the project is broad: the diagnosis of global society and its social changes using secondary analyses. One of the project's interests is to use existing data in order to arrive at a more in-depth analysis.

The comparative dimension should also be stressed. Despite the difficulties that this presents, we believe that the results will be productive. The comparison with other countries will allow us to go ahead with certain interpretations. □

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## **COMPARATIVE CHARTING OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

### **LIST OF TRENDS**

(Québec, December 1988)

#### **0. Context**

- 0.1 Demographic trends
- 0.2 Macro-economic trends
- 0.3 Macro-technological trends

#### **1. Age Groups**

- 1.1 Youth
- 1.2 Elders

#### **2. Microsocial**

- 2.1 Self identification
- 2.2 Kinship networks
- 2.3 Community and neighbour-hood types
- 2.4 Local autonomy
- 2.5 Voluntary associations
- 2.6 Sociability networks

#### **3. Women**

- 3.1 Female roles
- 3.2 Childbearing
- 3.3 Matrimonial models
- 3.4 Women's employment
- 3.5 Reproductive technologies

#### **4. Labour Market**

- 4.1 Unemployment
- 4.2 Skills and occupational levels
- 4.3 Types of employment
- 4.4 Sectors of the labour force
- 4.5 Computerization of work

#### **5. Labour and Management**

- 5.1 Structuring of jobs
- 5.2 Personnel administration
- 5.3 Size and types of enter-prises

#### **6. Social Stratification**

- 6.1 Occupational status
- 6.2 Social mobility
- 6.3 Economic inequality
- 6.4 Social inequality

#### **7. Social Relations**

- 7.1 Conflict
- 7.2 Negotiation
- 7.3 Norms of conduct
- 7.4 Authority
- 7.5 Public opinion

## **8. State and Service Institutions**

- 8.1 Educational system
- 8.2 Health system
- 8.3 Welfare system
- 8.4 Presence of state in society

## **9. Mobilizing Institutions**

- 9.1 Labour unions
- 9.2 Religious institutions
- 9.3 Military forces
- 9.4 Political parties
- 9.5 Mass media

## **10. Institutionalization of Social Forces**

- 10.1 Dispute settlement
- 10.2 Institutionalization of labour unions
- 10.3 Social movements
- 10.4 Interest groups

## **11. Ideologies**

- 11.1 Political differentiation
- 11.2 Confidence in institutions
- 11.3 Economic orientations
- 11.4 Radicalism
- 11.5 Religious beliefs

## **12. Household resources**

- 12.1 Personal and family income
- 12.2 Informal economy
- 12.3 Personal health and wealth

## **13. Lifestyle**

- 13.1 Market goods and services
- 13.2 Mass information
- 13.3 Personal health and disorders beauty practices
- 13.4 Time use
- 13.5 Daily mobility
- 13.6 Household production
- 13.7 Forms of erotic expression
- 13.8 Intoxication

## **14. Leisure**

- 14.1 Amount and use of free time
- 14.2 Vacation patterns

- 14.3 Athletics and sports
- 14.4 Cultural activities

## **15. Educational Attainment**

- 15.1 General education
- 15.2 Professional education
- 15.5 Continuing education

## **16. Exclusionary Phenomena**

- 16.1 Immigrants and ethnic minorities
- 16.2 Crime and punishment
- 16.3 Behavioral and emotional
- 16.4 Poverty

## **17. Attitudes and Values**

- 17.1 Satisfaction in life domains and in general
- 17.2 Perceptions of social problems
- 17.3 Orientations to the future
- 17.4 Values
- 17.5 National identity

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# The International Research Group for the Comparative Charting of Social Change

## (Club de Québec)

### Guidelines For New Members

#### Introduction

The International Research Group on the Comparative Charting of Social Change in Advanced Industrial Societies, informally known as the Club de Québec, was founded in 1986 by a group of sociologists and historians from France, West Germany, Canada, and the United States, who had been studying social trends in the respective countries. These separate studies attracted a fair amount of scholarly and popular attention but did not advance our general understanding of contemporary industrial society as much as they should have, for want of a comparative perspective. Without systematic international comparisons, it is impossible to know whether trends we discover in national societies are local accidents or features of a larger system.

Another reason for combining our efforts was that we had been using different methods to delineate social trends and wanted to standardize them to facilitate comparison.

The project was initially sponsored by Council for European Studies, but each national team has found the financial support of its own research operations. The Canadian team assumed responsibility for maintaining a central secretariat, at the Université Laval in Quebec. Meetings have been hosted in rotation by national teams: at Charlottesville in April 1986, Paris in April 1987, Bad Homburg in June 1988, Quebec in December 1988, and Charlottesville again in May 1989.

At Quebec in December 1988, responding to a request from Professor Constantin Tsoukalas of the National Social Research Center in Athens, the members voted to admit additional national teams on the following conditions:

1. Persons proposing to establish a national team, and professional personnel subsequently added to a national team, must be individually approved by a vote of the general membership of the International Research Group.
2. National teams are obligated to follow the research methods adopted by the International Research Group, including the standard format of trend reports, the list of trends for which reports are prepared, and the criteria for acceptable data.

3. Trend reports may be written in any language, but each national team has the responsibility of eventually making its reports available for publication in English.

4. Members of any national team shall have full access for their own scholarly purposes to the data gathered by other national teams, and shall make their own data reciprocally available.

#### The Research Problem

Social change is too large a topic to be manageable without further specification. We are specifically interested in the late twentieth century, the industrialized or partly industrialized nations and the social structures and institutional patterns that characterize the behavior of mass societies, especially those associated with the family, voluntary associations, work, leisure, education, religion, government and politics. Our unit of analysis is a trend, i.e. a series of values representing the incidence of some item of social behavior in a given population at points of time in a consecutive sequence. Most of our work has been done with time series 10 to 60 years long, ending as recently as possible, and covering such matters as family income, household expenditures, employment and unemployment, working conditions, the informal economy, marriage and divorce, household composition, kin networks, housing, migration, educational achievement, criminality, leisure patterns, health care, social movements, and so forth.

In the scholarly literature, a few trends have received the lion's share of attention. Economists have looked very closely at trends in economic growth, prices and wages. Political scientists have studied twentieth century trends in voting and party affiliation. Demographers have scrutinized trends in fertility and mortality. It is no coincidence that these are the areas of social life which lend themselves most readily to quantification and offer the longest time series. But a description of social change that limited itself to trends in economic development, political participation and population would be incomplete indeed. Even though quantification is initially more difficult in other institutional sectors, many of the difficulties have been overcome in recent years, and we can anticipate that the quality of data will continue to improve.

The International Research Group's standard list of

trends and indicators currently includes 77 trends grouped into 18 major categories. It is attached hereto. Note that the development of a national profile calls for the preparation of 77 trend reports, each corresponding to one of the numbered subheadings in the list, from 0.1 Demographic Trends to 17.5 National Identity. The first four national teams have already finished this phase of work, which takes from 12 to 36 months depending upon the man- and woman-power available, and they are currently engaged in the more challenging task of comparing their results. We anticipate that new national teams will complete their national profiles at various times during the next five years and we believe that this staggered schedule may be intellectually advantageous.

Following the list of trends and indicators, you will find, first, the standard format for trend reports, and second, a review of the project's long-term goals by two participants.

### Format for the Presentation of Trend Reports

#### Coverage

A trend report is prepared for each numbered subheading in the List of Trends and Indicators, e.g. 0.1 Demographic Trends, 0.2 Macroeconomic Trends, 0.3, Technological Trends. The items listed underneath each subheading constitute a check-list of topics that should be covered in the trend report, but the checklist is not intended to be inclusive.

#### Arrangement

A trend report normally has four sections: a brief summary of about five lines at the beginning, an explanatory text, a section of tables and figures, and a bibliography. Each table or figure is placed on a separate page. Factual statements in the explanatory text, as well as all tables and figures, should be fully referenced, but the bibliography is usually much more extensive than would be required for direct referencing alone.

If possible, trend reports should be prepared on an IBM or IBM-compatible personal computer, using Word Perfect for the text.

#### Labels

Every page of every trend report is labeled for each identification, as in this example:

[CCSC-US, 3/8/88, Trend #4,1, Draft #3, AC, Page #4]

Interpreted as follows:

CCSC-US: Comparative Charting of Social Change,

United States

3/8/88: Date Prepared

Trend #4.1: Taken from List of Trends and Indicators, 4.1 Unemployment.  
 Draft #3: Self-explanatory  
 AC: Preparer's initials, A. Carrier in this case  
 Page 4: Of this trend report

#### Criteria for Data

1. The data were obtained by empirical measurement or observation.
2. The data refer to an entire national society or a representative sample thereof.
3. The data may be expressed as a time series.
4. The time series covers a period of at least ten years, ending in 1983 or later.
5. The time series include measurements or observations for three or more time-intervals, obtained contemporaneously.
6. The data are defined in such a way that the measurements or observations can be replicated in other national societies.
7. The data are defined in such a way that the measurements or observations can be replicated in the same national society in future years.