



## Call for Papers: "Complexity and Truth"

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A complex society does not accommodate one truth for everybody. Different functional systems, different organizations, and different individuals perceive different things to be true. Truth is not regarded – or at least not during the last few centuries – to be an absolute, but rather a socially produced construct. This perception is increasing the complexity of society – another person really is “other” if even her or his concept of truth is a different one. As a result of the multiplicity of truth, there are constant negotiations and power struggles over how one specific truth can become binding for several people or even one (national, global?) society. The social production of truth takes place within complex social situations characterized by bargaining, fighting, forging of alliances, etc.

Tackling the question of complexity and truth is not limited to scholars of the social sciences. Ever since the Enlightenment, the quest for truth has been said to be the ultimate duty of historians. Source criticism and hermeneutics are intended to reveal historical facts in light of the infinite dimension of (societal) reality. Nonetheless, historical research is dominated by conflicting narratives. Hence, there is no one truth either at present or in distant memory. For quite some time, scholars from many historical subdisciplines have been striving to combine social-scientific principles and methods with historical research.

This special issue wishes to build on the relevant intersections between the different disciplines. This implies an interdisciplinary discussion of how truth is produced and accepted in different parts of society, in different regions of the world and different historical time periods, including functional systems, organizations, and interactions. While the call for papers is related to sociocybernetics and systems theory, it is open to all approaches oriented towards complexity. Beyond the broad field of the social sciences, we would also appreciate submissions from the entire field of historical research, including – but not restricted to –



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social history, economic history, business history, knowledge history, history of science, and history of technology.

We are looking for contributions that discuss the problem of complexity and truth within a wide range of disciplines and geographic regions, both empirically and theoretically. Some of the possible topics could be

- Science and complexity. According to thinkers such as Niklas Luhmann, science is the sphere of society where truth is produced as a medium for communication and as a code that can be applied in different ways. Here, it would be interesting to discuss how truth is produced by science (as an empty code applied through changing programs, as Luhmann claims, or in other ways?), how the different academic disciplines are united or divided by their conception of truth, and whether there are different truth regimes depending on geographic regions of the world, organizations, or institutions. In terms of the societal role of science, it is relevant to discuss how scientists can convey the complexity of their particular domain to the public at large.
- Politics and complexity. Politics is all about power; however, the definition of what is true can itself be a form of power. Political disputes are often disputes over what is true – only a mutual first agreement on its definition can make other types of argumentation possible later on. In recent times, “post-truth”, that is, the open delegitimization of things generally held to be true, has become an important political strategy. Here, it would be interesting to research the position of truth in politics under conditions of complexity.
- Organizations, Institutions, Enterprises. Organizations produce their own truth. This may be the importance of their own actions or products, the idea of their being special, or having hidden knowledge that could change the situation of the organization in future – and therefore is in danger of being leaked to outside actors. The internal treatment of truth can be part of an organizational culture or institution, which pre-defines what can be understood as truth in the future.
- Economy and Complexity. Economics as well as Business Administration strive to explain complex economic interactions by reducing empirical phenomena under



assumptions into theoretical models. Consistently, these explanatory approaches are challenged by incidents which they have been unable to explain. In the face of the current predominance of the Neoclassical School, it would be interesting to discuss to what extent the history of economic thought has been grinding to a halt. Furthermore, it would be relevant to discuss whether this development is leading to an inappropriate simplification of complexity in the sense of a self-limitation by leading economists.

- **Media and Communication.** Mass media and the press have always held a central role in the definition and diffusion of truth. Now, the classic mass media are in crisis and are being increasingly replaced by social networks, such as Facebook, and new channels that are open to propaganda and disinformation. At the same time, the old media are being accused of producing “fake news”. Here, it would be interesting to discuss how old media as well as new media have produced truth over time, whether and how this production has changed, and how to understand the -apparently recent- trend of producing “alternative facts”. One of these questions could be to which extent established theoretical concepts can serve to answer the issues mentioned above. Is it still expedient to adhere to concepts such as the “public sphere”?
- **Conspiracy Theories.** Complex modern society, especially since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has given rise to conspiracy theories. These theories provide a reduction of complexity and a production of sense for individuals and organizations. Evidently, such theories have more influence nowadays. It would be worthwhile to discuss conspiracy theories, their origin, their social function, and their relationship to complexity.
- **Education for complexity.** In a complex society, the individual needs tools to reduce complexity without impeding an appropriate observation of reality. One important channel to build up this capacity is that of formal education. Here, it would be interesting to discuss whether and how schools help in developing this capacity in students and whether there is an awareness of the problem.

We are asking for abstracts of between 200 and 300 words in length and a short biographical sketch (around 100 words) to be sent to us (to both [peters@wisotech.rwth-aachen.de](mailto:peters@wisotech.rwth-aachen.de) and [paltmann@uce.edu.ec](mailto:paltmann@uce.edu.ec)) by December 1, 2017. We will get back to interested authors within



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two weeks after that date. The first versions of the texts (up to 8,000 words including abstract, tables, endnotes, and references) are due by March 15, 2018.