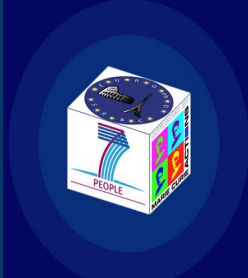**The methodological polytheism in the Social Representations literature and its implication in the contemporary communication era: distinctiveness and dialogue between multiple research methods (textual and image-based research sources and tools, traditional and new media-based research design, experimental and field oriented studies)**

European / International Joint Ph.D. in
Social Representation and Communication

The Anthropological Approach: its distinctive features and research methodology

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The Anthropological Approach to Social Representations

An overview through exemplary studies of selected key authors:

*Denise Jodelet (1991)
*Gerard Duveen & Barbara Lloyd (1993)
* Ben Asher (2003)

The Anthropological Approach to Social Representations

❑ **Main exponents**: Denise Jodelet (Jodelet 1984, 1989a, 1998b, 2003), Haas (2002, 2006), Kalampalikis (2007), Duveen & Lloyd (1993) etc.;

❑ **What's specific to this approach?**

1. S.R. are investigated within the socio-cultural context in which they occur (the researcher immerses himself/ herself in the subjects' environment);

2. Qualitative methodology:

- interviews;

- observation;

- examination of documents.

The rationale for studying Social Representations within an ethnographic framework – and the scientific utility of this endeavour

- Moscovici (e.g., 1987; 1993a; 1988; Moscovici & Marková, 1998; 2006): Social Representations Theory should be considered as the anthropology of contemporary culture.

- Valsiner (2012): investigation of the dynamic life of the populations under study– in order to grasp the myths, beliefs, imagery of a population, all these elements must be taken in context.

The rationale for studying Social Representations within an ethnographic framework – and the scientific utility of this endeavour

- **A population's system of knowledge can only be understood within the context in which it was created:**

- Moscovici: Factuality is never at the core of human exchanges (Moscovici, 1984a; Moscovici, 1987).

- Joffe: Human thinking is studied within itself, without comparing it to a given standard (Joffe, 1998).

Jodelet (1991): Madness and Social Representations – methodology employed

- Study of social representations of mental illness in a village in France, where the resident families were taking care of mentally ill patients.

Methods used:

- **participant observation;**
- **interviews with residents**;
- **examination of documents**;
- **interviews with nurses who cared for the patients and the families;**
- **a questionnaire**.
- **another set of interviews** were conducted on a representative sample of this population, who had filled in the **questionnaire** she constructed, in order to validate the results of the survey.

Jodelet (1991): Madness and Social Representations – the information conveyed by the data collected

- It portays a world in its internal dynamic functioning: the mentally ill were regarded as strange and ostracized in order to protect the pre-existent group from the threat they perceived by the infiltration of madness in their community.

Anchoring – which is normally employed to make the unfamiliar familiar (Farr & Moscovici, 1984) – **serves in this case a reverse purpose: to exclude the others and ascribe them to another category in order to defend the locals from a perceived threat.**

Duveen & Lloyd (1993): An ethnographic approach to social representations

Methods employed:

- **observation of the interactions of children in two different primary schools;**

- focus on **how children interacted in the play groups they themselves were organizing, as well as how they interacted in groups formed by the teachers.**

- **observation** of how gender was **institutionally represented** (and prescribed) **by the roles** assigned to boys and girls.

Duveen & Lloyd (1993): An ethnographic approach to social representations

- **gender identity ->both externally and internally ->identifying yourself & being given an identity by others (Duveen, 2001).**

- **gender is internalized by children over the course of their development, through all the practices and modes of behaviour to which there are introduced by their respective community.**

Ben Asher (2003): Hegemonic, emancipated and polemic social representations

- It is described how a group of Israeli parents of soldiers have their hegemonic social representations of the absolute trustworthiness of the military (summed up by the military guarantee that it would assume full parental responsibility for the soldiers' well-being) undermined by the fact that, due to military training in polluted waters, many of the soldiers fell ill of cancer and died.

- **Methods employed:**

- Participant observation;

- Examination of documents.

Ben Asher (2003): Hegemonic, emancipated and polemic social representations

- This research illustrates precisely what Moscovici (1984a) stated: the dynamic character of S. R. is captured when there is a time of crisis, and a group or its image is undergoing a shift.

Final remarks

- a wealth of information which can be obtained by the employment of multiple methods in the study of S. R.

- by immersing themselves in the in-depth observation of the targeted population → the researchers working within the Anthropological Approach manage to capture the multiple facets of their subjects' fluid reality.

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