



Contact Email for September 2018

In 1981 Kurt Finsterbusch wrote about the use of Social Impact Assessment in the Handbook of Applied Sociology, (Ed. Marvin Olsen & Michael Micklin, 1981). It was a new idea then but I have not come across much use of it since. However, the idea had considerable merit. We hear people talking about taking action, but we do not hear much about considering the consequences. Yet, the consequences of any particular action often produce different outcomes to that expected by the originator.

In 2000, Piotr Sztompka had this to say in an article for The Berlin Centre for Social Science, (The Ambivalence of Social Change Triumph or Trauma?):

Sociological approaches to social change have evolved in three typical forms: the discourse of progress in the period of classical sociology, the discourse of crisis characteristic for the middle of the 20th century, and the discourse of trauma, which seems to emerge at the end of the 20th century. The concept of trauma, borrowed from medicine, suggests that change per se, irrespective of its content, but provided that it is sudden, comprehensive, fundamental and unexpected, may produce painful shock for the social and particularly cultural tissue of a society. Paradoxically, this applies also to changes which are otherwise progressive, welcome, and intended by the people. Cultural trauma begins with disorganization of cultural rules and accompanying personal disorientation, culminating even in the loss of identity. This condition is made more grave by the traumatizing events or situations which occur as the effect of major change in areas other than culture, and affect the whole "life world" of the people. The traumatic mood which spreads in a society is countered by various coping strategies. If they are successful, trauma turns out into mobilizing force for human agency, and stimulates creative social becoming.

Through the nineteenth century and much of the 20th century, the assumption of 'progress' was in people's minds. We would soon solve all problems and progress would get us to nirvana. Towards the end of the 20th century the expectation of crisis and the expectation of someone dropping the atom bomb together with the Cold War, had people living with fear, not about what was happening but what might happen. In the 21st century right wing populist ideas are gaining ground around the world, and what these people now anticipate is one of isolation from what is happening elsewhere, and nirvana is seen in nationalism rather than in progress.

Whether we consider constant social change or one particular change, an account of the results of these changes, both expected and not expected, need to be identified. For instance, could it be that 'progress', instead of reaching nirvana, has

reached nationalism? How has this come about? Is there fear of people from other places, other religions, other languages? The Jewish scripture has the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11v6-9) where the people on earth were one, and all spoke the same language. God thought this was dangerous so God confused their language so that they could not understand each other and scattered them all over the world. What does this idea say to the hope people have had about everyone coming together? You can tell me what you think about all this at the TASA Conference in Melbourne 19 Nov. to 22 Nov. 2018. See you there.

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