In Need of Conceptual Clarification

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Abstract: It has become common knowledge that what we are now experiencing is a supposedly Late Modernity. The history of the notion of modernity is brief, but the branding of it has been highly successful. What was initially, in the late seventies, a neologism aimed at subverting the new postmodernism, soon became an indispensible and rarely questioned term frequently employed in social theorising. (Both the adjective ‘modern’ and the verb ‘modernise’ were already there of course, but they were something quite different; the term ‘modernism’ applied to art and to literature should also be distinguished conceptually from ‘modernity’.)

The present paper deals with three basic questions: (i) Does the notion or concept of modernity enhance a critical analysis of post-89 Europe with all its historical and regional diversity? Modernity can be seen to appear now in multiple versions. Nevertheless: Eastern and Western Europe, the Baltic Sea region and the Balkans are in regard to each and every aspect of the social and political life as divergent that it would seem a utopian project to put them all together in a European Modernity.

(ii) Does the concept of modernity have anything substantial to add to studies involving use of concepts like those of a market, of politics, of globalization and of ideology for example?

(iii) How is the conceptual dichotomy of places and of non-places related to modernity? Can one envisage here a return to ideas stemming from the postmodern framework of the seventies? If so, this could be regarded as an example of what has been discussed within sociology in terms of a generational conceptualisation or of a ‘metamorphosis of generation’ (Beck 2015).

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