

Constructed Complexities

A Network of Scholars and Workshop Series



First Workshop of the Series:

Institutions as social constructs and social construction through institutions

21st June, 2013

University of Surrey, Guildford, UK
Oak Suite

Call for Participation

The Constructed Complexities Network invites applications to a one-day workshop exploring the relationships between social constructionism and institutionalisms. The workshop is a part of a series of events aiming to bridge social constructionism and complexity theory.

The workshop welcomes **Professor George Thomas** from Arizona State University, expert in the diffusion of institutions and world culture, to give the opening lecture. The workshop will also include seminar presentations and group work sessions tackling questions such as:

- 1) Are all institutions social constructs?
- 2) Are all social constructs institutions?
- 3) Are institutions rational or rationalised?
- 4) How do institutions relate to social structures and how do they relate to social change?

Participation: To participate in the workshop, please write a short article (800-1000 words) tackling one (or more) of these questions and send it together with your short bio-blurb (200-300 words) to o.dilaverkalkan@surrey.ac.uk by **21st May 2013**. These will be utilised to initiate discussion and collaborations during the group work sessions. Participation in the workshop is **free of charge** and limited travel support is available upon request. Early career researchers will be prioritised for this support. If you are unable to attend the workshop, but would like to participate in the debate, you can contribute to the project blog at <http://constructedcomplexities.wordpress.com>.

Background: Complexity theory and social constructionism are important meta-theories that have evolved from very different worldviews and knowledge bases. Yet, there are some important similarities between the core arguments of the two meta-theories which are frequently neglected in methodological debates. Both meta-theories reject reductionist, time, space and relationship-free analyses of positivist or Newtonian social science. While social constructionism reveals the existence of multiple realities and viewpoints, history and context dependence of reality and the role of social embeddedness; complexity theory studies heterogeneous populations and the role of stochasticity, path-dependence of processes, the role of interactions and interdependencies and properties of social networks. Exploring the interesting similarities between the two meta-theories provides an opportunity for the development of interdisciplinary or intermeta-theory social research. At the same time, complexity theorists and social constructionists approach these issues with different interpretations and research objectives. There are important differences between the ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying the two meta-theories.

Project: Constructed Complexities, an ESRC-funded project, aims to initiate an international network of scholars working together to review and clarify the core ontological and epistemological arguments, discuss strengths and limitations of state-of-art interdisciplinary mixed method research, and develop research approaches and tools specifically designed for studying complexity of social construction. In the first year, there will be 3 workshops and a final conference focusing on linking social constructionism and complexity theory via institutionalist perspectives.