

*Social Theory Lecture Series*

**Giuseppe Sciortino**

***Globalizing Civil Sphere Theory:  
An Experiment in Social Theory.***

**Monday, May 13, 2019, 5.30pm**  
Fakultätssitzungssaal SOWI (3<sup>rd</sup> floor)

How does social theory evolve and change? Are theoretical contributions always rooted in an unredeemable local perspective? Is a universal social theory possible? I discuss these issues through a critical assessment of civil sphere theory (CST). How it has evolved during the decade since its articulation in Jeffrey C. Alexander's *The Civil Sphere* in 2006? That book offered a robust articulation of a new way of viewing civil society, one that included the development of the idea of binary codes structuring political discourse, the significance of public opinion, the mass media, the law and regulative institutions, the inherent tension between the civil and uncivil, the role of social movements, and the emergence of multiculturalism as a new mode of incorporation of heretofore marginalized groups. At the same time, CST was also construed as a project, not a closed theoretical system, and so it is not surprising that theoretical developments have occurred in the intervening years. CST is intended as a general, universally-applicable theory. Given that the book limited its principal empirical examples to the United States, a series of case studies have been initiated to test what Alexander has called its "universal aspiration." I offer an analysis of the findings of the empirical projects that are currently underway—involving Latin America, East Asia, India, radicalization, and the Nordic social democracies—in order to assess CST's universality.



**Giuseppe Sciortino** teaches sociology at the Università di Trento. He is the author of *Great Minds. Encounters with Social Theory* (Stanford UP, with Gianfranco Poggi) and *Solidarity, Justice, and Incorporation* (Oxford UP, with Peter Kivisto). He has served as chair of ISA's sociological theory committee from 2010 to 2014.