

SUMMARIES

Persistence and Nonpersistence as Key Concepts in System Analysis: a Critique of a Central Conception of David Easton

By Dag Anckar

The theoretical works of David Easton have inspired much research in Scandinavia. However, as far as the links between theory and empirical results are concerned, this research has been far from satisfying. This suggests inherent weaknesses in Easton's general framework and the aim of the article is to penetrate into the leading persistence conception of Easton: »How can any political system ever persist whether the world be one of stability or of change?» The article is divided into two parts: (1) a brief outline of Easton's model of the political system; and (2) an analytical examination of the concept of persistence. The analytical part consists of: (21) a review of and some comments on the discussion about the consequences of a persistence orientation; and (22) an examination of the concept as a theoretical tool.

As to (21) the author concludes that the notions of persistence and non-persistence are not productive of guidelines for concrete analysis. The main reason for this is that a researcher who concentrates on these phenomena will have to limit his attention to extreme values on persistence variables and to sidestep more normal fluctuations and more particular changes, which, however, by no means are politically uninteresting or theoretically irrelevant. Further, it does not seem possible to empirically falsify the concept of persistence and hence the concept could not possibly form a basis for an empirical theory.

Regarding (22) the author starts with a discussion of Easton's examples of the disappearance of political systems. There are three kinds of examples: (1) cases where the membership of a society has been utterly destroyed; (2) cases where the previously existing political unit has collapsed to be replaced by independent, law-abiding centers, or lawless bands; (3) cases where historical political systems have been absorbed into alien systems. In the first case the author admits that a political system disappears when all its members die; however he does not find this very striking and replies that earthquakes and impotence hardly are important areas for political research. In the second case he argues that Easton's contention makes sense only if society is to be interpreted as the nation-state, a notion which Easton himself elsewhere explicitly has rejected. In the third case this notion is still more obvious and Easton's real concern seems to be with the maintenance of a particular kind of political system, not with the maintenance of any kind of political system. The conclusion is that Easton has been unable to give convincing examples of disappearing political systems.

Finally, the author argues that Easton by defining the political system as the authoritative allocation of values for a society and by defining the essential variables concerning persistence as allocations and compliance to them in fact has created a circle. Easton's conception could be rewritten into tautological statements saying that a political system persists when it persists or that a system disappears when it disappears. A final conclusion is that the notion of persistence has to be rejected.

Possibilities for Theory Building in Political Ecology

by Risto Sänkiäho

Political ecologists have always been interested in political areas, their location as well as factors promoting their development. According to these analyses so many types of factors explain the formation of often quite stable political climates that no coherent theory has emerged in this field of research. In addition, the main part of the political map consists of change areas, the explanation of which is much more difficult than that of stable areas.

Peasant culture has favoured stable political support but the rapid social change of the present has also in these areas created conditions for profound changes in the support of parties. Especially changes in the status of large parts of the population bring about radical political changes.

The schools of political ecology, French and American, have lead the research to directions where they should, at least from the point of view of the theory, turn to another direction and meet each other. The French school should follow more closely the development of cultural geography and it's research techniques and not only the techniques of other fields of political science. The American school should analyze phenomena on several levels to the able to contribute to context-analytical theory building. The American school has exaggerated the use of statistical methods which do not always produce results of remarkable informative value.

The Marxist-Leninist approach would bring an entirely new viewpoint into political ecology since the main part of the present Western political ecology takes the *individual* as a point of departure. Marxism-Leninism is based on analyzing the development of *society* (development of productive forces etc.) and draws the conclusions on the basis of this development. In empirical applications the methods of this approach are the same as those of the Western social science, i.e. correlations, factor analyses etc.

The fact that in longitudinal analyses the explaining variable may sometimes change into a consequence of the variable it was supposed to explain, thus creating problems for the theory building of political ecology. In this case the general theoretical models based on stable causal and effect relationships are not applicable and in interpretations very complicated cybernetic explanation strategies will have to be applied. Even if the transformation of the explanans into the explanandum may not always occur this assumption is very often reasonable enough to be tested.

The theory building is also difficult because of the weak comparability between the countries since there are no commonly accepted theoretical starting points. In addition cultural differences, very exceptional conditions and different party systems play their role as well as they do in the theory building of political action in general.

Political ecology should differentiate between the impact of general social development on the support of political parties on the one hand and the impact of regional factors — like regional party organization, a popular candidate or local party leader or some other typical local characteristic — on the other hand. The problem is how to use two scientifically but also organizationally different research traditions since the general social development framework as well as techniques of analysis are derived from sociology of political science while the cultural geography has the best techniques for the analysis of regional factors.