

# **Observing the world. The contribution of international statistics and UN world conferences to the rise of a global comparative order, 1949-2009**

**Funded by: German Research Foundation (DFG)**

*Principal Investigator:* Prof. Dr. Bettina Heintz

*Project Team:* Dr. Marion Müller (co-investigator)); Hannah Bennani, graduate sociologist  
Miriam Rosin, graduate sociologist; student assistants: Konstanze Reinecke, Anna Alexandra Skripchenko, graduate sociologist

*Term:* November 2010 – October 2013

Globalization is usually described as an intensification of structural linkages resulting from an expansion of exchanges and network ties across national boundaries. Less attention is paid to a second mechanism of globalization that is based on cultural rather than on structural linkages. Worldwide comparisons are an excellent point in case to investigate how such cultural linkages work and what effects they may cause. The project *Observing the World* examines the emergence, change and consequences of global comparisons. First, it analyses according to which criteria states are compared and to what extent these criteria have changed over time, and, secondly, it investigates when and how the global nexus has been described as an entity of its own – as a “world society”.

We assume that international statistics and world conferences play a pivotal role in the emergence of a global comparative order and in the growing awareness of the world as a whole. Empirically, the project focuses on international statistics and the preparatory and final documents of UN world conferences. It covers the period 1949 to 2009 and includes all world conferences which have dealt at least two times with the same issue. The leading questions of the project will be investigated from three different angles. The subproject *International statistics: measuring the world* investigates to what extent the categories and classification schemes of selected UN statistics (e.g., Statistical Yearbook, World Development Report) have changed over time and how the comparative data are represented (e.g., tables, rankings, diagrams). The subproject *UN world conferences: negotiating the world* retraces the semantic shifts of the global values and concepts (e.g, human rights, development, equality) propagated in the preparatory and final documents of world conferences. The subproject *Global encounters: representing the world* adopts a micro-sociological perspective and analyses world conferences as global interactive encounters. It is based on an ethnographic field study (presumably the Fourth UN-Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 2011) and investigates how “world society” is symbolically and interactively performed. For further information please contact: [bettina.heintz@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:bettina.heintz@uni-bielefeld.de)