

Reports

After the Gold Rush – Iceland Conference

In May of 2010, a conference titled *After the Gold Rush* was held in Reykjavik, Iceland, organized by the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, at the University of Iceland. The aim of the conference was to explore various aspects of the current global economic crisis from a broad social science perspective.

Many observers had pointed out that Iceland was the first victim of this world wide crisis and the nation worst hit. Therefore, Iceland was felt to be an ideal location to host such an event addressing these historic events.

In the conference global and local aspects of the crisis, as well as their intersection, was emphasized. Furthermore, the current crisis was compared historically with other such events, and how different crises connect to each other.

The conference was very informative and successful. International scholars, who participated in the conference, turned out to be more than twenty, representing different parts of the world; Europe, Canada, Africa, United States of America, South-America and India. Icelandic scholars, who participated, numbered more than forty. The conference was multi-disciplinary, with sociologists, anthropologists, historians, economists, councillors, librarians, philosophers, political scientists among others, submitting papers on the subject matter. Many of the participants expressed the view that this multi-disciplinary approach was the key to the success of the conference. Social reality was profoundly captured, by using a variety of theories and methods from different scholars, representing multiple disciplines. The topics addressed in the sessions, included economic and labor market issues, social morality, the role of mass media, social images, health care issues,

immigrants, and crime related matters, and how these reflect and are being shaped by the current world-wide crisis.

The President of the Social Science Faculty at the University of Iceland opened the conference. He formally invited all participants to the conference, and emphasized, how important the topic was to modern society – in particular how the topics address every day lives of common people, but not only the elites and the business world. Three plenary presentations were given, by two international scholars, and one local researcher. Karin Ho, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota gave a lecture titled „Financial Dominance and Crisis in the United States: The Cultural Practices and Consequences of Wall Street Financial Institutions“. In it, she analysed how different indexes in Wall Street are being interpreted and socially constructed by different actors on the market. Stefán Ólafsson, Professor of Sociology at the University of Iceland, gave a presentation called „From Gold Rush to Collapse: Iceland’s Financial Rise and Fall Explained“. In the talk, Ólafsson put the current crisis in Iceland in a historical perspective, tracing it back to the Great-Depression in the 1930’s. Finally, Fantu Cheru, Professor Emeritus and Research Director at the Nordic Africa Institute in Sweden, closed the conference by his paper; Ripe for a Revolution: The Quadruple Crisis and the Search for a Progressive Global Development Strategy. In his presentation, Faru demystified the power structure of the world economy, and how less affluent nations are being subjected and oppressed, by reigning market forces and the logic of rich and powerful nations. Social resistance was necessary and possible, by adopting global social strategies to alter the social order of our world economy.

The conference ended with barbecue and wine on an island just off the Reykjavik harbor. This island, Viðey, has become internationally known since Yoko Ono helped setting up a peace monument there in the memory of her late husband, John Lennon.

The night was beautiful and there conference participants enjoyed themselves, over looking Reykjavik City a few miles away.

Please check if possible to insert a photo of participants from this news letter – on page 8.

<http://www.hi.is/files/skjol/felagsvisindasvid/Frettablad%20tbl.pdf>