

Annual Meeting 2008

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July 21-23 2008, San Jose, Costa Rica

University of Costa Rica

Economic Flexibility and Social Stability in the Age of Globalization

(Spanish version here)

Download the conference e-vite here

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<http://www.ucr.ac.cr/>

Economic Flexibility and Social Stability

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(in Spanish here)

The theme of the SASE 2008 meeting is suggested by Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*. Polanyi interprets the history of industrial society in the 19th and 20th centuries in terms of a pendulum-like "double movement." One side of that movement is toward free and flexible markets that underpin, and in some sense foster, the material and technological gains associated with the Industrial Revolution. The other side is a reaction to the disruption that these markets impose on people's lives, an attempt to preserve the social relations through which people understand themselves and find meaning in their lives. The current era of globalization mirrors that of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in many ways. Markets are being established, liberalized, and deregulated throughout the world. Goods, finance, and people are moving within and across frontiers at an ever-accelerating pace. And people are bewildered, looking for alternatives to their increasingly chaotic and insecure lives. Furthermore, the reaction emerging today recalls

the politics and policies of the Great Depression and the immediate postwar period, when the second half of Polanyi's double movement came into effect. But with one critical difference: While the theories that have guided deregulation and globalization in the closing decades of the 20th century are the direct descendants of the laissez faire ideas that guided globalization a century ago, the philosophies that informed the second half of the double movement -that is, the social legislation that grew out of the Great Depression- have in many ways been discredited. Today's reaction is therefore more instinctive and visceral than deliberate and considered, and the question is whether it will indeed be possible to reconcile these two movements in theory or through practical politics. We will examine the prospects for reconciliation in a series of panels on the contemporary relevance of four major social and economic theorists: Marx, Keynes, Polanyi, and Hirschman.

A fifth panel will specifically explore the possibility that these older social theorists have been rendered obsolete by new technologies, especially information networking, which, if true, would call for new understandings of economic development, north-south relations, and the relationship between the economy and the society. The practical dimension will be explored through papers and panels drawing on grounded research on specific industries and geographic areas and devoted, where possible, to innovative approaches to critical markets (for labor, capital, raw materials, and the like). Special attention will be focused on the reaction against neoliberalism and the Washington Consensus in Latin American countries; to parallels in other countries and regions of the world; to the economic roots of that reaction; and to changes in economic and social policy that have emerged as a result not only in the region but throughout the world.

To explore the interaction between scholarly theory and political practice, we draw on the Latin American tradition of combining public service with careers as intellectuals and academicians. Oscar Arias, the Nobel Laureate and current President of Costa Rica, is one of the most prominent representatives of this tradition. He will also be the keynote speaker at the meeting. SASE will invite a group of prominent Latin American politicians with similar backgrounds to join him as panelists and discussants in roundtables with each other and with the academic participants.

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