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Special Issue Reprint

Systems Thinking in Anthropology

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The objective of this Special Issue is to highlight the efforts of contemporary anthropologists to integrate the theoretical framework and methods of systems thinking into their research. Systems thinking is approached here as a modeling methodology that facilitates our understanding of complex cultural phenomena, such as the multiple processes shaping social relations in cross-cultural contexts. Among the various lines of research in this area, this Special Issue focuses specifically on phenomena captured by the concept of superdiversity, first introduced by Dr. Steven Vertovec in his work on the evolution of migration patterns. By showing how "social, cultural, religious, and linguistic phenomena [...] combine with others like gender, age, and legal status" to produce a "diversification of diversity" in societies, Vertovec redirects the anthropological project toward a central concern of systems thinking: the "change of change". This concept was explored by Gregory Bateson in his general theory of communication, which aimed to explain the adaptive or transformative movements of the "mind" of human societies. In addition to discussions of superdiversity, contributions were expected to engage substantively with the concepts, principles, theories, or methods rooted in systems thinking, and, where possible, to explore how such approaches might enhance our understanding of social complexity in increasingly diverse urban environments.



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