

**THE PLACE OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE
IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AND THE
PROFESSIONALIZATION OF SOCIOLOGY
- The Visibility of Sociology as a Discipline -**

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Abstract. *The sudden changes that the contemporary world has seen during the last several years pose the following question: to what extent can sociology provide an answer, theoretically and methodologically. Ever since it emerged as a science, sociology has been faced with various difficulties, including those pertaining to the definition of its object, which is the result of the underdeveloped state of this particular science and the specificities of its subject matter (primarily its historicalness). Within the discipline itself, there is some confusion about what it actually means to be a sociologist. The fact that many people outside sociology (including non-sociologists at universities) do not take sociology seriously would be easier to accept if sociologists themselves did not occasionally have such thoughts as well. Still, anyone who participates in the various sociological gatherings cannot help noticing the self-doubt and even clear dissatisfaction with the fate of the sociologist today.*

Sociology must go back to the "great" questions, say Berger and Kelner, thereby referring to the questions about the very nature and structure of the modern world. In other words, it is not important only how to be, but also what it means to be a sociologist.

The paper analyses the position of sociology as a profession. Because of the way in which it emerged after the Second World War and the way it has been developing, the position of sociology has oscillated with political changes, which have determined its development. Sociology has developed against two backgrounds: the political and sociological context, in which it has been instrumentalized by politics, on the one hand, and the ontological and theoretical one, as a "younger and more immature sister of philosophy".

Since the classic results of sociology represent the foundation of all the important social sciences and the humanities, sociology could be a transdisciplinary spiritual field in which those sciences can cooperate and communicate most profitably. It is through a rational dialogue among the humanities that sociology can be best and sustainably revived. In that way, it would not only regain the status it used to have but would also attain a new, more lasting one.

Key words: *sociology, sociological profession, principles of sociology, professionalization of the sociologist, sociological knowledge.*

INTRODUCTION

*"Sociology begins by liberating the world from illusions
and continues by liberating itself"*

(Alvin W. Gouldner, 1980, p. 34)

People want to get to know the social and historical reality better, but the contemporary literature does not provide them with an adequate approach and tools for doing that. They would like to find out facts, understand their meaning, see the "big picture" in which they could believe and within the frames of which they could comprehend and explain themselves. They also strive for values they could use to orient themselves, for suitable mode of feeling, for emotion styles, and for the ways in which they could articulate their motives. Contemporary social thought has obviously found itself in a state of confusion and was blocked, from which it cannot easily exit; in that sense, the numerous protagonists of the contemporary "applied" American thought, such as George Friedman, and the like, will simply say that "Marxism has collapsed" in the formerly divided Europe.

Sociologists are especially stricken by the current unclear relation towards rational and empirical knowledge about society, and towards the sociological profession. Sociology is expected to be an "intellectual catalyst" of a society's getting to know itself better, especially now that it has found itself in deep all-out crisis (particularly when it comes to the education of the young). When it comes to the sociological profession in our society, sociology can be said to have succeeded in "liberating itself", i.e. in being able to tell the truth, and being able to do so after a series of extrasociological obstacles had to be overcome in the communist era. However, it has not succeeded too much in liberating society from illusions. As *Adorno* has noticed, sociology today is in a position similar to that of philosophy in the 1960s – "it feels terrorized and fears that it may be dispensed with as something dilettante the moment it has something important to offer" (*Adorno*, p. 11).

We are living in such an era in the development of science and other forms of social consciousness when, instead of confrontation and monopoly of ideology, we need pluralism, dialogue and the creation of a new synthesis among the various forms of human powers of getting to know the world better, namely religion, science and philosophy. In that endeavor, researchers from various areas should work together so as to better that human power and enrich human creativity.

Instead of clashes and claims of supremacy of one civilization over another, today we desperately need an ethnocultural and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and convergence. Such an approach to this issue is vital for the development of the culture of peace, the globalization of understanding and building bridges of cooperation among different civilizations. In doing this, it is not only science, religion and philosophy, but also sociology that can help. Neither form of social consciousness and acquisition of knowledge should monopolize the truth about the world and man; at the same time, each of them has the right, the duty and the responsibility to support dialogue, tolerance and understanding among different nations and cultures so that the people can treat different world views with respect, promote universal values of planetary ethics and culture, and that humankind can live and develop in peace.

THE PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONALIZATION

Sociology emerged out of the spirit of the Enlightenment and civil revolution. According to *Raymond Aron*, two important things have emerged out of the French Revolution: *the citizen*, as a form of political emancipation, and *sociology*, as an expression of spiritual revolution. As the science of social crisis, it first emerged in Western Europe within national global societies, and then spread transnationally / internationally over the globe, so that today we can talk about not only its internationalization but also the essential globalization of sociology, in the sense of its subject matter getting expanded not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively – through the assumption of new theoretical and methodological standpoints (in keeping with the world-systemic theory of I. Wallerstein), in the process of its research of the structure and the dynamics of the world society.

However, it should be pointed out that the development of sociology has been conditioned not only by the spirit of crisis but also by the ever-growing needs and challenges of an epoch, so that it has also focused on the problems of the structure and the dynamics of the current world order, has constantly been broadening its subject matter and pushing forward the horizon of its interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research.

The role and the tasks of sociology in education are determined by the peculiarities of the development of sociological knowledge and by its *professionalization*.

As Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist whose research has contributed very much to the development of the profession of a sociologist, claims, the mass appearance of the professional complex is the most important structural process of the 20th century. Professions are systemic wholes that are formed by: 1) individuals acquiring them, and 2) by those individuals acting in keeping with the rules and values they imply (a code of behaviour like the Hippocratic Oath). The social importance of modern professions lies in their assuming a leadership role in the current social organization of work. The word profession is of Latin origin (*professio*) and represents a calling, a line of work.

Professionalization itself began the mid 1950s (*Milošević, 1987, p. 101*). Since then, the given process has gone through the following phases. The *first phase* saw the "recognition" of sociology as a science that social practice needs and that is necessary in the struggle against dogmatized Marxism (*Lukić, 1974, p. 34-60*). In the *second phase* (the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s), sociology was institutionalized at universities and then some secondary schools as well, in which sociologists can work on their research. In the *third phase* sociology stagnated, primarily because of the clash between the critically oriented intellectuals (sociologists) and the then-ruling political oligarchy. And finally, in the *fourth phase*, that started in the mid 1980s, scientific and creative sociological work was truly re-evaluated.

Back in the 1970s, *sociology* was on an unprecedented rise and resembled a new fashion wave. Through its research and the results of the criticism of contemporary society, it captured the imagination of the young, rebellious generation and spurred them into trying to radically change the authoritarian structures at universities and in society, in the West and the East. At that period, a group of sociologists such as *Bourdieu, Bottomore* and *Berger*, wrote about the rise of the profession of the sociologist, insisting thereby that sociology was a "critical literature on social practice", a criticism of society, aiming at a radical reevaluation of the ruling order, of the capitalist, etatist and technocratic power in contemporary society and its Holy Trinity (money, power and technocracy).

In the 1970s, sociology and other social sciences helped the *development of critical self-awareness*; in addition, through the movements against capitalism and totalitarianism, sociology helped the *renewal of revolutionary energy and mission of intellectuals* seen as the "conscience of their nations" and the development of social movements as social agents. Through their research and action, they have undermined the bureaucratized parties and delegitimized their opportunistic leaders, who have become integrated into the ruling order so that they could realize their own interests there. In the contemporary sociological system and practice, this has led to a vulgar neopositivist empiricism, the explosion of disciplinary chaos, the rise of particularized work in sociology, and has made sociologists turn away from macrotheoretical analysis and criticism of society towards smaller scientific fields, and towards developmental and action research. Critical analyses of the strategies of development and of the possibilities of social progress have been supplanted by systematic apologetics. *The rise of postmodernism* in culture has made sociology abandon large format theories and obscure the truth under the guise of theoretical pluralism and the plurality of the relativity of each theory in science. The work that concentrates on tiny areas and is done for the sake of the new and the old bosses (corporations, parties, local and national institutions), has produced a new *grey zone* in science, with numerous pseudo-scientists, and misuse of theories and methods. Sociology has become a mere servant of the centers of power, which made *Berger* (back in the 1990s) publish a lament on the crisis, the fall and the death of sociology as a science (*Berger, 1992*).

Through new research, contemporary sociology must confront the phenomenon of *neoliberal totalitarianism*, which can be observed in the neocolonial expansion of megacapital, i.e. transnational corporations as "planetary gladiators". It also addresses monocentric globalism, as a specific military and political phenomenon, a source of inequality and of antagonistic power in the contemporary world and as a specific form of monocentric globalism. In keeping with Bourdieu's critical theory of society, it is the task of contemporary sociology to demystify the neoliberal myth of globalization. Its task is also to develop a means of the critical evaluation of the neo-institutional approach in contemporary science, that has blurred the actual social relations and social processes, to uncover the agents of destruction of the social-democratic model of society in Europe, and research how the adopted neoliberal development strategy has divided Europe from within into the "Europe of workers" and the "Europe of bankers". It is in such a way that sociology could uncover the other, invisible face (A. Touraine) of the emerging European society, which is characterized by decreasing solidarity and increasing plutocracy and technocracy.

In addition, sociologists should analyze the sources of the new *contradictions in contemporary societies in transition*, whose elites, by opting for the strategy of dependent modernization, have paved the way for the peripheralization of the economy, society and culture. Such a *model of transition without social responsibility* is most prominent in the *Balkans*, which have become a new zone of dependent societies of peripheral capitalism.

Later on, after a long-term crisis of sociology and of society in America, *Berger* could only conclude in his book *Sociology: A Disinvitation?* (1992) that sociology has betrayed the expectations people used to have of it (*Berger, 1992*). Today, its identity is seriously challenged by both the phenomenon of the disintegrated division of labor in sociology ("sociology without society"), and by its getting pushed aside by monology, as a transdisciplinary "omnibus" science in the system of education and the division of labor (*Mitrović, 2010, p. 243-252*). In addition, one can also easily discern the tendency to sup-

press sociology in the post-socialist countries at the level of high schools, i.e. one can discern the process of its getting substituted by civic education, a constitutional system and other positivist scientific disciplines. Under the influence of the Bologna reform in the system of academic studies of sociology, philosophical and humanist disciplines are marginalized, whereas general disciplines are segmented into courses.

In his book *Freedom or Capitalism*, Ulrich Beck, the well-known German sociologist, made several comments that are very critical of sociology today. Of course, that was not the first time that Beck had critically approached sociology, but at this point he placed his criticism in a different context. In answer to the question he posed to himself, namely *What do intellectuals do?*, he gives the following answer: *The intellectuals have stopped thinking* (Beck, 1999:288–899). A similar thought was expressed by Zygmunt Bauman in his critique of sociological functionalism as the main current in the sociology of that time and in his critique of Parsons' theoretical conception of society. Metaphorically speaking, sociology today is "merely a whirlpool in a river flowing fast, a whirlpool that preserves its shape but constantly changes its content, keeping that shape only on condition the water keeps flowing constantly" (Bauman, 1992:213).

However, the entire course of development of sociology has not led to sociology liberating itself from numerous illusions. Namely, *sociology has managed to express various scientific truths, but it has not done too much in making society recognize those truths*. Therefore it can be said that our sociology began by liberating itself, but also that it has to liberate society from illusions.

The process of the professionalization of sociology has developed particularly well in the formation of the sociological profession, which has a developed theory about its subject matter, a developed ethical code and considerably developed specific professional subculture, but is actually still faced with the problem of underdeveloped professional authority and social sanction that should enable this profession to be recognizable in society and that should prevent "charlatanism in professional work" (see: Greenwood, 1962, p. 207-218).

In less than half a century (from the 1970s to the present), sociology, as a science and as a vocation, has managed to get transformed from the "common intellectual denominator of culture of the contemporary world" (R. Mills), and the rebellious agent of the 1968 events, to apologetic engineering, thereby becoming integrated into the ruling order and losing the image of a science devoted to radical truth and creative destruction that used to help the new social movements in their intellectual odyssey and their longing to get to know the world better and also change that world for the better.

Among other things, U. Beck, in his research (that can be termed *sociology of globalization*) presents sociology as a critical reflection on social issues and as a cosmopolitan transnational science, which explores globalism and globalization, and their influence on contemporary social changes. On the other hand, A. Touraine, in his professional development and in his view of what sociology should especially focus on, went from actionalist sociology, that focuses on micro social structures, via social movements as collective agents, to emphasizing the importance of emancipation of an individual and the role of culture in contemporary social changes.

One should bear in mind that "each profession represents a context *sui generis*, which requires a specialized skill and specialized knowledge, which is characterized by a set of ideas, a set of customs, and a particular way of looking at things" (Dirkem, 1981, p. 39). When it comes to the sociological profession, in our society it is still in the phase of get-

ting social acceptance, primarily because of the resistance on the part of those social groups, institutions and individuals that consider society an irrational human creation in which passion and will have a decisive role, while they just "skillfully steer" human behavior and action. However, the process of constituting the sociological profession can be said to have come a long way; still, the process of "insertion" of sociological knowledge into social practice has remained insufficient and slow. It is precisely the process of sociology getting constituted that ran parallel to the process of sociology getting liberated from itself.

Despite the given trends, our opinion is that sociology as a critical and humanistic science has its *raison d'être* in the system of social sciences. The author reminds the reader that *sociology* studies the general and specific laws of the production of social life and their influence on the structure and development of human society, the system of the division of social power, the social status of people and social groups in the global society as a concrete historical totality. Because of the globalization processes, this particular subject matter of sociology has now been expanded to cover the global world system. In that sense, contemporary sociology explores not only the manifest but also the implicit functions of social phenomena, the character of social relations, the identity of the invisible society and of social agents. In all this it strives to research both the structural and the dynamic aspects of various phenomena and of the global society, not forgetting thereby not only social costs, efficiency of organization and sustainable development but also social justice, human quotient and the possibility of the emancipation of man and humanization and progress of society. As *A. Touraine* has pointed out, it is the task of sociology to help the development of rational critical awareness that societies are not gifts of gods or of rulers, but a self-product of systems of social actions. In that sense, what sociology always discovers underneath the ruling order are the interests of social classes and movements, their struggle for supremacy in the system of the division of social power, the implicit functions and the hidden socio-cultural meanings of social phenomena.

If sociology is to avoid the traps of implicitly supporting the current centers of power, then its strategic direction of investigation must again start focusing on the research of the system of the division of social power, of the new forms of exploitation and of neoliberal totalitarianism in the conditions of asymmetric globalization, that produces monocentric globalism, thereby forcing the world into new forms of unrest, inequality and conflict.

Therefore, it is necessary for sociology as a polyparadigmatic science (*J. Ritzer*) to synthesize the best theoretical values of contemporary science and philosophy, and, on the basis of that, renew and restore its critical and humanistic role, as well as to connect its research results with the progressive movements arguing for social change, which should, in our contemporary world, realize the goals of the still unfinished civil revolution whose goals are expressed in the well known Liberty, Equality, Fraternity slogan. The realization of this goal would renew the humanistic deontology of the profession of the sociologist and the critical role of intellectuals in the contemporary world. It would also restore faith in the social sciences and the humanities, and destigmatize them as they are currently seen as mere servants of politics and other centers of alienated power in the modern world.

Knowledge of the rules of the social structure and development is crucial for successful professional work, but, more or less, also for an informed relation of man towards social, historical and cultural events.

In a practical respect, neglect of sociological knowledge in education 1) makes the profession have difficulty incorporating professionals into social life, and 2) makes the professionals have a limited view of professional and work processes, not be creative enough when it comes to their professional duties, which makes the professionals distance themselves from their profession and their uncritical "immersion" into the established ways of social life and also their reorientation towards managing people in society and in the work processes. In such conditions, professionals exclusively focus on the application of knowledge that has been developed by others, rather than on perfecting the existing and developing new knowledge. In that way, they effectively become an instrument of the established non-autonomous practice, or of technocratic and bureaucratic politics. In the gnoseological respect, they limit themselves because they limit the fields of their professional work in view of the natural, scientific, technological and economic capability of people to exchange matter with nature and among themselves.

The knowledge that sociology and its disciplines acquire can help overcome the given shortcomings. In this respect, sociology and its disciplines must actively fulfill the three following roles: *the role of acquiring new knowledge, the professional-practical and the humanistic-emancipatory role* (Milošević, 1991, p. 6). In view of the first role, sociology broadens scientific horizons, because it researches, analyses and explains the broader and the narrower social and cultural conditions and internal social contradictions. Sociology relies in philosophical and anthropological knowledge on man as a practical being, that acquires sociability in work and via work. All this is a result of the fact that the question of the essence of work, of social division of labor, alienation, social and cultural possibilities of conversing the process of the alienation of man, are the basic gnoseological and theoretical standpoints on which sociology has based its scientific foundation.

CONCLUSION

The role and place of the members of a profession depend not only on their relation towards the subject matter of their discipline but also on the creation of a systematically organized whole that is made up by the relevant theories and techniques as the basis of professional authority, as well as on the valorization of their knowledge and the results of their work, on the potential of the theories used, on the methods and techniques of a science and profession, and, in the case of sociology, also on the readiness of the society to acknowledge the need for the application of the obtained results.

During the three and a half decades of the struggle of sociologists in Serbia with the bureaucratic elite in our society and with their attitude towards the scientific truth about society, sociology can be said to have achieved a good level of epistemological development and to be relatively independent of the perception society has of itself (ideology); still additional effort must be made in order to overcome the obstacles sociology faces in its struggle to present the truth about the kind of society that is ahead of us. The relation between teaching sociology and the education one receives in order to become a professional sociologist will not change for the better: a) if sociology is supported by the "regime", or b) if it is dispensed with in the name of "purity" of professional education, c) but only if society rationally evaluates the need for the development of scientific knowledge about itself, and for the acknowledgement of the place it has in social and cultural development.

When it comes to the profession of a sociologist, we have been faced with the clash between professionals attempting to establish a monopoly on professional expertise, and the attempts of the political oligarchy to preserve the monopoly on ideology in society. The clash has actually rendered the sociological profession stronger, which can be seen in the prominent position sociology occupies in the international community, the strengthening of the professional solidarity among sociologists and partial socialization of the sociological profession, which represents the presence of sociological ideas at the level of the global society. The author puts forward the view that if sociology is to avoid the traps of supporting the current centers of power, then its strategic direction of investigation must again start focusing on the research of the system of the division of social power, of the new forms of exploitation and of neoliberal totalitarianism in the conditions of asymmetric globalization, that produces monocentric globalism, thereby forcing the world into new forms of unrest, inequality and conflict.

The paper urges for sociology to reaffirm its critical and humanistic role, and for the results of its research to connect with the progressive movements leading to social change, which should eventually realize the goals of the unfinished civic revolution expressed in the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity". In other words, the paper pleads for a "new enlightenment" and for sociology to assist active participation of citizens in the self-production of contemporary society and emancipation of man. In still other words, the paper pleads for sociology to serve its honorable scientific aims as well as to serve the Truth, Goodness and Emancipation, as I. Wallerstein put it. It is the task of social sciences, and especially of sociology, to uncover the real sources of the crisis of social division and clashes, to rationally define the future directions of social agents towards an authentic *social-democratic alternative*, so as for the world to be richer, more equal, more free and more just. And for the people to be more carefree and happier.

Today, *sociologists* are torn between *the critical and the apologetic role* of our scientific field and profession. The warning old *Pašić* gave to politicians is still valid for them, namely that they can catch a cold if they are too far away from the fire of power, but they can also get burnt if they are too close to it. Attention must be drawn to the common opinion that sociology is in a crisis, not only here but also abroad, that the crisis of sociology is the result of the crisis of society, that progressively fewer sociologists are able to deal with sociological issues outside the education system as opposed to economists and psychologists. As an academic discipline, sociology is one of social sciences. Its task is to establish the rules that govern human society, and its purpose, as Conte put it, is to "see what you can foresee".

It is time sociology is said to have overcome beginners' mistakes and that it should develop as a whole and as a theoretical and empirical science on contemporary society and man, as a humanistic reflection on the ways and possibilities of the emancipation of man in the context of contemporary social changes. Its task is not only to phenomenologically describe the official order, but to uncover the "hidden society" behind it, the general and the specific laws of the production of social relations and the position of social groups and individuals. In addition, its task is also to provide answers not to the current problems, the quality of life and the system of the division of social power, but also to pave the way for alternative forms of living that would enable the emancipation of man and social progress, and to do all of that through critical (fundamental, developmental and applied) research.

In conclusion, the author would like to reiterate that *sociology should remain an analytic, critical and emancipatory science studying man and society*. Otherwise, it will just serve the system of power and be instrumentalized by it.

Sociology has been and still is a profession with the form of consciousness based on a specific scientific method, trying to cope with its own existential burden. Should it manage to survive in its authentic form, sociology will resolve the problems relating to its very existence. It has an impressive tradition. Despite the fact that this tradition is not as long as human history, it has proved its validity in a century marked by radical transformation and crises. Professionals are getting ever more convinced that the general future development of sociology, and the practical application of its results, are uncertain. Joint work with economists and jurists in the resolution of conflicts and at the level of social organizations and their interrelationships are some of the areas in which sociologists can find their place. Taking into account the entire course of its development, not only in Serbia but also abroad, uncertainty regarding the future of sociology should be accepted as a challenge for further scientific research in the area. Thus far, that research has yielded many valuable results and much valuable knowledge about society which no other science could have provided.

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MESTO SOCIOLOŠKOG ZNANJA U SAVREMENOM DRUŠTVU I PROFESIONALIZACIJA SOCIOLOGIJE - Vidljivost sociologije kao discipline –

Biljana Prođović

Nagle promene do kojih je došlo u savremenom svetu u poslednjih nekoliko godina nameću pitanje: u kojoj meri sociologija može u teorijskom i metodološkom pogledu da odgovori na njih. Od svog nastanka sociologija se suočava sa teškoćama i različitim pristupima u definisanju svog predmeta što je uslovljeno njenom nerazvijenošću i specifičnostima predmeta (pre svega njegovom istoričnošću). Postoje zbrke u okviru same discipline u vezi sa pravilnim razumevanjem toga šta znači baviti se sociologijom. Činjenica da mnogi izvan discipline ne shvataju sociologiju ozbiljno (uključujući i ne-sociologe na univerzitetu) bio bi lakši zalogaj da se iste nedoumice nisu uvukle i u redove samih sociologa. Pa ipak, svako ko obilazi različite skupove posvećene ovoj disciplini ne može a da ne uoči sumnje u sebe, i često neskriveno nezadovoljstvo sudbinom sociologa u ovom vremenu.

Sociologija se mora vratiti onim "velikim" pitanjima, poručuju Berger i Kelner, misleći pri tom na pitanja o samoj prirodi i ustrojstvu modernog sveta. Drugim rečima, nije presudno samo kako biti, već i šta znači biti sociolog.

U radu se analizira položaj sociologije kao profesije. Zbog načina kako je nastala posle II svetskog rata i kako se razvijala, položaj sociologije oscilirao je sa političkim promenama što je determinisalo njen razvoj. Ukratko, sociologija se razvijala u dva okruženja: u političko-društvenom kontekstu kao "prođužena ruka politike", i u spoznajno-teoretskom kao "mlađa nedorasla sestra filozofije".

Sociologija bi, budući da su njeni klasični rezultati već ugrađeni u tkivo svih važnijih društvenih i humanističkih nauka, mogla da bude transdisciplinarno duhovno polje na kojem je moguć njihov najracionalniji susret i najplodnija uzajamna saradnja i komunikacija uopšte. Posređujući u racionalnom dijalogu među humanističkim disciplinama, sociologija se najpre, najbolje i najperspektivnije može oživeti. Time bi ne samo povratila onaj ugled koji je nekad imala nego bi stekla novi, veći i trajniji.

Ključne reči: *sociologija, poziv sociologije; principi sociologije; profesionalizacija sociologa; sociološko znanje.*