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## THEORIES AND PARADIGMS IN SOCIOLOGY

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**Abstract.** *This paper presents the interpretations of sociological science fundamental categories - conceptual and structural explanations of the sociological theory and sociological paradigm, as well as the examples of their classification. Ritzer's definition of sociological theory was approved. He considers it a form of scientific theory by which smaller or greater systems of scientific laws and hypotheses on the society as a whole or on some societal phenomena are established through the application of scientific research methods. Several elements may be distinguished in the sociological theory structure - concept, variable, statement and form (J. H. Turner). The sociological paradigm is defined as a fundamental picture of the society (concept, structure and society dynamics) which has been more or less accepted by the association of sociologists in certain periods of this science development. In this respect, the author discusses old and new sociological paradigms that mutually differ with regard to the theories, methods and instruments applied in learning about the society in its totality. Taking into account the temporal, content-subject and validity criteria, sociological theories are classified in two groups: a) classical sociological theories (positivistic, mechanistic, biologist, psychologist, Marxist, formal-sociological and cyclic theories of society) and b) modern sociological theories (behavioral theories, functionalism, structuralism and critical societal theory).*

**Key words:** *sociological theory, sociological paradigm, classification*

### 1. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY CONCEPT AND ELEMENTS

Investigations in the field of sociological science history are greatly permeated by the analyses of various sociological theories, either old (classical) or newer (modern), conservative or progressive, "mini" or "maxi" ones. The existence of numerous social theories demonstrates not only the development of sociology, but also the complexity and dynamism of social phenomena and inability to establish sharp mathematical relations in a

social organism research. At the same time, it helps revealing the positive fact of the openness and developing possibilities of the sociology as a science. The variety of thematic and methodological choices among the sociologists' association members concerning the sociology as a subject supports this tendency. For this reason, the statement of Anthony Giddens (Anthony Giddens: "Social Theory and Modern Sociology", Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1987) about multidimensional development directions of the sociology as a science is acceptable, as well as his assertion that during the last two decades of their development the social sciences have been abandoning the ideal that their "aims and logic are more or less the same as the ones in the natural sciences"<sup>1</sup>.

The differences in theoretical and methodological approaches to social research are also reflected in the interpretations of sociological theory as a term. The term of theory itself does not cause any significant disagreement, being that the theory encompasses the entirety of systematized knowledge and hypotheses by which the phenomena may be empirically verified and predicted in the sense of their development trends, or by which certain unsolved scientific problems can be unveiled. On the contrary, a great number of various definitions appear in the interpretation of the term of sociological theory and its classification and typology.

In this respect, G. Ritzer (G. Ritzer: "Contemporary Sociological Theory", A. Knopf, New York, USA, 1983) points out four meanings of the sociological theory: as a systematic and chronological representation of certain ideas, as different social taxonomies and classifications in the history of social thought, as a form of systematized or partial research hypothesis, and as a form of scientific theory which follows logic laws of scientific attitude establishment. We would rather accept Ritzer's definition of the sociological theory as a form of scientific theory which, along with the scientific research methods application, establishes smaller or greater systems of scientific laws and hypotheses about the society as a whole or about particular societal phenomena<sup>2</sup>. Nicholas C. Mullins defines sociological theories as a kind of "creations (given in any form, most frequently a written one), the aim of which is to analyze and generalize mutual relations among people through the application of certain number of general standpoints and/or variables whose interrelations are determined by specific theory laws"<sup>3</sup>. Mullins' definition of sociological theory refers to the need of recognizing basic structural elements of a sociological theory. In addition to this, a sociological theory requires the observation of principles and laws existing in the standard fund of sociological science and science in general, as well as the usage of specific scientific knowledge about the phenomenon related to the theory itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Društvene nauke i filozofija - trendovi u novijoj socijalnoj teoriji*, "Kulturni radnik", Zagreb, 2/1990., p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> For more details concerning the sociological theory terminological definition and their classification in the modern sociology, refer to the article: Ognjen Čaldarović, *O pristupima klasifikaciji suvremenih socioloških teorija*, "Kulturni radnik", Zagreb, 2/1990, pp 69-93.

<sup>3</sup> Complex reviews of sociological theories are also presented in the book: Ljiljana Slović, *Savremena sociologija*, "Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva", Belgrade, 1986. According to the opinion of Lj. Slović, in his definition of sociological theory Mullins emphasized the analysis and generalization of social phenomena (ibid. p 137).

Robert Merton has analyzed the empirical investigation impact on a sociological theory, outlining the comprehension of the scientific research and theory interaction. Namely, Merton is of the opinion that the function of empirical research is not only to test or verify scientific hypotheses, but it greatly exceeds this passive role of a hypothesis confirmation or refutation. "Research plays an active role: it performs at least four important functions, which help the theory development formation."<sup>4</sup> A scientific theory initiation represents the first basic role of empirical research, being that the research material may be used for the construction of new hypotheses and theoretical attitudes. The empirical material can undoubtedly contribute to the formation of new theoretical formulations or reformulation of existing ones (a theory resetting). Finally, the creative part of the research lies in the sociological theory psychological and logical comprehension, as well. "For, the main research requirement is that the ideas, variables, be defined with enough clarity to enable the research realization. This requirement cannot be fulfilled unconsciously and easily in some kind of a discursive presentation often referred to as a sociological theory. The explanation of ideas usually enters an empirical research in the form of the index establishment of variables to be dealt with. Non-research speculations may deal with 'morality' or 'social cohesion' in a very detailed manner but without any clear conception of what is meant by these ideas. Yet, they have to be cleared up if the researcher wants to systematically investigate the cases of low and high morality, social cohesion or social disagreement."<sup>5</sup> Merton's observation of the need for clear formulation of ideas used in a sociological theory is very actual, being that it appears as a problem in disputes in numerous scientific meetings, and it may hence be attributed the significance of a methodological principle in scientific work. Of course, the theoretical opinion in sociology has to be interactively connected to high-standard empirical researches.

A more complete presentation of the sociological theory basic elements is given by Turner in his study (J. H. Turner, "The Structure of Sociological Theory", The Dorsey Press, Homewood, III, USA, 1974). Turner points out four basic sociological theory elements: theory concept, variable, statement and form<sup>6</sup>. As a sociological theory element, concept represents the author's fundamental idea about certain social phenomenon, this idea having a unique meaning regardless of the context in which it is presented (for example, the theoretical concept of alienation has the unique meaning in sociology in spite of its different manifestations). The sociological theory variable shows the theoretical concept development. The theoretical statements represent sociological conclusions about the social phenomenon structure or about their interrelations. The sociological theory form refers to the level of its exactness. So-called "firm" theories are more abstract and they allow deductive conclusion, while the "loose" sociological theories are closer to scientific hypotheses (assumptions).

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<sup>4</sup> Robert K. Merton, *O teorijskoj sociologiji*, CDD, Zagreb, 1979, p 172.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p 184.

<sup>6</sup> Ognjen Čaldarović, *O pristupima klasifikaciji suvremenih socioloških teorija*, "Kulturni radnik", Zagreb, 2/1990, p 73.

## 2. OF SOCIOLOGICAL PARADIGM

The concept of scientific paradigm, and particularly the sociological paradigm, is closely connected to sociological theories. If we assume that a scientific paradigm represents a general hypothesis of scientific knowledge, a general knowledge which can be presented both as a practical one and as a specific matrix of scientific research, then we can talk about a wider and more exact system of views, attitudes and theories concerning the scientific explanation of objective reality. In its widest meaning, a scientific paradigm is "a set of facts and convictions which is systematically presented, that is presented as a theory whose function is to initiate theoretical productions, and practical research in certain fields thereafter, so that it appears in this sense as a source of some future or already existing theoretical composition"<sup>7</sup>. In accordance with that, a sociological paradigm represents a fundamental illustration of the society (the definition of its concept, the comprehension of its structure and dynamics) which has been more or less accepted in the association of sociologists during certain periods of this science development.

The sociological paradigm performs significant functions in a qualitative sociological analysis. According to Merton, at least five functions of a paradigm in sociology may be specified: a) the function of defining concepts, b) the function of decreasing the probability of unconscious introduction of latent assumptions and concepts, c) the function of cumulating theoretical interpretations, d) the function of concept systematization, and, e) the function of qualitative analysis codification<sup>8</sup>. The first function of the paradigm in sociology is to provide precision in designating the central concepts of a sociological analysis, and it can almost be compared to the significance and functions of mathematical symbols in natural sciences. Moreover, the paradigm implies logical concept derivation from previously clearly defined concepts. The cumulation of theoretical interpretations in a sociological paradigm enables new theoretical attitudes to be derived from and supported by the previous ones, producing a coherent theoretical structure. In case the fundamental paradigm assumptions are weak, new theoretical statements cannot withstand theoretical and empirical verification. Paradigms may initiate the systematization of significant concepts, as well as point out the need of empirical and theoretical investigation of certain problems. Paradigms also contribute to certain codification and unification of procedures in partial and global researches.

In this respect, in the frame of sociology we may find the old sociological paradigm and the new sociological paradigm, which mutually differ with regard to the theories, methods and instruments applied in learning about the social totality. Professor Miroslav Pečujlić is of the opinion that the old (classical) sociological paradigm pervaded classical sociological theories and so-called objectivistic theories (positivism, functionalism, system theories, structuralism). The statements and attitudes of a classical sociological paradigm are predominant in them, particularly the conceptions of: linear progress and historical determinism, mechanical comprehension of the universe, idealized image of the society in the center of which are order, harmony, nonconflicting, and in which the conflicts, social struggles, force and domination, social changes, discontinuity, great

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<sup>7</sup> Vjekoslav Afrić, *Struktura sociološke teorije*, "Naprijed", Zagreb, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Robert K. Merton, *O teorijskoj sociologiji*, CDD, Zagreb, 1979, p 78

obsession of theory by apology and governing system preservation, dominance of system over personality, limited picture of historical actors, are either excluded or less discussed. A new sociological paradigm is created on completely new assumptions and knowledge, such as: the openness of history, entropic comprehension of the world (a danger of the planet destruction), the beginning of an era of great cultural transformations, mutual permeance of social processes of continuity and discontinuity, the necessity of free human actions development, the appearance of new agents of social changes, the beginning of social movements, the outset of new factors of social dynamics<sup>9</sup>. Alongside with that, a new sociological paradigm organically originates from the critical and creative meditation of previous systems of thought in the science of sociology. "The first step in a large revitalization of sociology lies, then, in the synthesis, in supplementation of mutually exclusive streams: a modern system theory, critical theories of the society, theories of radical changes (dialectics), as well as in the apprehension of social phenomena as the phenomena with certain meanings. Comparative investigation of objective circumstances and subjective motives, observation of the phenomenon in the system frame, but of more profound changes as well, critical examination of the existent and also of the desirable and possible future (alternative) - all of that provides incomparably more powerful intellectual instruments for the understanding of the new, more complex world that is being formed. Yet, it gives much more, in fact. A new sociological paradigm, critical interpretation and comprehension of existing and search for more rational social life forms, and a desirable and possible future, have become a decisive factor of great cultural transformations brought into focus by history"<sup>10</sup>. In this manner, sociology is actively included into the modern civilization courses, it observes and analyses contemporary society and establishes itself as a modern science. "A true history of sociological theory has to exceed by evidence the chronologically arranged disquisition set; it has to deal with interrelations between the theory and other items, like the social origin and status of its exponents, a variable social organization of sociology, changes of the ideas brought about by their expanding, and the relations of ideas toward the surrounding social and cultural structure"<sup>11</sup>.

Being that sociology is a multi-paradigmatic science (Ritzer), and we can agree with that, in a sociological explanation we should also take into consideration the verified data of various theories and paradigms developed in its scope. In this respect, the research of the social structure in modern society, for example, demands the application of both social-class and stratification theories, which may cover the research subject more complexly if combined in use. Ritzer's paradigms may in this sense be understood as complementary and not exclusive and mutually independent paradigms. Namely, although the paradigm of social facts, paradigm of social definitions and social-behavioral paradigm differ in their contents, their statements are respected in modern sociology<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to the distinguished study of professor Miroslav Pečujlić: *Savremena sociologija*, "Službeni list SFRJ", Belgrade, 1991, pp 5-51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p 51.

<sup>11</sup> Robert K. Merton, *O teorijskoj sociologiji*, CDD, Zagreb, 1979, p 40.

<sup>12</sup> "The paradigm of social facts corresponds to the sociological orientation aimed at the research of social facts, institutions (Durkheim and Sociological Method Rules), the methods of interview and historical-comparative

## 3. TYPOLOGY AND CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

The complexity and numerousness of sociological theories produce difficulties in formulating firmer criteria for their categorization and classification. According to the level of generality, sociological theories may be classified into general theories of society (so-called "great theories") and particular theories of society (so-called "small" sociological theories). The well-known sociological theory historian J. Goričar is of the opinion that general theories of society include the sociological systems of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, as well as the Marxist theory of society. Particular sociological theories are characteristic for modern sociological orientation which is, through complex theoretical and empirical research, trying to give adequate sociological picture of certain social phenomena (town, village, labor, family, social groups, social structure, social changes, etc.). Robert Merton, an American, with his middle range theory, is a typical representative of such theoretical determination. According to the middle range theories, sociological research is aimed at revealing the structure and development laws of certain social phenomena in certain periods of time. Apart from the polarized opinion of sociologists about the middle range theory validity, Merton points out significant features of these theories which do not divide sociological knowledge up, as often asserted, but consolidate them by reconciling theory oriented empirical research and sociological generalizations. In this sense, according to Merton, the middle range theories:

- consist of limited sets of assumptions out of which specific hypotheses are derived and confirmed by empirical research,
- get united into wider theoretical networks, as illustrated by the theory of aspiration level, referential groups and structure of circumstances,
- are abstract enough to deal with different spheres of social behavior and social structure, so that they exceed pure description or empirical generalization (theory of social conflict is applied to ethnic and racial conflicts, class conflicts and international conflicts),
- abolish the distinctions between micro-sociological problems, appearing in a small group research, and macro-sociological problems, occurring in a comparative investigation of social mobility and formal organization, as well as the interdependence of social institutions,
- are in harmony with various systems of sociological thought (Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Sorokin, Parsons, etc.),

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methods, and predominant sociological theories applied in the frame of the mentioned paradigm are the structural-functional theory, conflict theory and elements of the system theory. The paradigm of social definitions corresponds to the work of M. Weber and his interpretation of social action, that is the social situation definitions and investigation of these definitions impact on actions and reactions. Interview, poll and observation represent the major methods, while the theory of action, symbolical interaction, phenomenological sociology, ethno-methodology and existentialist sociology represent the basic sociological theories in the scope of this paradigm. Finally, the social-behavioral paradigm corresponds to the works of Skinner, in most of the cases the method of experiment is used, and different psychological theories are most frequently applied for the phenomena interpretation, while the theory of exchange is the most frequent sociological one." (Refer to: O. Čaldarović, *O pristupima klasifikaciji suvremenih socioloških teorija*, "Kulturni radnik", Zagreb, 2/1990, pp 85-86.)

– also include the specification of ignorance, orienting toward the problems which can be nowadays cleared up in the light of the accessible knowledge<sup>13</sup>.

The appearance of these theories represents to a certain extent a response to the uncritical acceptance of the theory of social development as a form of linear and automatic social progress. Contrary to the tendency of sociologists to develop all-inclusive theories, which was the characteristic of the sociological systems established in the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and to a certain degree in agreement with the philosophical system of thought, contemporary sociological researches, according to Merton, have to thoroughly and theoretically-empirically investigate each and every segment of the society.

Sociological theories may be classified according to the country (state) in which they appear most frequently (American sociological theories, German, French, English, etc.), according to the time of their origin (the 19<sup>th</sup> century sociological theories, the 20<sup>th</sup> century sociological theories, old and new theories), according to the ideological factor (middle-class theories of society and Marxist theory of society), scientific concept and contents of a sociological theory (biologist theory, psychologist theory, formalistic theory, Marxist theory of society, etc.).

Several types of sociological theories may be recognized, depending on the sociological theory level of development and consistency. The types are: concepts, empirical generalization, social taxonomies and models. According to J. H. Turner, "the 'concepts' are only appropriate, non-verifiable theories, the 'ideas', or 'perspectives' which cannot be treated as theories in any serious systematization; empirical generalizations are most often only empirical descriptions or generalizations of some partial phenomena, social taxonomies are most frequently only the elements and efforts of systematization of certain phenomena (usually mere biographies and bibliographies of important persons in sociology), and only models and tendencies toward modeled construction represent the genuine way for the development of a sociological theory"<sup>14</sup>.

Difficulties in determining the sociological theory types are also occurring due to different concepts of sociologists with regard to the social order, social changes, comprehension of subjective-objective relations, the role of an individual in the society, system of values, social functions, social development (W. Skidmore, *Theoretical Thinking in Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, USA, 1975). The dependence of sociological theories and ideological connotation on the society complicates the typology and classification of sociological theories likewise (the examples of functionalism and Marxist theory of society). One may find in them the analyses of social system nature and structure, the distribution of economic, political and spiritual power, various definitions of social changes and laws of social trends.

The sociological theory classification has also been presented in the most popular sociology textbooks in USA and Great Britain (in USA: James W. Vander Zanden, *The Sociological Experience/An Introduction to Sociology*, New York, Random House, 1988;

<sup>13</sup> Robert K. Merton, *O teorijskoj sociologiji*, CDD, Zagreb, 1979, pp 75-76.

<sup>14</sup> Ognjen Čaldarović, *O pristupima klasifikaciji suvremenih socioloških teorija*, "Kulturni radnik", Zagreb, 2/1990, pp 85-86.

in Great Britain: Michael Haralambos with Robin M. Heald, *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, University of Tutorial Press, 1980). In the mentioned textbooks, the authors try to offer relevant information to the readers about the main theories and courses of sociological science development. In this sense, basic sociological theories are presented in scholarly circles in the form of tripartite classification into the Marxist theory of society, functionalism and interaction theory. According to these authors, they are at the same time the predominant scientifically-theoretical and empirical orientations in the modern sociology.

Apart from the relatively simplified classification of sociological theories in the academic sociology, much more complex and developed systems of sociological theory classification may be found in the modern sociological literature. W. L. Wallace (in: *Sociological Theory*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, USA, 1969) classifies sociological theories into eleven groups: 1) ecological school, 2) demographic school, 3) materialism, 4) psychological school, 5) technological school, 6) functional structuralism, 7) interchanging structuralism, 8) conflict structuralism, 9) symbolical interaction school, 10) social action school, 11) functional imperativeness. The criteria of this classification are polyvalent - social life factors, the place of structure in a social system and the role of individuals and smaller social groups in the society as a whole. One of the significant sociological theory classifications in the modern sociology has also been derived by J. H. Turner (in: *Societal Stratification, A Theoretical Analysis*, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 1984). Turner classifies sociological theories into: 1) functional theories (early functionalism of E. Durkheim, functional imperativeness of T. Parsons and functional structuralism of R. Merton), 2) conflict theories (conflict legacy - Marx, Simmel and conflict functionalists, dialectical conflict theory - Dahrendorf and conflict functionalism - Coser), 3) interactional theories (the growth of interactional doctrine - Mead, the theory of roles and symbolical interaction school), 4) the theory of interchange (early interchange theory, interchanging behaviorism - Homans, interchanging structuralism - Blau), and 5) ethno-methodology (alternative paradigm). Turner obviously combines several criteria in his classification, particularly the functional analysis and individualistic sociology.

Several attitudes have been singled out in the discussions about the contents of the modern sociology concept. One of the attitudes determines the modern sociology as the sociology in the transition of centuries (passing from the 19th to the 20th century), when great socio-economical and political changes emerged, especially the consolidation of imperialism and societal industrialization. The opinion of the others is that modern sociology begins with the works of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Charles Cooley (1864-1929). American sociologist Talcott Parsons states that the generation of sociologists acting during the period of 1890-1935 laid the foundations of modern sociology. In this sense, particular significance is attributed to Durkheim's definition of concepts, such as structure, function and social institution. Paul Lazarsfeld claims that modern sociology begins with the application of contemporary methods for social phenomena investigating (at the end of the World War II), that is with data codification and systematization. Regardless of different comprehension of the modern sociology concept, we consider the definition of Lj. Slović acceptable. Under this term she understands a synthetical expression for the sociological science development phase in which great structural social changes are generated on the basis of industrial and post-



industrial development, and in which the sociology tends to reveal the principles and laws of social phenomena and changes, including the criteria for their evaluation<sup>15</sup>.

Starting from the above presented, more or less complex typologies and classifications of sociological theories, as well as from the necessity of clear presentation of former and contemporary sociological orientations, we think that sociological theories can be divided into classical and modern sociological theories. Besides the fact that the temporal, content-subject and validity criteria were combined in this case, the traditional academic presentation of the problems in our sociological literature was also given importance to a great extent. The following are included into the classical sociological theories: the positivistic theory of Auguste Comte, mechanistic theories, biologist theories, psychologist theories, Marxist theory of society, formal-sociological theories and cyclic theories of society. Modern sociological theories are presented by: behavioral theories in sociology, functionalism, structuralist theory of society and critical societal theory.

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## TEORIJE I PARADIGME U SOCIOLOGIJI

**Petar Hafner**

*U radu su prezentirana tumačenja fundamentalnih kategorija sociološke nauke - pojmovno i strukturalno objašnjenje sociološke teorije i sociološke paradigme, kao i primeri njihove klasifikacije. Afirmisano je Ricerovo odredjenje sociološke teorije kao oblika naučne teorije kojom se uz primenu metoda naučnog istraživanja ustanovljavaju manji ili veći sistemi naučnih zakona i hipoteza o totalitetu društva ili pojedinim društvenim pojavama. U strukturi sociološke teorije moguće je razlikovati nekoliko elemenata - koncept, varijablu, tvrdnju i formu (J. H. Turner). Sociološka paradigma definisana je kao fundamentalna slika društva (pojma, strukture i dinamike društva) koja je u manjoj ili većoj meri prihvaćena u zajednici sociologa u pojedinim periodima razvoja ove nauke. U tom smislu, autor govori o staroj i novoj sociološkoj paradigmi, a koje se međusobno razlikuju u odnosu na korišćene teorije, metode i instrumente u saznavanju društvenog totaliteta. Uvažavajući temporalni, sadržinsko-predmetni i vrednosni kriterijum, sociološke teorije klasifikovane su u dve grupe: a) klasične sociološke teorije (pozitivistička, mehanicistička, biologistička, psihologistička, marksistička, formalno-sociološka i ciklična teorija*

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<sup>15</sup> Ljiljana Slović, *Savremena sociologija*, "Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva", Belgrade, 1986, pp 79-100.

*društva) i b) savremene sociološke teorije (bihejviorističke, funkcionalizam, strukturalizam i kritička teorija društva).*

**Ključne reči:** *sociološka teorija, sociološka paradigma, klasifikacija*