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GENERAL SOCIOLOGY

- REVISED EDITION -



Foreword

Starting with the 21st century, human society has become increasingly complex, so that today we live in a profoundly troubling world, subject to continuous change, marked by deep conflicts, tensions and social divisions, but also by the ravishing effects of modern technology on the surrounding environment. All our questions concerning the forming of the world, the social differences of mankind or those regarding the future represent a preoccupation of sociology, which has a fundamental role in modern life.

Sociology makes it so that people carefully examine the social environment they live in, verify their incomplete or even erroneous knowledge related to it. Sociology helps individuals understand the means of organization of society, the reason for which a society is as it is and how it can be changed. Through sociological knowledge, people acquire a new form of consciousness, this allowing us to state that sociology is a liberating science. The purpose of the present endeavour is to present basic sociological concepts in the simplest possible way, this offering it a distinct character. The apparition and development of sociology, the fundamental notions, the theoretical and methodological landmarks, the organization, the products and social relations are found perfectly systemized in the contents of the present creation.

All elements contained in it are presented in a manner so as to aid in acquiring knowledge in different fields of sociology, it can be easily adaptable to the needs of individual courses, as sociology ensures a better understanding, offering us an increasingly greater chance of changing our own lives.

I. THE OBJECT AND DEFINITION OF SOCIOLOGY

We currently live in a profoundly disturbing world, although many promises for the future are met. It's a world subject to continuous change, marked by deep conflicts, civil strife and wars, where the damaging effects of modern technology on the environment are also found¹. All the questions that today's world brings into focus find their answers due to the emergence and development of sociology, which has a fundamental role in modern intellectual life, sociology being the scientific study of social human life, of groups and societies. Sociology was born as a scientific endeavor of social life in the second half of the nineteenth century, as an epistemic response to the conjunction of major changes and economic, social, political and intellectual conditions of this period in history².

Sociology is a daring initiative and one of immense responsibility, since its subject is our own behavior as social beings. The area of action of sociology is extremely wide, from the analysis of transient encounters between individuals on the street, to the investigation of global social processes³. The term "*sociology*" was introduced in the vocabulary by Auguste Comte who believed that addressing society's issues should be placed under the sign of positive study of the facts, in the spirit and with analysis methods similar to those of natural sciences. However, Comte did not interpret sociology only as an intellectual exercise, but also as a genuine social life improvement tool.

The substantiation of sociology was requested and highlighted by a series of phenomena specific to the second half of the nineteenth century's European world, such as:

- the increasingly accentuated industrialization as a result of the technological progress;

¹ Anthony Giddens, *Sociologie*, Ediția a V-a, Editura ALL, București, 2010, p. 4.

² Vasile Marin, *Sociologie*, Editura Universității Transilvania din Brașov, Brașov, 2005, p. 13.

³ Anthony Giddens, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

- the rapid urbanization as a result of the technological and economic progress and the change in the relations between economic sectors;
- the break in rural barriers and excessive liberalization of large urban communities in process of constitution;
- the emergence of unintended consequences of the restructuring and resizing of economy and society in general, such as: poverty, marginalization of groups of people⁴;
- the manifestation major of social crises as a result of political and social events and of the redrawing of Europe's political map.

Along with the development of a variety of social sciences, each dealing with different aspects of social reality, the issue of determining the specifics of sociology became more and more acute. Defining it as a science of social reality is no longer satisfactory, seeing as each specific field of the social tends to develop, eluding the whole.

Therefore, sociology also deals with the general, abstract characteristics of social behavior, social relations, groups and communities, it also can be termed as a science of the social and not of social reality⁵.

Sociology is a scientific discipline structured onto several steps, as follows:

- general theory of the social (social organization theory) also known as the social system theory, the theory of social action, the abstract theory of social organization, the logic of the social. This theory ignores the actual content of various social phenomena, analyzing only their characteristic of being social;
- branch sociologies (industrial sociology, family sociology, art sociology etc.), theories of the various components and subsystems of global society, analyzing the mutual influences between them;
- global society theory (macro-sociology) which is a theory on types of societies, the major types of organization of global society, with important implications for understanding each particular social phenomenon, each subsystem⁶.

⁴ Vasile Marin, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 18.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 19.

I.1. The main moments in the development of sociology

- Auguste Comte publishes *"Positive Philosophy"* (6 vol., 1830-1842), in which he uses the term sociology for the first time (1838);
- Harriet Martineau publishes *"How to Observe Customs and Habits"* (1838) - the first work on social research methodology;
- Karl Marx - *"The Capital"* (1867);
- Herbert Spencer publishes *"Principles of Sociology"* (1883);
- Lester F. Ward publishes *"Dynamic Sociology"* (1883);
- Emile Durkheim publishes *"The Rules of Sociological Method"* (1894), *"Social Division of Labor"* (1893) and *"Suicide"* (1897);
- Ferdinand Tonnies publishes *"Community and Society"* (1887);
- The first journal of sociology appears (1895): *"American Journal of Sociology"*;
- Charles Norton Cooley publishes *"The Human Nature of Social Order"* (1902);
- Max Weber publishes *"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"* (1904-1905) and *"Economy and Society"* (1921);
- Wilfredo Pareto publishes *"General Sociology Treaty"* (1917);
- The work of George Herbert Mead, *"The Person, the Ego and the Society"* (1934) is published;
- Talcott Parsons publishes *"The Structure of Social Action"* (1935) and *"The Social System"* (1951);
- Robert King publishes *"Social Theory and Social Structure"* (1949);
- C. Wright Mills publishes *"Sociological Imagination"* (1959)⁷.

I.2. The relationship of sociology with other sciences

Based on the research of a field of reality, the social one, sociology occurs inevitably encounters many other sciences. The sciences on society and on humans are divided into:

⁷ Ioan Mihăilescu, *Sociologie generală*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2003, p. 15.

- social sciences (anthropology, economics, social psychology, history, sociology);
- humanistic disciplines (philosophy, theology, literature, music and arts);
- behavioral sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology, behavioral aspects of biology, of economics, of geography, of law, of psychiatry, of political sciences)⁸.

Sociology is included, therefore, in two groups of sciences: social and behavioral. This shows, on the one hand, the complexity of its object of study, on the other hand, the existence of different ways in which social issues can be addressed. The finality of sociology lies in the scientific knowledge, explanation and understanding of the structure and functioning of global society. Analyzing sociology's relations with other social sciences is appropriate in view of delineating the field of sociology⁹.

Psychology is the science that studies individual behavior and personality through properties such as: attitudes, needs, feelings, as well as through processes: learning, perception etc. In this area, a particular science distinguishes itself, social psychology, closely associated with sociology. Social psychology is the scientific knowledge of behavior interaction and human mental processes. It studies the manner of interaction of individual and group behaviors, as well as collective states and mental processes, personality in terms of socio-cultural conditioning. Sociology, unlike psychology, deals with knowledge about social relations, structures, interactions and organization of society. Psychology studies the psyche of the individual, while sociology deals with social communities.

Anthropology is the science of man as an individual, group and species seen from a biological and social perspective. Physical anthropology examines themes related to the origin of man. Close to sociology is cultural anthropology, centered on the study of human behavior in the context of norms and values of an actual society. Sociology focuses on knowledge about contemporary societies, while cultural anthropology has as object archaic cultures. Cultural anthropology discourse includes topics related to

⁸ Achim Miha, *Introducere în sociologie*, Editura Dacia, Cluj Napoca, 1992, p. 26.

⁹ Constantin Schifirneț, *Sociologie*, Editura Comunicare, București, 2004, p. 24.

the contexts of existence of traditions, to modern civilization in relation to traditional values¹⁰.

Social anthropologist studies the social structures of a traditional society and sociology addresses the same issue in modern societies. Like sociology, anthropology has as an object society. Therefore, it was regarded as the sister of sociology.

Economic sciences study the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. The main themes are: work, money, finance, business, international economic relations etc. Unlike sociology, these sciences pay little attention to the interaction between people in economic activities, or to social structures in the economic sphere. For sociology, economy is the environment where social relations are produced, where man can assert himself as human labor in certain social contexts. The evolution of sociological thinking led to the establishment of sociology branch, economic sociology, oriented towards the sociological analysis of economic life. Political sciences study ideas regarding the political organization of society, modes of government, political behavior, power structures, political movements, electoral behavior, political participation. Sociology includes many of these topics, however, analyzed as social realities. It must be said that the differences between sociology and political sciences are small. The foundation of political sciences is given, undoubtedly, by sociology¹¹.

I.3. Major themes of sociology

Having as a starting point the extraordinary diversity of paradigms and the interests of contemporary sociologists, researchers, especially American ones, organized an inquiry among sociologists, for then to extract the common themes, this leading to a genuine "table of subjects", a problematic accepted by those invested. According to Alex Inkeles (1964), such a "table of subjects" contains the following issues (which can interpreted as the major themes of sociology as a science)¹²:

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹¹ Constantin Schifirneț, *op. cit.*, p. 29-30.

¹² Traian Herseni, *Sociologie*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1982, p. 47.