

CAN SOCIOLOGY DEFEND SOCIETIES?

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Abstract. The article discusses some aspects of the mutual influences of sociology and society. The first part of the article is devoted to the “mechanism” of sociological impact on social knowledge (sciences) and societies. The second part discusses the way the “mechanism” was built (social environment’s influences on sociology), and the third part presents basic aspects of the sociology’s impact on societies. Actual state of sociology is considered as a source of dangers (new risks) for societies and the urgent need of radical reconstruction of the science is emphasized.

Key words: preventive social function (of sociology); standard model of scientific research; secrecy, ignorance; nonknowledge; intelligence; new risks.

A need to assess the social impact of sociology

Probably it is difficult to find a more attractive idea in sociology than that science must defend societies. There are also specific proposals for ‘sociological protection’ of society (for instance, development of public sociology, sociology of happiness, etc.).

But there is something disturbing – the first step towards the construction of such protection is an adequate assessment of the real impact that sociology has on societies. However, studies of the real impact of science on society are not sustainable and meaningful mainstream of sociological work, and one of their main conclusions is that one should not expect any direct social utility of sociology. Furthermore, the relationships between the state of sociology, the way this science is producing knowledge, the ‘quality’ of the ‘product’, the manner of its use and the effects of using remain some of the ‘darkest zones’ caused by failure to analyse (in the words of Foucault), inadequate research and knowledge deficit.

It is a fact that sociology is not particularly sensitive to the risks that threaten societies. The science, for instance, ignored one of the earliest warnings of impending crisis (‘dark period’), despite the importance of the warning, and although it was made by a scientist with very high prestige [Wallerstein, 1998].

All this suggests that without assessment of the social impact of sociology (and the inverse impact of society on sociology), it is not possible to formulate adequate proposals for protection of societies.

Mechanism for influencing societies

Sociologists are aware that the mechanism through which their science influences society depends on the conflicting relations between the dynamics of social and scientific knowledge and the social environment (its central component – power). However, the sociology of knowledge has hardly turned these relations, and the consequences thereof (for sociology and society) into a subject of continuous and careful monitoring.

And this conflicting relations have given rise to a strategy to control the creation of social knowledge (social sciences) aimed at adapting it to the requirements for stability of the social order. The implementation of the strategy can be illustrated both by longitudinal observations and through numerous individual episodes. One particularly striking example is offered by an episode from the history of risks-related studies: these studies were able to make a rapid progress and in a relatively short period of time offered socially significant and useful research results. But after a period of intensive and successful development, the progress of the studies ran into difficulties and slowed down. Trying to determine the cause of the difficulties hampering the progress of risk analysis, the Society for Risk Analysis set up a special committee which identified the cause (which, according to Kasperson, many people have guessed): **“the definition of risk in its nature is a political act”** [Kasperson, 1992: 155], i.e. the definition of risk is the monopoly of political decision-makers, and the advancement of knowledge about the risks could disrupt the monopoly. In other words, the monopoly on the social processing of risks can be protected from erosion by limiting the advancement of knowledge about risks and their social treatment.

In the history of social sciences can be seen many facts that show that these sciences have long encountered the same problem – the advance of social analysis was confronted with the exercise of power (political monopoly on decision-making) and the advancement of science has been subjected to restriction in order to protect the political monopoly from erosion.

In fact, the political monopoly covers not only the definition of risk, but also other interrelated phases of the social treatment of risks such as: creating a ‘picture’ of the social world (monopoly of the dominant ideology); identification of threats – risks contained in the ‘picture’ (a key political act in the process of social treatment); analysis of (identified) risks (the creation of knowledge about them) – defining actions for risk prevention or elimination of damages (strategies, policies, design of specialized (social) security systems).

Because of the links between the different phases of the social processing of risks, the preservation of political monopoly on the definition of risk requires it to cover also the other phases. Hence, restrictions on the advancement of knowledge should also be extended to the other phases. For

example, in order to avoid erosion of the dominant ideology, knowledge that can erode it may not be created (mainly – general social theory); social sciences can only create knowledge concerning threats that have been politically identified (autonomous scientific identification of significant risks is intervention in the central political act); major, socially important proposals for the construction of systems for addressing risks should not be formulated independently – this can only be done within the framework already outlined by political monopoly (through the relevant strategies, policies), etc.

Because of its importance, the system of restrictions on the creation of social knowledge and the technologies to implement restrictions inevitably become a strategic line to stabilize the political and, generally, the social order. And the emergence of such strategic line creates continuous extension of restrictions. The core of the strategy is to put ‘on hold’ the advancement of knowledge in social sciences and even the active maintenance of ignorance, especially in those key areas of the social realities and social treatment of risks that are exclusive political (power) monopoly. It is possible to trace the gradual maturing of the strategy (the ideas) that restricting the advancement of knowledge is a means of maintaining political control over societies – starting with the insights of Machiavelli (who clearly understood the close link between power and secrecy as a form of social differentiation of knowledge); through Boulainvilliers (who emphasizes the connection between control over knowledge and power)¹, Nietzsche (who connects the “will to knowledge” with “will to power”) and M. Weber’s “domination of rational bureaucracy”; to the explicit statement of social scientists published in a scientific journal in the middle of the 20th century that “ignorance can be useful and potentially positive for maintenance of the social order” [Moore and Tumin, 1949]. Of course, along with the progress of these ideas, technologies for their practical implementation also moved forward. The direction in which the control over the creation of social knowledge was developing can be observed too – the extensive use of secrecy, ignorance and nonknowledge as ‘protective shells’ against erosion of the political monopoly (exercise of power).

Sociology as a gate keeper

Sociology is a field of particularly intensive implementation of the above ‘stabilizing restrictions’ due to a well-known reason – sociology is the most general social science. Therefore, sociology has a significant impact on the state of overall social knowledge, the direction of its progress (respectively – the restriction of progress) and, therefore, on the intervention of the social

¹ Boulainvilliers’s statement goes: “You will not regain power if you do not restore the status of knowledge that you have been deprived of – or rather that you have never tried to possess. Because you actually have always fought without being aware that from one point on the real battle, at least in society, is no longer fought with weapons but with knowledge” [Foucault, 2003: 179].

sciences in the treatment of risks and their possible eroding influence on the political monopoly on the treatment.

The 'interventionist potential' of social knowledge depends largely on its state and if social knowledge will be fragmented, contradictory, 'politicized', irrelevant to the political process of decision making or vice versa – integrated, consistent, meaningful and socially influential depends largely on sociology. If it is in an adequate state, sociology can integrate disciplinary (social and other) knowledge and use it to build notions (conceptualization, theorizing) of the social world and its central aspects. It can add a 'social dimension' (idea of social impact and utility) to the scientific validity of the knowledge generated in other sciences, etc. If it contributes to the integration of social sciences, sociology might have also an eroding effect on political acts through the scientific construction of 'long causal chains' that may restrict 'political acts' (by outlining fields of scientifically feasible solutions and associating the 'acts' with their consequences and motives).

But sociology can achieve the opposite effect – by keeping social sciences and the creation of knowledge therein fragmented, disintegrated where the 'threads' brought by individual social sciences remain 'incoherent' and do not form an entire fabric of social knowledge (adequate social and scientific representation of the social world). Figuratively speaking, if sociology as a 'last link' in the complex of social sciences does not perform the last (finishing) operation in producing the final 'product' - social knowledge, the latter will not be produced. Then sociology would not develop 'long causal chains' and fields of scientifically feasible solutions and thus the erosion of political monopoly would be limited. Sociology and social sciences won't become high-consensus, rapid-discovery science [Collins R., 2001].

The aforementioned history of risk analysis has other components that provide an example of the capacity of sociology to hold the progress of other sciences, if the knowledge they generate threatens the political monopoly on decision-making. The progress of risk analysis has not been terminated through a formal ban. Progress has been terminated due to the lack of a **general risk theory** and the general theory is missing because the social sciences (in particular – sociology) **cannot develop it**. Thus, namely sociology blocks the way for the advancement of research and prevents their 'invasion' in the field of political monopoly (acts). Risk researchers have noticed this 'feature' of social sciences (respectively – sociology) long ago: "The irony is that among risk researchers namely social scientists fail to reflect and incorporate in their analysis the very good inventions of other approaches to risk and to harness the full power of social sciences to enrich the studies of risk" [Kasperson, 1992: 156].

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT ON SOCIOLOGY

The pressure on sociology

Evidences that sociology performs the said ‘stabilizing function’ can be found in the science itself.

First of all, in sociology is clearly noticeable a direct pressure to push the science on ‘safe distance’ from ‘political acts’.

Interestingly, the pressure on sociology has no geographical, political, ideological and time limits – the same traces of it can be seen in the 20th century (the 50s) in China and in the early 21st century in the U.S. and Europe.

In China, the political attack on sociology began with the accusation that through their orientation towards “social work” (!!!) the sociologists supported the Kuomintang government.² Today, scientists in the U.S. and Europe also claim that scientific facts are regularly suppressed by those who exercise the power; social scientists are being persecuted for doing their jobs; politicians publicly expressed their views on “the sociological nabobs such as Comte, Durkheim, Weber” [Callinicos, 2007: 4]; scientific advisors say that “measures to reduce the number of scientists are very late”. The pressure gives the impression that “We live in times of extreme hostility to science demonstrated at all levels of American society” [Massey, 2006: 88].

In response to the unprecedented political pressure on science, Nobel laureates issued a joint statement in the United States, accusing the state administration of manipulating the **process through which science enters the political decisions** ... by appointing professionally unqualified people or who have clear conflicts of interest to official positions in scientific advisory committees; by disbanding existing advisory committees; by censoring and suppressing scientific reports of their own government scientists; and simply refusing to seek independent scientific expertise. Of course the same problems are clearly visible in Europe, including the EU institutions.

Naturally, scientific policies reflect the general political attitude towards sociology. Many European scientists believe that a major component of scientific policies is ‘holding of knowledge’ and ‘detachment’ of sociology (social sciences) of the political decision-making process mainly by determining the lines along which knowledge is created, but also by other means (systematic underfunding, reducing the number of scientists, etc.). Exactly the scientific policies turned sociology into ‘Cinderella’ in the family of Sciences.

An important source of external impacts on sociology is the system for publication of research results. The famous experiment of Alan Sokal showed that “the selection of journal articles is highly dependent on political, social and cultural elements” [Bucchi, 2004: 95]. According to Sokal, his meaningless article was published because it met **the ideological predispositions of the publishers**.

² Actually, the commitments of Chinese sociologists to “social work” consisted in research on: policies for preservation of minority groups; policies regarding the peasants; employment policy and social services policy [Yeo-Chi King, Tse-Sang, 1978: 42].

Furthermore, the Sokal experiment proves something else – publishing institutions can influence the work of scientists by subordinating the creation of knowledge to ‘ideological predispositions’.

Recently, scientific policies used these opportunities to strengthen the control over social sciences by introducing a system for assessing the work of scientists that enhances the impact of publications by certain publishing institutions. The system covered a large number of countries and has a considerable potential to limit the influence of the scientific communities on the assessment of scientific results and to strengthen the impact of the ideological predispositions of publishing institutions. The expected consequences are obvious – a tendency to concentrate control over the production of knowledge; increasing the pressure to produce knowledge within certain ideological and political frameworks, etc. [Minev, 2013a] Apparently, there is a strong political interest in such changes because the system was introduced in many countries, despite the criticism and dissent of the majority of scientists and the risks that are likely to arise.

Scientific policies probably would not be so ‘effective’ and would provoke more resistance if they were not assisted by researchers and networks of scientists in science itself. The activities of such scientists were noticed long ago and A. Gouldner called them “old people”, P. Bourdieu – “conservative ideologists”, St. Pinker – “nerds”, etc. But perhaps the most accurate description of their activities could be borrowed from the Polish sociologist Zibertowicz – “Anti-Development Interest Groups” because the main function of these groups (networks) of scientists is to constrain the development of science.

These groups are well represented in many of the ‘scientific councils’ advising the scientific policies development or directly involved in the work of the policy-making centers. They also have a strong influence on the work of the scientific communities and organizations by transferring the external pressure within sociology, by demonstrating models of successful scientific careers or through direct debates on key issues (e.g. the distinction between social scientists and social workers – the unfading idea of Chinese communists from the 50s).

For their part, ‘conservative ideologists’ receive a special ‘external’ (actually – political) support. A large part of the noticed by Merton “Matthew Effect” is probably due to such support for ‘conservative ideologists’.

The pressure on sociology undoubtedly affects researchers. Sociologists are hardly protected from the change that N. Wiener noticed already in the 40s of the last century: “... degradation of the position of the scientist from independent thinker to a servant, who is employed in a factory of science and is morally irresponsible, has happened much faster and in far more devastating way than I expected. This subjugation of those who have to think to those who hold administrative power is destructive to the morale of the scientist” [Salomon, 1970: 308-309]. In sociology, the change indicated by Wiener is probably amplified by the evergreen “value neutrality principle” of science. At the end of the day, there is no reason to be surprised of the finding of Elias that sociologists feel a strong attachment to the existing social order.

Zombification of science

In the 20th century, the strategy for control and holding of knowledge in sociology has given rise to a remarkable result – a specific ‘internal structure’ of sociology as a specialized and institutionalized system for production of knowledge. The main feature of the internal structure is that sociology does not possess basic attributes of science. Long ago was noticed the chaos that reigns in the ‘internal structure’ of sociology (which is defined [Cole, 2006] as a set of paradigms, theories and other accumulated knowledge, approaches, principles, disciplinary structure, rules of research work, including ways to evaluate the results and the work of scientists and therefore – the formation of the scientific careers of researchers, etc.). Sociology, for example, not only doesn’t have widely accepted general theory (central theoretical corpus, conceptual framework), but the history of this science is also marked by intensive struggles against theorizing and the need for theory (the statements that theory is useless or sociology is an ‘empirical science’ are quite popular among sociologists). Numerous warnings of the negative consequences of the lack of a central theoretical body (disintegration of science, opening the door to ideological influences, etc.) and many other good ideas are ignored. Attempts to introduce some order into the chaos encounter resistance and for more than a century there is no consensus in sociology on key elements of the internal structure.

Actually, the chaos is functional – in sociology are fully applied the above requirements for restricting the intervention of science (knowledge) in the political process of decision making. Since sociology itself has no theoretical basis, this science cannot develop a general risk theory; ideological influences will not only be strong, but the entire process of knowledge creation will take place within the frame of dominant ideology; social knowledge will remain disintegrated and at a safe distance from power (how the knowledge generated in other social sciences can be integrated if sociology itself is disintegrated and there is a chaos).

Control over the creation of knowledge through chaotic ‘internal structure’ of sociology is a technology that has been introduced for a long time, the work is done by part of the scientists themselves and is backed with arguments that make it difficult to be linked to the control over the production of knowledge and any criticism is immediately stigmatized through ideological and political labels.

Standard research model

Impacts on science and the state of its internal structure generate a ‘standard research model’, which reflects the conditions for restricting intervention in ‘political acts’. Although the study of ‘social issues’ (risks) is allowed, the pressure for detachment of science (knowledge) from the exercise of power directs research to the risks that have already passed political identification (restricts the autonomous scientific identification of risks); a-theoretical nature of science gives rise to primarily descriptive research,

analyses are superficial, any autonomous proposal of political measures to neutralize the risks (prescriptions) is considered unacceptable, etc.

Turner notices the beginnings of this model already in the 20s of 20th century: a-theoricity, focus on narrow research issues, generation of descriptive data [Turner, 2006: 20].

But the most important feature of the model is the avoidance or 'failure to analyse' key segments of the social world that are particularly significant for the exercise of political monopoly on risk management. The model 'holds back' the production of knowledge in certain areas and directs it to others. Thus arises the effect that H. Simon has already noticed in the 50s – the production of irrelevant, unusable, unnecessary, useless knowledge [Simon, 1957: xxiv]. In summary, the model allows creation of knowledge by maintaining ignorance and nonknowledge about key aspects of the social reality.

Besides restricting the intervention of knowledge in 'political acts' by creating 'politicized knowledge' and maintaining ignorance and nonknowledge about the way power is exercised, the model expands the area of free political decisions and actions, eliminating any restrictions on the decision making that might occur in free knowledge creation. By 'tearing' the links between political decisions and the negative effects thereof (social pathologies), the model creates a kind of 'protective shell' of political monopoly (power) against criticism. On this basis it becomes possible to maintain the legitimacy of power through the illusion of socially useful exercise of power. Briefly, through the standard model is realized the positive function of ignorance (and nonknowledge) that Moore and Tumin talk about – stabilization of the social order. Enforcing this function, sociology becomes one of the main pillars of the social order. Some authors long ago claimed that sociology had become a 'maidservant of power'.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIOLOGY ON SOCIETY

Expansion of the Standard Research Model

Because of the special position of sociology in the complex of social sciences, and perhaps for other reasons, the standard model of sociological research affects also other social sciences. St. Pinker noticed the dissemination of the Standard Model in social sciences and its massive influence on social studies: "Leading social researchers can say any absurdities as long as they comply with the Standard Model of social sciences. (...) it is hard to believe that the authors believe in what they say. Statements are made without regard to whether they are true. They are part of the catechism of our century. (...) Modern social comments remain based on archaic concepts..." [Pinker, 1997: 57].

Particularly noticeable (and dangerous) is the suppressing effect of sociology and its standard model on the economics since a significant part of the problem fields of economics (economic phenomena) cross the disciplinary boundaries between economics and sociology – either as cause or as

effect of the objects of economic observation (one of the presidents of the American Association of Economists argued that economists will become sociologists, if they are interested in the deepest causes of the phenomena that they observe). The suppressing effect of sociology has not changed radically with the development of economic sociology as a bridge between sociology and economics.

Encountering the result of the suppressing effect, some economists (D. North, A. Sen, M. Olson, J. Hirshleifer, E. Ostrom and many others) are trying to overcome it by impressive attempts to bind the created knowledge with a wider range of social realities. However, economists still cannot do all the unfinished job of sociology, and the economic mainstream manages to ignore their attempts. For example, the economist Karl Gunnar Myrdal observed that a very useful and important exercise for scientists is to see clearly how the direction of their research efforts is determined by the society we live in, and **especially by the political climate** [Myrdal, 1977: 4]. And yet there is no branch in economics that addresses this issue; the branch where such study could be expected is sociology of knowledge.

Similar example of the suppressing effect of sociology offer studies of inequalities. In 2005-2006 top economists conducted a large scale study of income distribution. Researchers noticed a rapid increase in inequality of incomes in some English speaking countries (20% of the population receive the bulk of the income and determine the savings, investments, the market and production). But researchers explicitly emphasized that inequality is not a problem of economic analysis and reached the conclusion that the concentration of income bears no risks to the financial sector. The financial crisis broke out 2 years later. It is not a coincidence that the causes of the financial crisis still remain unexplored and unknown – the reasons go far beyond the traditional frameworks of financial and economic analyses.

The suppressing effect of sociology in combination with other impacts on economics (mainly – scientific policies) probably contributed to the distortion of the mainstream of economics. And one can hardly find a more striking example of holding (restriction and distortion) of the advancement of knowledge in order to prevent political acts (economic policies) from the intervention of knowledge.

Therefore, economics students from 19 countries want courses to include analysis of the financial crash that so many economists failed to see coming. Students manifesto emphasizes the lack of intellectual diversity; restrained education and research and argues economics courses failing wider society by ignoring need to address 21st-century issues. It seems to me that this finding had to be made long ago and by leading sociologists.

Of course, criticism of economics in the context of the crisis is not devoid of grounds, but a large part of the reason for this criticism is hidden in sociology, which managed to stay in the shade. The significant change will happen when students of sociology understand that they have reason to join their colleagues in economics – the knowledge that sociology creates (and teaches) is also cut off from social realities. Sociology, for example, did not notice the crisis long after its political recognition. However, economists

will hardly be able to explore successfully the causes of the crisis, unless they become sociologists.

The conclusion that follows is that the main social function of sociology is ‘preventive’ – limiting the conflicting interactions between power and social knowledge by adapting the creation of knowledge in social sciences to the requirements for “free” decision making and stability of the social order. Adaptation of the production of knowledge is expressed in its ‘politicizing’ by restriction, deformation and maintaining ignorance and nonknowledge about key aspects of social realities.

Although the main components of the mechanism for the preventive function implementation are known, the mechanism and the function itself remain poorly studied.

Hypertrophy of power

The preventive function of sociology does not just limit the conflict between social knowledge and power, it not only protects the exercise of power through a shell of deformed knowledge. The preventive function forms vicious and dangerous to society relationship between knowledge and power; relationship that gives rise to an invisible process of hypertrophy of power.

Holding back and distortion of social scientific knowledge tear the links between social realities and the scientific understanding thereof. The social world becomes increasingly unfamiliar, in other words – grows the perception of as chaos (unfamiliar order). Since the decline of social knowledge is related to the decline of authentic moral values, the result is that the two main resources to tackle uncertainty fall into crisis and become less and less effective. Occurs a process of increasing uncertainty or something like meta ignorance appears. This creates conditions (even demand) for hypertrophy of power, because its social significance increases as the main or even the only effective resource to tackle the fundamental (and growing) uncertainty in which societies are immersed. Furthermore, ‘freedom’ in carrying out ‘political acts’ (decision making) increases as social knowledge and moral values do not define ‘socially acceptable’ limits for decision making. The purposive rationality of power centers and groups that control societies remains the only, unconditional, unrestricted driver of the dynamics of societies. A hypertrophied version of Weber’s “domination of rational bureaucracy” is born – elitist ‘intelligent design’ of societies.

But the driver of purposive group rationality is only the main goal of the ruling elites – stability of their power. Thus purposive rationality gives rise not only to actions of ‘restriction’ of social knowledge but also of accelerating the advancement of knowledge concerning nature, since the latter directly enhances power and catalyzes its expansion³.

³ A study in 2006-2007 found huge secret and uncontrolled funds in the U.S. used to fund secret scientific research aimed at creating a high-tech systems of warfare. “This is a huge industry, really huge industry. It is remarkable that such projects can be developed on an in-

The result is a tendency to hypertrophy of power (centralization, concentration, incredibly expanding fields of ‘free decisions and actions’ of power centers) and the effects of increased hypertrophy – deficit of democracy, concentration of income and wealth (increasing inequality) are consequences of all these changes.

But there are also other effects – deep and growing gaps: between social realities and their social scientific representations (due to suppression and deformation of social scientific knowledge); deformation of the structure of general knowledge (due to ‘suppression’ of social scientific knowledge and rapid progress of knowledge in natural sciences) and growing ignorance; deterioration of the social functionality of moral values (due to structural changes in knowledge and the structure of moral values) etc.

Changes in human intelligence

All mentioned gaps (and many others not mentioned) can be summarized as reducing the capacity for social treatment of risks (capacity to solve problems – intelligence). Indeed, many notice strange changes where (as Ferruccio Rossi-Landi wrote) unnatural meanings begin to look like natural. Many of the “wilful blindness” cases presented by M. Heffernan are examples of the decline of intelligence at a group, institutional and state level.

The reasons for this decline could be sought in the dynamics of fundamental social resources (components) of the capacity to solve problems – if those resources are experiencing crisis inevitably arises crisis of intelligence.

Through the educational system the distorted structure of general knowledge (the lag behind of social knowledge) and the gap between social realities and social knowledge are transferred at individual and group levels, creating distortions in the intelligence of individuals and groups. Students of economics do not accidentally want a change of teaching in economics. But reducing the capacity to solve problems is much wider and more dangerous problem. At individual level, changes in intelligence particularly affect the social and emotional intelligence (social and emotional component of individual intelligence). L. Gallino, B. Barber and others write about infantilisation of the individuals aiming to prevent their transformation into citizens [**Gallino, 2011**: 56; **Barber, 2007**]. The ability of individuals to solve simple everyday life problems is also affected. There is also many empirical data for this process, but as the mechanism that gives rise to it is not well studied, the data remains somewhat obscure and does not provoke particular concern and appropriate action. By the way, in this respect also stands the question of the state of sociology and its links with other sciences (psychology, social psychology).

dustrial scale without anyone knowing what they actually are. This is an amazing achievement of social engineering.” [**Broad, 2008**, 4]. Several other sources also confirm the staggering scale of this type of “engineering”, for instance overwhelming secret projects that are developed by DARPA (Defence Advanced Research Project Agency).

Particularly important are the changes in intelligence of the groups that play a central role in the processing of risk. Infantilisation affects all. The intelligence of groups that control societies cannot avoid changes in knowledge and values, and the purpose which is a benchmark for group intelligence inevitably encourages exploitation of other “resources”: fraud, secrecy, ignorance, nonknowledge, amorality, etc.

Therefore, the trajectory of social dynamics is formed by the purposive group rationality that shows signs of serious illness – a growing willful blindness.

Decision makers are intentionally abusing the inadequacy of the created knowledge (the use of the wrong analysis for formulation and implementation of “austerity” policies is not the only case). Even formulation of adequate policies is becoming less possible because of changes in social knowledge – the “Manifesto of Appalled Economists” indicates that a number of economic concepts that serve as pillars of economic policies are just delusions.

The growth of crime: individual, organized, corporate, institutional, governmental is the inevitable consequence of changes in intelligence of individuals, groups, institutions and societies.

New risks

“If there is such a thing as Durkheim’s collective consciousness on a global scale, it is probably best represented by the **widely shared opinion that we are living in times of unprecedented danger**. Although the odds of premature death or disability today are probably not bigger than ever before in human history, the dangers we face are unique in two aspects: **they are mostly designed by humans and their impact threatens us collectively rather than individually**”, writes St. Lyng [Lyng, 2008: 106].

Lyng has in mind the emergence of ‘new risks’ that have two important features – they threaten society as a whole, and are rather dangers than risks. The second feature reflects the deficit of knowledge that hinders social treatment of risks (timely identification, analysis, development of effective prevention or remedial systems). “New risks” cause more and more damage to communities and people and the low level of control over the risks stirs the perception of helplessness in the face unprecedented dangers.

Researchers noticed that the risks are associated with a deficit of adequate knowledge but according to them the deficit of knowledge is due more to the “advancement of knowledge rather than its limitations” [Beck, 2001: 167; 1992: 34-35, Zinn, 2008: 184]. Therefore, they tend to seek a solution in ‘holding back’ the production of knowledge.

This opinion ignores the gap between social science and natural science knowledge and is valid in terms of knowledge concerning nature, but is hardly valid for social knowledge.

J. Ravetz points out the basic problem – if there is indeed a key issue in the debate on risk, it is the issue of power and more precisely – of knowledge, which merges with the power [Ravetz, 1971; 1990].

The merger of knowledge and power runs through that spectacular mechanism which is outlined in the previous points. And the effect of this mechanism is the process of reducing the intelligence on whose basis ‘political acts’ are effected. M. Heffernan has found a right expression: the mechanisms that make us blind to the world, put us in danger. We may think that our blindness makes us safer, but in fact it leaves us crippled, vulnerable and disempowered [Heffernan, 2012: 5]. Therefore, new risks are not just ‘new’ – the “revival” of old and long ago controlled risks is clearly noticed.

The generator of new risks are distortions of knowledge (social and general) rather than its progress. The generator is a “projectoid” just in the sense of R. Dawkins – both intentional and unintentional phenomenon representing a social technology for fundamental control over social changes. The technology itself, however, remains unknown (as well as its consequences), because it is based on maintaining ignorance and non-knowledge. And that in itself gives rise to danger – dangers seem like the effect of ‘natural’, spontaneous changes (advancement of knowledge) but actually they are not. New risks are consequence of profound distortions of knowledge production and a sign of profound distortions in the trajectory of social dynamics.

Some time ago, St. Hawking pointed dangers that are so great that it is better to seek conditions for life on another planet. In a lecture [Brussels, 2010] I. Wallerstein said that the most developed countries are entering a special period that will last until 2050 and may result in establishing a system of slavery without precedent in human history. L. Gallino believes that a civilization crisis is occurring [Gallino, 2011: 41-59].

Dangers originating from the gaps between social knowledge and knowledge in the field of natural sciences are growing. St. Hawking has many reasons to be afraid of the work on artificial intelligence. The combination of reduction of the human intellect with progress in the development of artificial intellect, creates not just risks but unexpected dangers. It is certain that at the present level of societal capacity to cope with risks the likelihood of useful exploitation of artificial intelligence is much less than the likelihood achievements to prove to be ‘new risk’ – a danger which is ‘democratic’ (damaging whole societies) and cannot be controlled.

Empirical confirmations

The above-described social (preventive) function of sociology can be tested empirically by case studies of social choices (choices of institutions). In particular, from the processes of ‘choice’ of a particular legal regulation, such as “Prohibition” in the United States and the rapid introduction of statutory prohibition of prostitution in many countries, the following scheme of failed social choices can be derived [di Mauro and Joffe, 2007; Epstein, 2006; Weitzer, 2007, 2010; Minev, 2013b]:

1. Premediated impacts of power centers (in this case – public institutions) on the creation of knowledge about the subject of social choice and the consequences of that choice. The target of impacts is sociological research.

Impacts stimulate the creation of certain – preferred – segments of knowledge and suppress the creation of knowledge that is judged undesirable.

2. Impacts on knowledge creation generate distortion of the created knowledge: low level of scientific validity; intentional ‘narrowness’ of scope; neglecting segments of social realities, etc. Thus central aspects of the subject of choice remain outside of the scope of established knowledge; the main outcomes of the social choice (the prohibition); the very fact of distortion of knowledge and the ways of distortion.

3. Knowledge distortions increase contradiction between research results (disputes between researchers intensify) as well as the uncertainty of the available knowledge and (stimulated) inconsistency and uncertainty of existing knowledge (‘politicizing’) enable the decision making centers to reject the knowledge that is not desirable, if created despite their intervention. Power centers have the opportunity to impose their preferred solutions.

4. Knowledge distortions simultaneously expand the use of moral based judgments and distort the results of these judgments. Thus exactly arises what some call “moral paroxysm”.

5. The combination of shortage of knowledge and compensational extensive use of judgments based on moral values is not unique to the cases examined – it occurs and has been observed in many other cases – for example, in formation of policies on stem cells, AIDS prevention and others [**Buchanan et al., 2003**]. In these cases, the debates and social choice (or the political process of decision making) are also not ‘nourished and steered (not directed and in this sense – not limited) by adequate knowledge and therefore – by adequate moral based judgments. But in the above-mentioned choices made by institutions (statutory prohibitions) ignorance is deliberately maintained, while in the latter cases the cause is ‘natural’ shortage of knowledge, due to the simple fact that the available knowledge at any given time is not sufficient (not advanced enough), but can be expected to be created or at least – there are no special and non-scientific obstacles to such knowledge to be created in the next period.

The above observations actually outline the technology of control over social choices where some of the participants in the process choose inadequate institution without detecting they have been subjected to specific impact. These participants (at least some of them) believe that they had made a free and good choice. In fact, the power centers have led them to do something they would not have done if they had sufficient knowledge about the choice (its subject, its course and its consequences). Thus the “key issue” of Ravetz – the merger of knowledge and power stands out very clearly. The effect of the merger is a social choice that is not based on adequate knowledge and adequate moral judgment but is determined by the goal of a specific group rationality.

Scientific policies also generate such effects, especially the impacts on sociology; they systematically distort the structure of the overall (general) scientific knowledge and observations of this effect rarely notice these distortions and also rarely care about the consequences of the distortions.

Sociology must be protected!

If the willingness to provide ‘sociological protection’ of society is genuine, it is obvious that an agreement has to be reached on some issues.

Firstly, the protection of society is to work for its release from the modern version of Weber’s “iron cage” of rational-bureaucratic over-control on them.

Secondly, in order to perform such work sociology itself should be released from control and reject its ‘preventive’ social function. This means deep and profound changes – of the science itself (its internal structure); its relations with power (including the “useful exercise” recommended by Myrdal); permanent monitoring of the formation of scientific policies and their effects; decisive democratization and transition to post-academic (post-normal) science which has long been suggested by risk researchers [**Funto-wicz, Ravetz, 1990**]; reconstruction of relations with other social sciences (‘opening’ as suggested by the Gulbenkian Commission) and possibly many more.

If sociology does not take such action, the issue of ‘protecting the society’ will increasingly evolve into an issue of ‘saving the society’ and sociological opt out of saving will attain a nature of complicity in crimes against humanity.

Sociology can influence in other ways, it can be useful to society and should try to achieve this.

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