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## **THE EARLY AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIOLOGY – POLITICS RELATION POLEMIC**

*Abstract:* Review of the relation between sociology and politics through a view of the American sociology from the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, from the aspect of positive achievements from this relation, the possibilities for realizing sociology as a value neutral science, as well as the dilemmas in relation with those possibilities.

*Key words:* sociology, politics, sociological researches, sociological methodology, value neutrality

### **1.**

From the very beginning, sociology is defined as a science in the service of the real social needs. Thus, although never openly expressed, it calculated the inevitability to build some relations with politics, either to help it create certain policies, or to strive to instigate changes in contrast to the political forces which want to maintain a certain order. Hence the question, which has not lost its actuality since its establishment up to the present, whether it is possible to have a positive relation with the centres of political power, and at the same time, retain objectivity in the presentation of the research results. When Weber considered this issue – whether sociology can be built as a value neutral science, he concluded it was possible – the researcher sociologist belonging to a certain environment and having incorporated its viewpoint can, depending on his particular position, choose a topic of research which impels his specific interest, but when he starts researching, his work fulfils the requirement of value neutrality. This view, however, is not shared by many sociologists.

The polemic about the possibilities of attaining the goal of objectivity while having good relations with the political and corporate establishments and the financial dependence on them for conducting research projects was especially intense in the framework of the American sociology in the 1930s and later and led to division of sociologists in two strongly opposed sides, here labelled as “conservative” and “radical” sides. The former, mainly sociologists working at the

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most prestigious American universities, organized themselves in numerous clubs – supporters of Pareto's theory, and the latter, mainly engaged at smaller and less prestigious universities, in their criticism mainly took the theoretical positions of Marx and Simmel. The representatives of the functionalist theory, mainly located at Harvard (Parsons) and Columbia (Merton), were especially criticized. The polemic with them gradually took the form of attacks and defences. The attacks were that the functionalist theory, especially Parsons' theory, is holistic and as such inadequate for the possibilities of the sociological science at the time to explain the social phenomena and that it is a theory aimed solely at a social structure which completely neglects the topic of the social change and is thus a supporter of the established social system and an assistant in preventing the forces to change it. The defence is that the social structure and the social change are inextricably linked, the change is a shift in the social structure and hence every model used for studying the structure is at the same time a model for studying the change, which means this theory is not an anchor of the existing system.

Without going into details of the polemic, I will here try to give a brief review of the work of the sociologists engaged at the prestigious American universities, who had generally established good relations with the American government and were financially aided in conducting a great number of researches, the aim being to obtain a direct answer to the question of how much their work had contributed to the development of the sociological science. I will focus on the work of the oldest and most eminent American universities from the last decades of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, to which one more entity joined – the private business – the representatives of which established foundations, which founded universities and provided financial support for education of people who would be involved in academic work, as well as for conducting scientific researches of various kinds.

Three universities with the longest tradition on American soil and with the greatest contribution in fulfilling the primary goal of sociology to be in service of the social needs via conducting researches which put sociology on an empirical level are: Harvard University, Columbia University and the University of Chicago. There was an exchange of staff among the three universities, whereby students of one university often began their career at another university or they rotated during their careers. Hence the examples of fruitful cooperation, which are here selected and are not classified separately for each university. The examples also include researches which were started in institutions outside these three universities.

Harvard University, founded as a private university in Boston in 1636, is the oldest institution for higher education in the USA. Along with it, the Harvard Corporation was founded as the first charitable foundation. In the beginning, it was run by teachers of Congregational and Unitarian denomination, gradually becoming secular in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century promoted itself as a modern research university, earning great reputation among the American elite. The Department of Sociology at this University was founded by Pitirim Sorokin in 1930, and his successor was Talcott Parsons.

Columbia University was founded in 1754 in New York, in the beginning as a Royal College by a decree of King George II of Great Britain, to be named Columbia College in 1784, after the American revolutionary war. In the beginning it was financed by several donators and later provided its own financing by investing in real estate. The University created the position of a professorship of the Department of Sociology as early as in 1894, which was filled by Franklin Giddings, but because of his non-motivation for empirical research, the researching phase of the university began by filling in the professorship with Robert Lynd. He had already realized the Middletown project, and continued researching the contemporary American scene, with a particular focus on the consumption and the family. The younger members of the department, stimulated by him, researched the idleness, and in 1935, after the major crisis, they accompanied him in the new research of the middle town – Middletown in Transition.

The University of Chicago, founded in 1892, established the Department of Sociology very soon after it was founded. This Department gathered a great number of researchers, whose work became distinguishable in the Federation, so that in the 1920s it acquired the reputation of the most prestigious university, with a developed program for doctoral studies in sociology. The first head of the Department, Albion Small, established an inextricable link between the German (particularly the formal sociology of Georg Simmel) and the American sociology and imposed a practice of qualitative research, which was the basis of the qualitative methodology. He was also the founder of the American Journal of Sociology in 1895 and the American Sociological Society in 1905.

Three foundations that played a crucial role in helping the development of the American sociology are: the Carnegie Corporation of New York, founded in 1911, with several scientific centres focused on gathering scientists of remarkable capacity and later realized cooperation in the field of understanding the Cold War; the Rockefeller Foundation, established in 1913, initially focused on philanthropy, and later went on to stimulate the work of social research centres; and the Ford

Foundation, founded in 1936, with a mission to contribute to human well-being, with a particular focus on supporting higher education, art, economic development, civil rights, the environment and others.

If the European founders of sociology established the theoretical foundations of the new science, the representatives of the American sociology from the period referred to are the ones who showed the way how sociology can accomplish the originally conceived aim - to be a science in the service of the social well-being. Namely, they are the ones who began researching a set of social phenomena, which resulted not only in data that evidently present the states in the domains of the researches, but also established the bases of the methodology of social research. Before them the only research project was Durkheim's "Suicide", in which he showed that statistics can be put in function of explaining the social phenomena.

The search for suitable methods of research and explanation of the social phenomena began by the researchers at the University of Chicago, and to their perceptions that the most suitable way to detect matters is the profound observation. Robert and Helen Lynd joined in, experimenting with the interview, as one of the methods of qualitative analysis. Lloyd Warner proved after them that the methods applied in the research of the small primitive communities could also be applied in the research of the contemporary societies, thus expanding the scope of the anthropological science – its aim to research the primitive societies was upgraded with the aim to research the culture of the contemporary complex societies. Paul Lazarsfeld continued this methodological campaign by finding ways to get to the real nature of the social phenomena by experimenting with a statistical research analysis and many techniques of quantitative research (Lazarsfeld, 1955). He is one of the founders of mathematical sociology. The ardent search for techniques of the quantitative methodology earned him the epithet of "founder of the modern empirical sociology". He also has merits in the domain of the qualitative methodology. Along with Everett Rodgers, he developed the method of focus groups. The research conducted in the factories with the aim of obtaining data for promoting the working process and increasing the work productivity (especially the Hawthorne Project) had, as its effect, the introduction of the experiment as a method in the sociological research, as well as establishing the bases of the industrial sociology. This research, in the context of studying the social class and the social mobility, bought up the perception of the significance of the social and psychological factors and their superiority with regard to the exterior financial motivation. In the context of this research, what was distinguished is the significance of the hypothesis, as a starting statement of the expected possible influence of the factors used in the experiment on its effects, made before the experiment was started and checked after it was finished.

Many dilemmas in the quantitative sociology were resolved in the context of the American Soldier Project, among other things, the dilemma of how the application of quantitative tools can lead to perceptions that can be presented only in qualitative terms, that is, how the application of a survey questionnaire can measure the nature and strength of the moral attitudes.

Here, I will focus separately on several major projects of the early American sociology.

**The city as a laboratory.** The research conducted at the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago has a broad scope and includes urban studies, poverty, family, work place, immigration, ethnic and racial relations, juvenile delinquency, crime and deviation. The Department sociologists, who turned the city of Chicago into their research laboratory, were faced with a situation of an explosive urban growth, caused partly by migrations of people from the small village homogenous communities from the city surroundings, and partly by immigration from various parts of Europe (Park and Ernest Burgess 1925; Park, 1955).

Some of the first researchers were William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, with their study of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, followed by Robert E. Park, who focused his view onto a great number of aspects of the city life, such as racial relations, trade unions, ethnic neighbourhoods, the influence of the ethnicity and racial affiliation on forming the personal identity (the marginal personality), the role of the media etc. He demanded from his colleagues to focus their attention on the neighbourhood and its role in a situation of a great progress of the means of transport and communication on the one side, and the concurrent isolation of the immigrant waves and racial minorities into ghettos and areas of city quarter segregation on the other side. Further on, he demanded that the industrial organization should be researched, that is, the division of labour and the structural changes that came out of it. He suggested that a series of researches should be conducted about the life of certain professional types, as well as the problems of social control and social disorganization on different levels – the level of the family, the street and the city as a whole. His aim was by reducing the city to a scientific laboratory, directed at researching the human nature and the social progress, to penetrate into the good and the evil of the human nature.

Park's collaborators in the dissection of the city community were Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth and Ellsworth Faris, and their work was continued by alumni of this university, like Everett C. Hughes and many other sociologists. Among the most significant works that came out from the research of the representatives of

the Chicago School are: *The Golden Coast and the Slum* (Zorbaugh 1929); *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Anderson, 1923); *The Ghetto* (Wirth, 1928); *Delinquency Areas, Chicago* (Shaw and McKay 1929); *The Taxy Dance Hall* (Gressey 1932); *Six Boys in Trouble* (Reckless 1930); *The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boys Own Story* (Shaw, 1930); *The Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (Shaw, 1931), *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas* (Shaw and McKay 1942).

After a period of diminished interest in this University, when Harvard University took over the prestigious first place among the American universities, in the 1950s, a large group of sociologists set up the basis of what is called The Second Chicago School. Some of the best-known are: Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strass, Gary Fine

The basis of the qualitative approach of the Chicago sociologists is the observation. By using it, they made a parallel between the natural and the social systems, whereby they perceived the social system in an inextricable connection between the city, the country, the culture and the population. In the context of this parallel they developed the idea of “natural areas”, as parts of the city in which one function prevails over the others, in which they researched the crime, vagrancy, the decrease of the value of ownership and thereby the related internal migration of the ethnic groups, the intergroup interaction between certain parts of the city, the traumas and the process of adaptation to the new conditions of the immigrants who came from small agricultural communities.

Besides the research work, the representatives of the Chicago School also played an important role in the public life of the city. Thus, Park was a delegate at the Institute for Peace Relations, a director of Research of Racial Relations on the Pacific coast, an editor of a series of books on immigration funded by the Carnegie Corporation, president of the Urban League of Chicago. Members of the Department of Philosophy also had an important role in the public life. The sociologists who were working at this Department were focused on the social psychology and established the foundation of the symbolic interactionism as a separate school in sociology. The leading scientist in this area, George Herbert Mead, who, apart from his research and educational engagement, was engaged as an advisor for education reform, ran or participated in the work of several committees assigned to find solutions for many problems in the fields of education and urban planning.

**Middletown.** The researches of the middle town (Middletown and Middletown in Transition), realized by Robert and Helen Lynd, in relation with the sociological methodology, represent a continuation and upgrading of the Chicago School.

Working for the Institute for Social and Religious Research during the 1920s, the Lynd couple was assigned to research the religious readiness and practice of the people from a typical small American town. The choice for this type of town was Muncie, a town in Indiana, which fulfilled the conditions determined beforehand for a typical small American town – moderate climate, sufficiently fast economic growth accompanied with an appropriate social change, an industrial culture with a moderately fast machine production, not being a one-industrial town, relatively self-sufficient with respect to the needs of manpower, located in the Middle West, with a population between 25,000 and 50,000, not being a satellite to a larger city, etc.

The Lynd's came to Muncie, accompanied by two assistants, in 1924 and stayed there in 1925, too. The results of the research, after many dilemmas and reviews regarding the organization of the gathered material, were published as late as in 1929 in the book *Middletown* (Lynd and Lynd 1929), which had six editions in that year.

When they were about to start their research, they had no other methodological position apart from the conviction that the research of the religious life requires an insight in all aspects of life. Hence the decision to focus on six activities: earning a living, building a house, raising the young, use of spare time, engagement in religious activities, engagement in activities of the community.

They began their research with Park's recommendations for observation as the basic method, implementing procedures practiced by the researchers of the Chicago School, by walking the streets, talking to people, visiting the homes where they were invited, attending meetings of various organizations, attending churches, school classes and gatherings, anniversaries, card clubs etc.

The second method they applied was in the function of the set goal, to follow the changes in the town from 1890 onwards and involved gathering documents – data of censuses, court records, school records, almanacs, local papers from 1890-1891 and 1923-1924, the missionary work of the churches, the women's club, the library board etc. The third method was the statistical one – concerning salaries, employment, factory accidents, church memberships, library records about reading, going to the cinema etc. Further on, they used several types of interviews: unstructured – talks with town inhabitants, semi-structured – with a selected sample of women employed at three factories and a separate sample of businessmen's wives. The last method was the survey, with a questionnaire for members of clubs, and a questionnaire for high school students.

In 1935, after the great depression, the Lynd's returned to Muncie to research the aftermaths of the depression and the results of that research were presented in the study *Middletown in Transition* (Lynd and Lynd 1929).

**Yankee City.** Lloyd Warner (1898-1970), head of the Yankee City Project, was one of the examples that the ideological profile of a sociologist could have only a limited influence on his career development in the period labelled as a period in which only sociologists who supported the political establishment could prosper. In his youth a member of the socialist party, he, in his scientific work, which was based solely on an empirical basis, researched the social and economic inequalities and expressed his scepticism regarding the capacities of the legal system to produce changes through which they would be reduced.

The Yankee City Project was entrusted to him during his stay at Harvard in 1930, when he was 32 years old. Thirty anthropologists from Harvard and Chicago were involved in it, and under his leadership, in the period 1930-1935, conducted a research of the social structure of the town of Newburyport in New England, which was given the name of Yankee City in the project. The original aim of the project was to research the aspects of life outside the work engagement of the workers at the Western Electric Factory in Chicago, but Warner, who had just returned from Australia, where he had researched the life of the Australian Aborigines and wanted to use in his new research the techniques he had used there, came to the conclusion that those techniques were inapplicable in an environment characterized by an emphasized disorganization. He chose Newburyport as a town which has a long history and which, he presumed, caused a shaping of a coherent tradition, which was in accordance with his functionalist thesis that the city is a functional whole in which everyone performs a certain function. He was convinced that his choice represented the average American city, with its characteristics of a community with a stable social organization, with several types of industrial production and several factories, which is autonomous, and not a satellite to a metropolis, which manifests most of the complexities of the modern life.

That was the first systematic research of the American local community, directed towards the different levels of social life – the social, the religious, the ethnic and the economic ones. The research started with an observation in accordance with Park's recommendations, by observing the people in their everyday activities – observation of the news stalls to perceive which magazines they buy, observation of the traffic in order to find out who goes where etc. Other techniques were added to this, such as collecting and processing various documents, analysis of the contents of the local papers, analysis of the doctors' records, analysis of the membership

in various clubs etc. They continued with interviews with the most distinguished representatives of the city who provided them with information about all the city events.

In the framework of the research, they also researched the area of living, the type of the house, the type of education, the manners and the other symbols of the class affiliation which determine the place of the individual in the community, and a form of a social identity card was made which was filled in by 17,000 inhabitants of the city. This form included information about: age, education, housing, economic and social status, family, membership in various clubs and associations, newspapers, magazines and books that were read, going to the cinema (motion pictures at that time), going to the doctor's etc.

Warner initially emphasized the human behaviour in the domain of economy. The research, however, discovered that, when it came to local marking of the boundaries of the social structure, the economic moment was not the main criterion for acquiring a certain class status. The research discovered that people with the same income were ranked differently, and people who earned more were sometimes ranked on a lower class position. Namely, he concluded that the class is more a subjective than an objective category – the money was translated into a socially confirmed behaviour which conditioned an acceptance by the members of the class to which the given behaviour was directed. So, what influenced most the determination of the class status was the judgment of the inhabitants of the city themselves – their own attitude and the attitude of the others towards them.

Yankee City is considered to be the most comprehensive and most ambitious project on the social structure of the American society ever to be conducted in the framework of the whole history of the American sociology. The results of the research were published gradually, from 1941 to 1959 in five volumes: *The Social Life in Modern Community* (1941), *The Status System of a Modern Community* (1942), *The Social System of a American Ethnic Groups* (1945), *The Social System of a Modern Factory* (1947), *The Living and the Dead: A Study in the Symbolic Life of Americans* (1959). And yet, the results of this research were criticized and questioned by sociologists who determined the class entirely as an economic category.

**The American Soldier.** The researches “Studies in Social Psychology in World War II”, known as “The American Soldier”, conducted by a great number of researchers <sup>1</sup> are an obvious example of the reputation that American sociology

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<sup>1</sup> This project, financed exclusively by the American government, is taken as an indicator for the respect American sociology earned in the USA. The project was realized at the demand of the Information and Education Division of the Army. After this project, the American government allocated huge funds in sponsoring projects of different

acquired and the awareness of the American government of the benefit of its researches in resolving the dilemmas when creating state policies.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, a lot of doubts made the beginning of the project difficult, primarily the fear that the free expression of one's opinion could jeopardize the cohesion of the army and the firmly established hierarchy. Numerous dilemmas were related to the making of the research tools, mainly the contents of the questionnaires for interviews – Should they correspond to the ones used by journalists or to the ones used in market research? Should they contain a simple set of questions that can be used as indicators of morality or should only objective facts be used, as, for example, the percentage of sick-leaves? The final solution was to make a simple questionnaire which would be filled in by the soldiers themselves (with the help of interviewers for the illiterate and injured ones) and this questionnaire became the basic means used in the research. Later, a focused interview was introduced.

What is significant about the contribution of this research to the sociological methodology is the conclusion of its investigators that the social science requires theories which can be formulated applicably (operational definitions) so that predictions can be verified through the obtained results, and also that the choice of the questions and the way they are formulated is of an essential significance for the objectivity of the results. Striving to find suitable tools in the domain of quantitative methodology for obtaining answers in the domain of social psychology, the researchers faced many dilemmas which they tried to resolve through comprehensive reassessments of every taken step in the research.

The research provided data, some of which were met with criticism and disapproval, especially those that revealed an image which did not match the stories about the great heroism of the soldiers in World War II presented in the novels and films. So, the cross questions revealed that only 27% of the officers and soldiers were involved directly in battles, whereas the rest were engaged in keeping the front lines, supplying or organizing. Other results, such as the correlation of the attitude towards the battle and the battle execution, showed the importance of a preliminary research in order to make a selection of soldiers to execute especially important operations.

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kinds. Participants in the project were: : S. A. Stouffer, E. A. Suchman, L. C. De Vinney, A. A. Lumsdaine, R.M. Williams, M.B. Smith, I.L. Janis, S.A. Star, L.S. Cottrell, C.I. Hovland, F.D. Sheffield, I. Guttman, P.F. Lazarsfeld, J. A., Clausen, R.K. Merton and others

<sup>2</sup> The results of the project were published in four volumes in 1949 and 1950 by Princeton University Press: *American Soldier; Combat and its Aftermath; Experiments and Mass Communications; Measurement and Predictions*. Later, Merton and Lazarsfeld, as editors made an analysis of the employed methodologies in: : *Continuities in Social Research: Studies in the Scope of Method of "The American Soldier"* ( N.Y.: The Free Press of Glencoe)

The “American Soldier” Project is of an immense significance for the sociological methodology after the intensive researches in the field of quantitative analysis. The Project was an opportunity for one of the researchers – Luis Guttman, to reassess the procedures of combining different questions on the same topic as a continuation of the problem of scaling on which he had worked long before that, that is, he was working on resolving the problem of how just one question can be substituted with many questions through which the general attitude of an individual can be discovered. Another problem was the need for measurement of the strength of personal conviction, which gave Rensis Likert the opportunity to continue work on the technique for measuring the intensity of the attitude which he had started in the early 1930s, and which is embodied in the well-known Likert scale, which takes into account both the direction and the intensity of the attitude. Further on, the researchers of this project tried to find out the differences between the scaling analysis and other appropriate techniques, mainly the factor analysis. Their conclusion regarding this is that the factor analysis is specially designed to treat quantitative data, whereas the responses gathered through the use of scales can only be expressed in qualitative terms.

Robert Merton used the results of the researches on this project as a foundation to continue the research on a reference group, started before him by other sociologists, referring to the relation between an individual and a group, whereby the reference group is defined as a group that an individual uses as a standard for his own judgment and evaluation of his behaviour.

## 2.

Yet, the view on the positive contribution of the sociologists from the prestigious American universities to the development of the sociological science, especially the contribution to building a sociological methodology, does not answer the question of achieving the goal of value neutrality. That is why I will go back to the polemic introduced in the beginning of this paper. With the intention of re-evaluating the strategic positions of this polemic, I will here try to make a brief review of the research preoccupation of the two most passionate polemicists – Wright Mills and Talcott Parsons.

Mills criticized Parsons that his theory was holistic and too general to be in concordance with reality. And, indeed, one can find holistic messages in Parsons, but in the concrete researches he holds the same position as Mills – the middle-range

position. An even more evident advocate of the middle-range position was Merton. Mills criticized Parsons for dealing only with research of the structure, but his research work shows that the structure was the main issue of his own research – he investigated the working class by studying their trade union organization (*The New Man of Power*); the middle class (*White Collar*); and the upper class (*The Power Elite* Mills 1948, 1951 and 1956). In contrast to him, Parsons, yet in *The Social System* set up the foundations of his research strategy – treating the structure as a dynamic category. Later, in *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*, he develops his theory of the social evolution, put on the level of the middle-range theory (Parsons 1937 and Parsons 1960).

It was obvious that the critiques had an ideological rather than a scientific background – they were generally directed towards the sociologists who were proclaimed to be supporters of the state ideology, which was assessed as unsuitable. Proof for that is examination of the work of the sociologists mentioned above, who instigated the polemic that intensified later, when functionalism became a leading theory and the critique was directed to its supporters.

The results of the above mentioned researches confirm the fact that when sociologists begin a research, they adhere to the principle of value neutrality. There is criticism regarding the researches presented above, but it does not question the goal of the research for objective investigation as much as the doubts in the appropriate use of some methodological procedures and the results that can follow from their use (The best illustration for this is the critique of Mills himself regarding Parsons' theory and the sociologists who establish the foundations of the quantitative methodology, presented in *The Sociological Imagination* 1959. Nevertheless, it is a generally shared viewpoint that the major projects of the American sociology are most deserving for establishing the foundations of sociological methodology.

Still, the question remains, whether the issue of the research involves an ideological choice, that is, whether the choice of the issue supports the established social system.

Lewis Coser also asked himself this question and he looked for the answer to it in the issues discussed at the general assemblies of the American Sociological Association. His analysis discovers that during the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an evident shift of the issues, from the problems of the dynamics to the problems of agreement. So, at one meeting in 1907, the chairman Thomas Harvey, in his presentation of the social conflict, held the thesis that “there may be many cases where there is complete harmony of interests, but it does not give them

growth of problems and therefore there is no need to look back on it.” (Cit. according Coser 1956: 15). For him the main object of sociological research were the social antagonisms and disharmonies. In contrast to him, the chairman Howard Odum, at a meeting held in 1930, established that “the sociological conflict is a sociologically unexplored field”, that is, “the sociology of conflict is yet to be written” (Cit. according Coser 1956: 15). Two decades later, Jessie Bernard asked the question whether such sociology had been built and replied negatively to it. According to her, very little was done after the first sociologists, like Small, Ross and Park in the field of the social conflict research. The conflict became an issue of research as late as in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among the critics of functionalism, with an approach to the research either from the positions of Marx (Ralph Darendorff) or from those of Simmel (Lewis Coser).

Following the process of shifting the research issues – from issues that include the conflict, to issues where social harmony has the central position, obviously says that the choice of an issue can, however, bring into question the thesis of the value neutrality of a methodologically correct research on any issue. In contemporary conditions, when the state is the main financer of the scientific researches, and it determines the priorities when giving grants for realization of social researches, the financial dependence of the researchers on state funding determines the nature of the relation between sociology and politics.

### 3.

The intensive change undergoing in the world is gradually blurring the boundaries of the entity which was proclaimed to be the subject of the sociological science – the society as a self-sufficient unit with a creative power in relation to the human individuals that constitute its whole. This change restricts the possibilities for relevant discoveries in both basic domains of the sociological research determined by August Comte – statics and dynamics. Statics, that is, the research of the social structure, can no longer be approached with the predominant view that the parts of the social whole are interrelated and conditioned by the whole. Their relation and conditioning should now be searched not only in, but also out of the social whole – in their relationship with correlating entities located in different parts of the world. The situation with the dynamics is even more dramatic – the change is so intensive and the number of factors of its conditioning increase so rapidly in numbers and in variety, that the main goal of the dynamic research – to predict the future course of the researched phenomenon – is becoming extremely limited, even

impossible. In those conditions, the state in which the sociological science is today is quite understandable. It is in a crisis, and this crisis can only be overcome, or at least mitigated if it redefines the subject of its research.

On considering the direction of the redefinition of the subject of the sociological science, it might be useful to go back to the levels of research identified in the period from the beginnings of the science until today. Sociology had its starting points on a macro level, while later, in the period covered in the presentation of the early American sociology, two new lines of research were established with a lower level of generality – the meso-level (middle-range sociology) and micro-sociology. The methodology developed by the American sociologists was mainly on the level of meso-sociology, that is, this methodology requires a theory with a lower level of generality – directed mainly at a more precise definition of the concrete object of the research, and empirical research tools which would describe and possibly explain the researched phenomenon and conclusions would be deduced that could partially improve the theory which was the starting point, but not to a degree to raise it on a general level. Together with the middle-range sociology, micro-sociology is developing – through researching separate phenomena, without prior connection of the research with a certain theory and with no ambitions for a more systematic discoveries of broad mutual conditionings of the phenomenon with other phenomena.

The continuous growth of the complexity of the social structures with the continuous growth of the labour division, to which is added the continuous growth of the density and scope (often with terrestrial dimensions) of the network that these structures are intertwined in, it seems that sociology is put before a challenge to reassess its possibilities and to face the fact that the time of meso-sociology has run out – the time has come to acknowledge the significance of micro-sociology, which was criticized so strongly half a century earlier. This focusing on concrete (petty) problems, without a broad view of the matters, clearly points to the need that sociology today, along with the micro-sociological preoccupation, goes back to its starting point – the philosophy, or at least from a philosophical viewpoint to further strive to perceive matters on a macro-sociological level. And this, in both directions mentioned, puts it in a position of a certain relationship with the centres of power: in the domain of micro-sociology – with the financial support of the projects chosen for funding for priorities set beforehand; in macro-sociology through the ideological position of its creators.

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