

A Look at Sociology Today

In the current year 2021, the Day of the National Revival Leaders drew the attention of educational and research institutions as well as of teachers and researchers organized in Third Sector structures such as the Union of Scientists in Bulgaria (USB) and the Union of Economists in Bulgaria (UEB).

On November 8, 2021, the Department of Social Sciences at the USB, jointly with the UEB, conducted a seminar entitled “A Look at Sociology Today”. The event was dedicated to the Day of the National Revival Leaders.

The main report on the topic was presented by Prof. Nikolay Genov, DSc, who is well known to the academic community as the founder of the Department of Regional and Global Development at the Institute of Sociology, BAS, as the Vice President of the USB during the period 1998-2002, as a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts (Salzburg), and other international organizations; and especially as the author of more than 350 publications in 28 countries.

N. Genov related his view of sociology today to the challenges of the 21st century as outlined by the Sociological Forum of the ISA: Democracy, Environment, Inequalities, Intersectionality (February 23-27, 2021). At this forum’s plenary sessions, Sari Hanafi formulated the topical themes facing sociology at present: the crisis of late modernity; populism and authoritarianism; COVID-19; the environment crisis; the crisis of consumerism; the logic of sociological analysis; the decolonization of sociology; the significance of emotions, love and the family, etc.

In his presentation, N. Genov emphasized that these topics are too numerous, and that the multiplicity of themes in multi-paradigmatic sociology comes at a price. This cost can be calculated by balancing the positive and negative aspects. The positive ones include the high complexity of social reality, the manifestation of intellectual freedom, creativity, tolerance, maintenance of traditions, etc. The negative ones are related to the resulting obstacles (very significant ones) to the cumulative development of sociological cognition. Prof. Genov connected these obstacles to the excessive differentiation of sociological paradigms, a feature that gives rise to tendencies such as a) paradigm-based preferences for certain aspects of the situation, which leads to a disregard for the integral character of social events and social systems; b) paradigm-based preferences in the selection of themes and problems according to

subjective preferences; c) paradigm-based preferences that lead to one-sidedness in the selected content and organization of sociological cognition.

In order to overcome the listed consequences of excessive differentiation of paradigms, Prof. Genov argued *the need for synthesizing the sociological paradigms*. He grounded this necessity in the heuristic potential of the classics of sociology. Thus, he recalled the “interaction between the I and the Me, between the Self and the Generalized Other” as analyzed by G. H. Mead, the law-like assertions involved in G. C. Homans’ theory of social exchange, T. Parsons’ view of society as a system of interaction, I. Wallerstein’s World-Systems theory of the interaction between center and periphery, and F. Engels’ dialectic of nature, interaction as a substance.

Prof. Genov summarized his argument by pointing out that this synthesis of sociological paradigms is in itself a paradigm – the “paradigm of social interaction”. In this connection, he outlined two category frameworks that determine social interaction: “actors-relationships-processes” and “determinants of social interaction” (which may be ecological, technological, economic, political and cultural). He defined the paradigm of social interaction, “*most generally as an exchange of matter, energy and information between individual and collective social actors within a network of social relationships in the course of social processes*”¹.

In his presentation, Prof. Nikolay Genov also pointed out and analyzed some specific requirements related to the core of the social interaction paradigm: a broad semantic basis; a maintained balance between ontological and analytical realism; the opening of cognitive space for differentiation and integration of knowledge about processes occurring at micro, meso and macro structural levels; the central concept of the paradigm is to provide an approach to resolving the traditional dilemmas of sociological cognition; an ensured connection between theoretical and empirical research; the ensured possibility for designing and applying mixed methods.

Prof. Genov presented a concrete application of the new social interaction paradigm to the construction of the concept of social innovation, which he defined as “*organized, managed, controlled social change – with actors, relationships and processes*”. In this connection, he drew examples from various countries and international communities, including the European Union.

The participants found particularly interesting Nikolay Genov’s observations on social interactions and social transformations seen through the prism of the theories of Marx and

¹ Genov, N. *The Paradigm of Social Interaction*. Routledge, 2021, p. 32.

Weber, the various interactions in Socialist and post-Socialist transformations and their consequences.

Prof. Genov checked the fruitfulness of the social interaction paradigm as applied to the COVID-19 problem and thereby convinced the audience that the paradigm does indeed enable the study of correlations through a single, integral set of categories. According to the current sociological canon, the social structures and processes involved in the COVID-19 issue should be studied at three structural levels:

- interaction at micro-level: doctor-doctor, doctors-nurses, doctors-nurses-patients, doctors-nurses-hospital administration;

- interaction at meso-level between organizations: hospital-hospital, hospital-Regional Health Inspectorates, Regional Health Inspectorates-Ministry of Health;

- interaction at macro-level: state-state, state-regional integration, state-regional integration-global structures and processes.

Of all 33 participants in the seminar (physically present or connected online), the following shared their opinions on the “social interaction” paradigm: Prof. M. Stoyanova, DSc, Assoc. Professor V. Kirov, DSc, Prof. E. Chengelova, DSc, Prof. S. Seykova, DSc, Prof. Tsv. Davidkov, DSc, Senior Assist. Prof. T. Kineva, PhD, etc.

Issues related to the quality of education in sociology, social dynamics, social innovation, etc., were discussed; without the adequate development of these, present-day and future societies would be at risk.

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