

ON SOME PECULIARITIES OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTING*

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In this article some problems concerning the reliability of sociological knowledge will be discussed. This problem is of current interest in sociology because some opinions concerning the problem of reliability of sociological knowledge sometimes lead to the question: whether the sociology does exist as a science, or not.

The problem arises concerning the comparability of the sociological knowledge obtained from different sources, in different contexts, by various methods. It is necessary to taking into account the wide spectrum of the theoretical approaches sometimes non-comparable with each other. In particular the difficulties arise because of the difference in methods of processing and diagnostics of the sociological knowledge, the contradictions between qualitative and quantitative methods, the social-cultural conditionality of the obtained sociological information. What are the criteria of truth of sociological knowledge (or sociological information)?

The development of criteria of truth of sociological knowledge now sometimes is included in a closed circle, localized within a particular methodological approach. "A necessary criterion of truth generalizations are methodological correctness" - says Russian sociologist Gennady Batygin¹. Meanwhile, the "methodological correctness" depends on a complex process of the obtaining of knowledge and its legitimating. This process is context-related and depends on the traditions and institutions of legitimating of knowledge within a concrete school in sociology.

The situation becomes more confusing if we take into account the dependence of any scientific knowledge (not even necessarily sociological) on the social context.

The known "thesis about the relative independence of theoretical statements on observations"² and Duhem-Quine thesis³ on "incomplete determination" of the theory with facts (or evidence) indicate the social construction of any scientific knowledge in general. In sociology, which takes a special place among other sciences, this problem is more acute. The peculiarity of sociology is the fact that the author of sociological knowledge (the sociologist) and the object of sociological knowledge (the social relations) are mutually conditioned. The paradox lies in the fact that the

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¹ **Batygin G. S.** Lectures on the methodology of sociological researches. M.; Aspect-Press, 1995, p.18 (in Russian).

² **Feyerabend (Feuerabend) P.** Selected papers on the methodology of science. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1986.

³ **Duhem Pier**, Physical theory: its purpose and structure, M., "KomKniga", 2007, p. 224 (in Russian); Quine U.W.O. From a Logical Point of View. Cambridge, 1961.

element of the system is trying to obtain knowledge about the whole system such that he is a part within it.

How does it manifest in sociology? According to R. Mills, "you cannot be outside of society, the question is only what position you occupy ... The moral and intellectual commitment of social science lies in the fact that the values of reason and freedom is still expensive and in the formulation of the problems they have been treated seriously, consistently and creatively. But there is a political commitment to that inaccurately referred to as 'Western culture'".

Moreover, the Russian sociologist Michael Sokolov says that sociology becomes an application to the ideology prevailing among Western intellectuals.

According to him, "... the profession of sociologist suggests definite political orientation, deviation from which among European and American social scientists almost never occurs. Sociologist can be leftist or left-leaning. Orthodox liberals like Raymond Aron and Peter Berger displease, the completely apolitical Hoffman was seen as a curiosity, and even analytical detached Boudreaux, despite his well-known anti-globalization beliefs repeatedly became an occasion for criticism from the left. It is clear that among sociologists living today there is probably no one would venture to confess to liking to the right"⁴.

Particularly Peter Sztompka openly posits the value-dependence of sociological theories, referring to a number of authors: "The importance of theories is to provide information for democratic discourse. This role will become even more apparent as democracy will be installed in new and emerging countries, it has particularly important role in the future "knowledge society"⁵. Thus, the entire contents of sociological knowledge are put in direct dependence on the social context on which it is constructed and what political or ideological concept it serves.

In this context, idea of the objectivity of sociological knowledge is essentially rejected, and its subjective - interpretive nature is emphasized, as in each social context knowledge is constituted especially.

In the empirical sociology one of the traditional criteria of reliability of empirical knowledge is the comparability of knowledge obtained from various sources. However, the criteria of comparability are very shaky, often the researches results are incomparable.

In fact, the main criterion for the reliability of information is the following to the accepted guidelines for the survey, which is a priori guarantee of the accuracy of the obtained knowledge. In other words, a procedural aspect of assessing the quality of empirical sociological knowledge is accepted.

Meanwhile, the implementation of any social research, whether qualitative or quantitative, also related to the social context in which it is conducted. A number of factors of social context (including the subconscious mechanisms) may contribute to the distortion of sociological information, and thus it is very difficult subject to capture and to evaluate. Feedback mechanisms in social systems, which are similar to "the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, which was formulated in relation to the need to consider the influence of ... research tool on the object of study" are very

⁴ **Sokolov M.** The coming crisis of sociological theorizing // Telescope: observing the daily life of St. Petersburg residents, 2002, №5, p. 10 (in Russian).

⁵ **Sztompka P.** Formation of the sociological imagination. Importance of the theory// Sociological Researches, 2005. № 10, p. 64–72 (in Russian).

important too. In this relation, the methodological "correctness" of empirical research can have very little value for the validation of knowledge.

There are well-known cases where unexpected peculiarities of social context influenced on the results of the research, impeccable in terms of generally accepted methodological principles of sociological research conducting (for example, the language accent of the interviewers, their images, etc.)

The resulting conceptual vacuum in this area of knowledge is reflected in the gradual expiring interest in this problem. The producers of sociological knowledge in their publications sometimes pay very little attention to the problems of reliability of knowledge.

Thematic content analysis of international congresses and conferences also shows a significant decrease of topics related to the mentioned methodological problems.

In fact, the situation dictates either the forced reconciliation with the considered situation and the recognition that sociological knowledge cannot fully claim to be scientific, or the necessity of new approaches to the solution of mentioned problems.

So according to the second way the dependence of sociological knowledge, both its content and features of its construction, on a number of social factors, the lack of relevant methods to assess the social context and sociological knowledge require a radical rethinking of existing methodological foundations in sociology. Thus, there is a need for a new type of studies of sociological knowledge, based on the acceptance that the sociological knowledge which is the result of empirical research or theoretical generalizations reflects the diversity of the social context in which it was constructed.

According to the suggested approach the traditional sociological knowledge can be considered as the primary information for a new type of research, namely metasociological research that can give new information about the social context in which original knowledge was constructed.

In other words, the proposed new perspective on sociology and the definition of sociological knowledge is that sociological knowledge, occupying a special place in the system of scientific knowledge should be combined together with its meta-knowledge - and this entity is a new type of sociological knowledge.

The new type of sociological knowledge would unite the primary knowledge (empirical or theoretical) with meta-knowledge in which the answer to the question "why and how did this knowledge?" is given.

This approach requires the creation of new methodological and methodical approaches to the analysis of sociological knowledge and assessment of its reliability. Such an attempt has been made in our department of sociology in Yerevan State University.

In these approaches to the mentioned problems the methodology of discourse-analysis with the fuzzy logic technique plays a significant role as a methodology of the metasociological analysis of sociological knowledge.

The statement that the sociological scientific text is a certain discursive practice reflecting a social reality is taken as a basis of this methodology⁶.

The discourse-analysis traditionally is considered as a qualitative method of research; and there is a need for some modifications if it some modifications of discourse-analysis give the possibility to compare the knowledge received by quantitative and qualitative methods.

An application of concepts of fuzzy logic for the discourse-analysis of sociological knowledge is offered for this purpose. In this approach the paradigms of both qualitative and quantitative analysis are incorporated.

Actually fuzzy logic gives the possibility of creating formal models reflecting the fuzziness and uncertainty of the real world.

The facts were always fuzzy or vague or inexact... Science treated the gray or fuzzy facts as if they were the black-white facts of math. Yet no one had put forth a single fact about the world that was 100% true or 100% false," - says Bart Kosko⁷.

«The concept “the indistinct phenomena”, such phenomena which can be outlined, but it is impossible to define strictly, is, in effect, one of rather important ideas with which the humanities enrich the exact sciences» - wrote Abraham Moles⁸.

The *fuzziness* arises during unification together of the objects x , having the same property φ . Property φ not always can lead us to an opportunity of exact definition of this unification as there can be objects for which it is not clear, whether they possess property φ or not (how to define, for example, set of all democratic states!). On the other hand it is possible to consider objects *typical* for given property. Therefore it is reasonable to use the certain scale which elements designate various degrees of the validity of possession of object x by property φ ⁹.

The method which is offered for **these aims** is the analysis of sociological scientific knowledge - so-called method of Fuzzy Discourse Analysis of Sociological Texts, is developed¹⁰.

Thus, by this method it is possible to track some tendencies **in public opinion** reflected in sociological knowledge, mental schemes, mechanisms and features of perception of a situation, features of social consciousness and possible borders of scientific sociological knowledge. Besides, this analysis makes a possibility to compare the sociological knowledge which sometimes seems incomparable and inconsistent.

However it's a first step in this area and we hope that the further development in this area will bring us closer to the solution of the discussed issues in modern sociology.

⁶ Today there is a variety of approaches to the definition and the development of discourse-analysis, and a uniform research methodology for such analysis doesn't exist. The approaches to the methodology of this analysis are mosaic and frequently inconsistent. So, there is a necessity of revision and specification of discourse - analysis methodology.

⁷ **Kosko B.**, Fuzzy Thinking, Flamingo, 1994.

⁸ **Moles A.** Théorie de l'information et perception esthétique, Paris, Denoël, 1972, p. 59.

⁹ **J. Yen, R. Landary** “Fuzzy Logic. Intelligence, Control, and Information”, Prentice Hall, NJ, 1999.

¹⁰ **Zaslavskaya M.** The social context estimation problem in sociological knowledge: analysis and methods of solving. Monograph. Yerevan: Publishing House of the Yerevan State University, 2010 (in Russian).

ՄԱՐԻԱ ԶԱՍԼԱՎՍԿԱՅԱ – Սոցիոլոգիական գիտելիքի կառուցակցման որոշ առանձնահատկությունների մասին – Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում է սոցիոլոգիայի՝ այլ գիտությունների շարքում զբաղեցրած առանձնահատուկ տեղի հիմնախնդիրը՝ պայմանավորված սոցիոլոգիական գիտելիքի օբյեկտի և առարկայի յուրահատկություններով: Ցույց է տրվում սոցիոլոգիական գիտելիքում սոցիալական և սոցիալ-հոգեբանական համատեքստի վերլուծության անհրաժեշտության խնդիրը: Ուսումնասիրվող հիմնախնդիրները վերաբերում են տարբեր աղբյուրներից ստացված սոցիոլոգիական տեղեկատվության գնահատմանը և մեկնաբանմանը, ինչպես նաև նման տեղեկատվության վերլուծության առանձնահատուկ մեթոդներին: Առաջարկվում է սոցիոլոգիական ճշմարիտ գիտելիքի նոր հարացույց՝ հիմնված սոցիոլոգիական և մետասոցիոլոգիական գիտելիքների միավորման վրա, և սոցիոլոգիական տեքստերի դիսկուրս-վերլուծության նոր կոնցեպտուալ մոդել՝ հիմնված անորոշ տրամաբանության վրա:

МАРИЯ ЗАСЛАВСКАЯ – О некоторых особенностях конструирования социологического знания. – В статье рассматривается вопрос об особом положении социологии как науки, где размываются границы между субъектом и объектом социологического знания. В этой связи неправомерно ставить вопрос о достоверности или качестве социологического знания как категории вне социального и социально-психологического контекста. Предлагается новая парадигма социологической истины как категории, основанной на объединении социологического и метасоциологического уровней познания. Ставится вопрос о нахождении релевантных методов извлечения верифицированных компонентов из социологического знания, а также некоторых специфических методов анализа подобной информации, когда на её достоверность влияет целый комплекс факторов, связанных с конкретным общественно-политическим контекстом. Предлагается метод анализа социологического знания, основанный на концепции нечёткой логики.