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TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIOLOGY: NECESSITY AND PERSPECTIVES*

The article analyzes the relevance, factors and prospects of the transformation of modern sociological science. It is noted that digital technologies significantly change the fundamental foundations of social interaction, most everyday social practices, structures and conflicts. This poses a number of serious challenges to sociology as a science. It is emphasized that it is time to think deeply not only about the problem of transformation of what sociology studies, but also about the transformation of sociology itself as a specific intellectual practice. Attention is focused on the need for sociological analysis and interpretation of large-scale and long-term social processes, changes in the traditional way of sociology's participation in the formation of state social policy and the implementation of social reforms. Endogenous factors hindering the leadership of sociological science in the modern public intellectual discourse are identified, namely: fragmentation of sociology, its division into a huge number of directions, particular, local thematizations; lack of research attention of sociologists to the fundamental problems of social life; modern sociology does not form an agenda for public intellectual discourse and scientific research, does not define the problematic field of research and interpretation both at the microsocial level and at the level of societal and global phenomena; it is not socially engaged, does not engage in dialogic interaction with various groups of the public, does not help them to realize their values, interests and problems, to fight for their solution; sociologists do not show activity in related research areas (for example, such as social communications, public relations, advertising, marketing, political consulting, conflict studies), do not use for this a rich arsenal of sociological theoretical concepts, quantitative and qualitative methods; despite the mediatization of social life, sociology is not sufficiently media-based, it is extremely weakly present in the media space. A conclusion is formulated about the need to transform sociological thinking and sociological imagination, the need for serious changes in the educational programs of professional training of students, in particular their practical component, the search for new formats of professional communication.

Keywords: *sociology, digital society, transformation, public sociology, social processes, sociological education, social communications, media*

On the 2nd of September, 1969 Leonard Kleinrock together with his graduate and postgraduate students at the University of California connected two computers via the information channel [1]. That day, our world was transformed which, to be honest, became clear later. Today this is an obvious fact and we are witnessing the total expansion of digital technologies. They are

rapidly transforming everything that can be transformed in the social life, they are changing the fundamental grounds of social interaction and open unimaginable prospects for even further transformations.

Humanity has never experiences such tremendous social changes and it seems like the finest hour for Sociology's which was conceived in its time as an attempt to

scientifically substantiate the specifics of a new industrial era, the era of modernity. Industrial revolution, formation of national states and urbanization were transforming society from its traditional agrarian format into a principally new one which required scientific comprehension. Sociology (in all its varieties) was formed for the sake of systemic, synthesizing exploration and explanation of a new social reality, its structure and its dynamics.

It is Sociology that was on the forefront of scientific comprehension of social forms of a post-industrial society (whatever you may call it) which substituted industrialism. Unlike other social sciences and humanities, that remain in their own confines Sociology was free in its search of different methodologies, as well as in its conceptual design and thus could claim that it knows how to explain not only some separate feature of a new epoch but also its essence.

Social transformations today are not less profound and extensive as compared to the previous ones. As if a new social world emerged in which many traditional social processes, structures, interactions and contradictions are being transformed [2; 3; 4; 5; 6].

What happens to the society, social groups and individuals in a digital era? How should people jointly respond to new challenges, get accustomed to new and previously unknown risks and dangers? International Sociology and its national communities (or branches) have so far created and accumulated lots of theoretical and empirical instruments that allow to form an actual agenda for international organizations, governments, politicians and social movements, to considerably improve its prestige and authority and to play a leading role in public intellectual life. It has not happened, though. Actually, it seems the other way round. That is why there are more and more clearly pessimistic definitions of the modern scientific status of sociology: "Today sociology has the status of a not-quite-science that is incapable of obtaining objective knowledge of sociality; considered as a special empirical discipline in philosophy without pronounced specific features that distinguish it from other social sciences; as a science that has not formed its own theory, its main task is reduced to the problem of understanding. The analysis of sociologists is based on the solution of hermeneutic problems and activist

principles of describing social processes; within this framework, the foundations of the sociologist's craft are the provisions of social linguistics, hermeneutics, social semiotics and, in part, structuralism" [7, p.36].

Accordingly, the interest of young people in mastering the sociological profession decreases. This summer Ukrainian Universities that train future professional sociologists were rather upset by declining interest to this profession from school graduates. The number of students admitted to the bachelor's and master's educational levels considerably decreased. The number of defended PhD and Doctor of Sciences theses in Sociology is hundreds of times less than those in Economics, Philosophy, Political Science, Cultural Studies, not mentioning Jurisprudence. One can claim that Ukrainian society (I can't speak about the situation in other countries) has no any notable interest towards our discipline. The society is only interested in the results of polls that demonstrate ratings of political parties or separate politicians. Marketing surveys are of some demand as well.

Sociologists are seldom invited as experts to TV channels. The profession of a sociologist is gradually losing its former appeal. In an attempt to attract new students, sociological departments and schools resort to semantic marketing tricks, rename and correspondingly modify educational programs, accentuating closer ties with business, international relations, psychology, media communications, etc. Sometimes it sounds really funny, like, for instance, the name of the program "Sociology of Psychology" offered by one of the universities.

It is difficult to say to what extent this trend is manifested in wider areas. But some publications from colleagues from other countries show that they are also concerned about this trend, the fact that not the strongest students come to the sociological faculties now. "Especially in recent decades, smart students do not tend to think of developing a career in sociology" [8]. Sociological departments do not attract the brightest students. Their employment prospects after completing the course are rather vague. Popularity-wise, Sociology legs behind Psychology, Economics, media Studies.

The causes, social and cultural circumstances, prestige or non-prestige of Sociology, prospects of its future existence, not even speaking about its further progress – all these factors together constitute the most pressing problem of Sociology because nobody except us themselves will be able to solve it.

The time has come not only to think over the transformation of what Sociology studies, but also to think over the transformation of Sociology itself as a particular variety of intellectual practice [9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15].

Unlike many other – and not only natural – sciences, Sociology has changed more than once during the short history of its existence in its structural, methodological and pragmatic aspects. Its history is not a linear, consecutive accumulation of knowledge, continuous improvement of methods and research techniques. It's not even a revolutionary development in which one well-established paradigm is substituted with a new one which, in its turn inevitably faces the fate of its predecessor. At all the stages of its history beginning with the earliest ones and up to today, Sociology has never been a systematically framed and internally uncontroversial collection of conceptions and theories reflecting the essence and regularities of social development.

It has rather been sum total of different intellectual efforts to comprehend the regularities of social development, to present them in particular systems of special categories and ideas and thus to help society understand itself. Despite tremendous diversity of these efforts, their deep and often antagonistic contradictions, despite notorious multiparadigmality at every qualitatively distinct stage of social development, various voices of sociology have always had some common traits. One could often observe deep transformations of sociological subject field, its language, theoretical problematization of social life and general research optics.

Gathering here to discuss colossal transformations of social institutions in digital society, we obviously should address the issue of transformations within Sociology itself, to ponder upon its current state and its problems.

What is awaiting Sociology in a new digital society – flourishing or decline? What is its future like and how can we influence its course?

Such considerations have been appearing again and again in the history of sociological

thought. Summing up the first years of institutionalization of Sociology as a discipline, Albion Small the founder of the first school of Sociology, expressed deepest conviction that Sociology has future not only because it received academic acclaim. He was confident that the important guarantee of Sociology's future lies in the fact that people are insatiably interested in people [16].

Albion Small looked centuries ahead and we can see that he was right, Sociology has not disappeared, has not dissolved among other social sciences but has been developing stably in all its institutional and intellectual dimensions and thus turned into an important element of education research and social control (regulation of human interaction).

But, as Anthony Giddens wrote much later, some doubts appeared that Sociology could really fulfill all the promises proclaimed by its outstanding leaders and thus the opinion was formed that Sociology moved behind all the other social sciences. In his well known to all of us “Nine theses on the future of Sociology” Giddens carefully formulated the number of conditions that would allow Sociology feel itself more confident in the system of modern social knowledge and play a much more important role in its development.

Among them, I would distinguish three major ones (in my opinion): the necessity to elevate itself to the analysis of large-scale and long-term processes of social transformations: “If we do not ask, and seek to answer as well as we can, questions like – how should we best characterize modernity? What were its origins? What are the major transformations currently influencing the trajectories of development of world history? – most of the intellectual challenge of sociology is lost” [17, p.75].

Sociology should also change its traditional way of participation in the formation of practical social policy and implementation of reforms. As a rule, practical importance of sociological research is reduced to providing an opportunity to the creators of practical politics to better understand social world and to influence it by more reliable means than those available without conducting such research. But this is not enough, and sociology should move from serving as an instrument for subjects of practical policies towards active participation not only in proposing instruments for achieving purposes and tasks of practical policies but for outlining these purposes and setting these tasks.

This thesis is in close relation to the call for combining sociological research with different social movements that stimulate sociological imagination, help find, see, feel problems that emerge amidst social processes and contradictions, and that “may identify previously undiagnosed characteristics of, and possibilities within, a given institutional order” [17, p.79].

Time flies, and it's already 35 years since Anthony Giddens formulated the program of renewal for Sociology. There has been some movement forward in regard to practically all of the nine theses, though it is obvious that this movement is not enough. Giddens's question “Why, during a period of transformative social change, is sociology not back at the forefront of intellectual life and public debate?” [18] is still on the agenda. We should also find truthful Michael Burawoy's words that sociologist played a less considerable part in comprehending globalization as compared to economists and specialists in foreign relations.

Let me try to outline those traits of modern Sociology that prevent it from occupying leading positions in the modern public intellectual discourse.

1. Modern Sociology turned out very fragmented, disintegrated into a huge number of directions, specializations, though important and interesting, but still particular local topics. Fundamental problems of social life fell out of the focus of our research interests. We do not contemplate such global issues as where the world is heading, what is awaiting it, what are the possible scenarios of current and upcoming social transformations. General public wants to hear our thoughts on all these problems. And when sociologists keep silent, someone else start talking – historians, journalists writers. You can buy Yuval Noah Harari's books translated into dozens of languages, in particular his bestseller “Homo Deus: A brief history of tomorrow” virtually at any international airport. Basically he works in the genre of pop-sociology, describing in bright colors social transformations that take place under the influence of digital and biological technologies. Sociologists could not offer anything of the kind. And the Anthony Giddens's call towards the analysis and interpretation of large-scale and long-term social shifts and processes still remain topical.

2. Modern Sociology does not form the agenda of public intellectual discourse and

scientific search. It's a common place to state that Sociology must scientifically substantiate correct managerial decisions, help authorities develop and implement social policies, solve specific social. problems. But as we can see, people in authority often concentrate on wrong issues and, as a rule, have no clear idea of what to do with sociological data.

Sociology should not react to the problems that have already been articulated and that are obvious to everybody. It must itself formulate problematic field of research and interpretation, because except sociologists comprehending the living tissue of social processes on both micro-social level and on the level of societal and global phenomena, no one can see emerging social problems before they grow and reveal themselves. Sociologists, though, cannot themselves determine potential areas for practical, political and research efforts.

That is why, “dialogical model” offered by Giddens is of special value (or, to be more precise, “trialogical” model of communication involving politicians, social scientists and those for whose benefit certain programs of improving social life are implemented). “According to dialogical model, the most efficient form of relation between social research and practical policy is developed in the process of expanding communication between scientists, politicians and those whom the questions discussed concern. This model overturns the traditional concept, according to which selected political objectives must determine the character of conducted research. Now, the priority will probably be given to those social research programs that outpace the formation of political objectives. At the same time, mutual influence of both processes is acknowledged. In a fast-changing world continuous research helps expose those layers of social life where most complicated practical problems are concentrated and at the same time offers scientific framework for finding their resolution” [17, p.78].

3. Not everyone will agree with the following point: modern Sociology must be socially committed in order to be able to problematize research agenda. No doubt, it cannot be politicized, ideologized or take side of a particular political force. But it can take side of those groups, communities, collective or even individual actors who stand up for their interests, their vision of justice, their view of the future. It can take form of communication

and cooperation with social movements, with discriminated communities, with structures of civil society (Piotr Sztompka). If we refer to the concept of sociological division of labor offered by Michael Burawoy, public sociology must play a much more important role in the modern sociological work. Let me remind you that public sociology in his interpretation is the one that dialogically cooperates with different public groups, that helps them comprehend their values, interests and problems and fight for their resolution [19]. Today, I think (and I can't extrapolate this opinion far beyond Ukrainian borders) academic (professional) and applied (business) branches of Sociology dominate within the system of sociological division of labor.

4. One can imagine that applied Sociology should also considerably expand its subject field, actively penetrate neighboring research territories like, for instance, social communications, public relations, advertising, marketing, political consulting, conflictology, and offer solutions to specific problems on the basis of its broad arsenal of qualitative and quantitative methods as well as on the basis of its ability to develop related social technologies in wider sociocultural contexts. Actually, this is the path followed by many Ukrainian universities offering educational programs in Sociology.

5. All the previous perspectives of transformations in the field of Sociology imply a much higher level of media presence as an

important condition of its success. If you are not present in media – you do not exist. It refers not only to politicians but also to sociologists. It's hard for us to enter media space and to exist in it, because major part of our data is gathered not for the general public, but for politicians, managers, colleagues. And even sociological materials connected with the problems of inequality, poverty, violence, etc. are of low interest for most people. In addition, though we study media, we don't understand well enough the laws according to which they live and thus lack experience in dealing with them.

We can't present ourselves and our information in a manner appealing to wide audiences except on rare occasions. Thus, in Ukraine there's only a handful of sociologist that are regulars in the national media space. We are not invited on TV, though it's probably not that important today. There's always Internet, there are social networks, blogosphere with lots of active political scientists and experts, journalists but unfortunately without the main experts on social life, that is us.

If we agree with some of the above considerations, we should recognize that sociological community is hardly ready for the offered directions of transformations in its professional life. We need profound changes in sociological thinking, we need considerable changes in the programs of training professional psychologists, we need new forms of communication inside professional community.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ СОЦІОЛОГІЇ: НЕОБХІДНІСТЬ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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У статті аналізуються актуальність, чинники та перспективи трансформації сучасної соціологічної науки. Зазначається, що цифрові технології суттєво змінюють фундаментальні основи соціальної взаємодії, більшість повсякденних соціальних практик, структур і конфліктів. Це ставить перед соціологією як наукою низку серйозних викликів. Підкреслено, що настав час глибоко замислитися не лише над проблемою трансформації того, що вивчає соціологія, а й над трансформацією самої соціології як специфічної інтелектуальної практики. Акцентується увага на необхідності соціологічного аналізу та інтерпретації масштабних і довготермінових соціальних процесів, змін традиційного способу участі соціології у формуванні державної соціальної політики і реалізації суспільних реформ. Визначаються ендогенні чинники, що перешкоджають лідерству соціологічної науки в сучасному публічному інтелектуальному дискурсі, а саме: фрагментованість соціології, її поділеність на величезну кількість напрямків, партикулярних, локальних тематизацій; брак дослідницької уваги соціологів до фундаментальних проблем соціального життя; сучасна соціологія не формує порядок денний для публічного інтелектуального дискурсу та наукового пошуку, не визначає проблемне поле досліджень та інтерпретацій як на мікросоціальному рівні, так і на рівні соцієтальних і глобальних явищ; вона не є соціально ангажованою, не здійснює діалогічну взаємодію з різними групами громадськості, не допомагає їм усвідомити свої цінності, інтереси та проблеми, боротися за їхнє розв'язання; соціологи не виявляють активність на суміжних дослідницьких територіях (приміром таких, як соціальні комунікації, паблік рилейшенз, реклама, маркетинг, політичний консалтинг, конфліктологія), не використовують для цього багатий арсенал власно соціологічних теоретичних концептів, кількісних і якісних методів; попри медіатизацію суспільного життя, соціологія є недостатньо медійною, вона вкрай слабо присутня в медіапросторі. Формується висновок про потребу трансформації соціологічного мислення і соціологічної уяви, необхідність серйозних змін у навчальних програмах професійної підготовки студентів, зокрема їхньої практичної складової, пошуку нових форматів професійного спілкування.

Ключові слова: соціологія, цифрове суспільство, трансформація, публічна соціологія, соціальні процеси, соціологічна освіта, соціальні комунікації, медійність.

ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ СОЦІОЛОГІЇ: НЕОБХОДИМОСТЬ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

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В статье анализируются актуальность, факторы и перспективы трансформации современной социологической науки. Отмечается, что цифровые технологии существенно изменяют фундаментальные основы социального взаимодействия, большинство повседневных социальных практик, структур и конфликтов. Это ставит перед социологией как наукой ряд серьезных вызовов. Подчеркивается, что пришло время глубоко задуматься не только над проблемой

трансформации того, что изучает социология, но и над трансформацией самой социологии как специфической интеллектуальной практики. Акцентируется внимание на необходимости социологического анализа и интерпретации масштабных и долгосрочных социальных процессов, изменений традиционного способа участия социологии в формировании государственной социальной политики и реализации общественных реформ. Определяются эндогенные факторы, мешающие лидерству социологической науки в современном публичном интеллектуальном дискурсе, а именно: фрагментированность социологии, ее представленность в огромном количестве направлений, партикулярных, локальных тематизаций; недостаток исследовательского внимания социологов к фундаментальным проблемам социальной жизни; современная социология не формирует повестку дня для публичного интеллектуального дискурса и научного поиска, не определяет проблемное поле исследований и интерпретаций как на микросоциальном уровне, так и на уровне социетальных и глобальных феноменов; она не является социально ангажированной, не осуществляет диалогическое взаимодействие с различными группами общественности, не помогает им осознать свои ценности, интересы и проблемы, бороться за их решение; социологи не проявляют активность на смежных исследовательских территориях (например таких, как социальные коммуникации, паблик рилейшенз, реклама, маркетинг, политический консалтинг, конфликтология), не используют для этого богатый арсенал собственно социологических теоретических концептов, количественных и качественных методов; несмотря на медиатизацию общественной жизни, социология является недостаточно медийной, она слабо представлена в медиaprостранстве. Формулируется вывод о потребности трансформации социологического мышления и социологического воображения, необходимости серьезных изменений в учебных программах профессиональной подготовки студентов, в частности их практической составляющей, поиска новых форматов профессионального общения.

Ключевые слова: *социология, цифровое общество, трансформация, публичная социология, социальные процессы, социологическое образование, социальные коммуникации, медийность.*

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