

ITS01 – What is sociology?

Sociology as science

- “Society” is everywhere
- From “what” to “**how**” : a **scientific perspective** on society

- E.Durkheim (1895): sociology = “the **science** of institutions, their genesis and their functioning”
- M.Weber (1922): sociology = “a **science** concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences”
- P.Berger (1963): “The sociologist [...] is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way. The nature of this discipline is **scientific**”

- Axiological neutrality
- Methodology
- Theory-building

”The sociologist will normally have many values as a citizen, a private person, a member of a religious group or as an adherent of some other association of people. But within the limits of his activities as a sociologist there is one fundamental value only – that of scientific integrity. Even there, of course, the sociologist, being human, will have to reckon with his convictions, emotions and prejudices. But it is part of his intellectual training that he tries to understand and control these as bias that ought to be eliminated, as far as possible, from his work. It goes without saying that this is not always easy to do, but it is not impossible. The sociologist tries to see what is there. He may have hopes or fears concerning what he may find. But he will try to see regardless of his hopes or fears. It is thus an act of pure perception, as pure as humanly limited means allow, toward which sociology strives”.

(P.Berger, *Invitation to sociology*, 1963, p.5)

The birth of a discipline

- How did society become a matter of scientific investigation in the XIXth century?
- European founding fathers
 - Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859)
 - Karl Marx (1818-1883)
 - Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)

Max Weber (1864-1920)

→ Founding questions

Different visions of sociology as science

Different starting points: micro vs macro

« The fundamental division [from a theoretical point of view] is between macroscopic perspectives that focus on organizations, institutions, societies, and culture and microscopic perspectives that focus on individuals' social psychology and interactive processes among them ».

(Smelser, 1994, p.25)

Agency vs structure

Integration vs conflict

Idealism vs materialism

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