

Nikolai Genov *Hrs.*

Advances in Sociological Knowledge

Over half a Century

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Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	
<i>Nikolai Genov</i> Breakthroughs, Fashions and Continuity in Developing Sociological Knowledge	11
Part One: Sociology and Social Processes	
<i>Martin Albrow</i> The Global Shift and Its Consequences for Sociology	33
<i>Terry Nichols Clark</i> Changing Visions about the Post-Industrial Society	51
<i>Nico Stehr</i> The Social Role of Knowledge	83
Part Two: Sociological Concepts	
<i>Lance W. Roberts and Susanne von Below</i> Role-Set Theory and Modernity: Transforming Experience into Understanding	109
<i>Martin Abraham and Thomas Voss</i> Contributions of Rational Choice Theory to Modern Sociology: An Overview	127

<i>Heinz-Herbert Noll</i>	
Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research: Background, Achievements and Current Trends	151
<i>Frane Adam and Borut Rončević</i>	
Social Capital as a Useful Scientific Metaphor	183
<i>Antonio M. Chiesi</i>	
Social Cohesion and Related Concepts	205
<i>Mathias Bös</i>	
Reconceptualizing Modes of Belonging: Advancements in the Sociology of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism	221
<i>Stella R. Quah</i>	
Conceptualizing Ethnicity: In Search of Cognitive Innovations	245
Part Three: Sociology and Social Practice	
<i>Jiří Musil</i>	
Fifty Years of Urban Sociology	269
<i>Else Øyen</i>	
Poverty Production: A Different Approach to Poverty Understanding ...	299
<i>Rosalind A. Sydie</i>	
Feminist Sociology: Past and Present Challenges	317
<i>György Széll</i>	
Sociology and Industrial Democracy	335
About the Authors	353

Preface

Sociologists face difficult tasks at the turn of the century. Sociology needs conceptual breakthroughs in order to keep pace with accelerated social change. Global trends require new visions about social action and social order. Evolving patterns of regionalisation and specific developmental paths of societies demand careful elaboration on relationships between local, regional and global processes. Deepening social differences and efforts to re-integrate social structures foster comparative research. The growing complexity of networks involving individuals, groups, organisations and societies calls for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary studies. They have to respond to widespread expectations for policy orientation and practical relevance of sociological research. Together with the spread of ideas and practices of sustainable development, there is an increasing pressure on sociology to incorporate closer links to nature and technology in its conceptualisations and to strengthen their normative content.

There is evidence to suggest that the international sociological community has difficulties in coping with the complexity and urgency of the above tasks. Narratives often overshadow analysis and explanations in sociological discourse as well as debates on current social processes. Studies and teachings in the field of sociological theory have turned into a self-satisfactory enterprise, receiving its inspiration from the classics of the discipline and much less from the burning social problems surrounding us. Empirical studies, having only symbolic connection to sociological concepts or to the need of practical solutions, are abundant. The result of these trends is the rise of heterogeneous and diverging orientations in sociological theorising and research and the deficit in the intellectual and institutional coherence of the discipline.

This is only one side of the coin. On the other side, one may identify the homogenising impacts of globalisation on sociological theorising and research. Old and new concepts of global trends, social networks, social capital, social cohesion, etc. take the lead in the sociological attempts to intellectually cope with the changing social situation. Comparative sociological research is getting more and more sophisticated. The traditional sociological search for the vision of 'good society' takes on new forms and contents.

The internal tensions and achievements of this intellectual process are the major motivating factors of sociological self-reflection. The fiftieth anniversary of the International Social Science Council provided one more occasion to pose questions about continuities, discontinuities, real breakthroughs and intellectual fashions in the development of sociological knowledge. Some tentative answers to these questions were discussed at the Special Session *Advances in Sociological Knowledge over Half a Century*, organised by the Council at the XVth World Congress of Sociology (Brisbane, Australia, July 2002). The present volume offers further elaborations on the topic by relying on the intellectual resources of a group of authors, which is representative of the current state of international sociology.

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Nikolai Genov

Introduction

Nikolai Genov

Breakthroughs, Fashions and Continuity in Developing Sociological Knowledge

1. Who Reads Parsons?

The first lines of Talcott Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) are indicative of perennial problems in sociology. They concern the relationship between innovation and continuity in the development of sociological knowledge. Parsons' rhetorical question, "Who now reads Spencer?" was borrowed from Crane Brinton to signal a disciplinary paradigm shift. The message was that Spencer's sociological evolutionism had become scientifically worthless. More precisely, Parsons believed that it had been made worthless because of the appearance of the modern theory of social action. It consisted mostly in elaborations on the ideas of Max Weber. Thus, the answer was obvious for Parsons: nobody used to read Spencer at the end of the thirties of the last century. Parsons' background assumption was that sociological evolutionism was dead forever. Sociologists used to read or had to read the new theory of social action.

The diagnosis was only partly correct. In the thirties and later, the impact of Marxist ideas about social evolution (implicitly) and revolution (explicitly) on social sciences in Europe was quite strong. The influence of sociological evolutionism could also be easily recognised in the writings of Parsons' colleague at Harvard, Pitirim Sorokin, and of other outstanding sociologists in the United States at that time. Nevertheless, Parsons was correct in one point at least: the sociological evolutionism of Spencer was *out of fashion*. New fashions dominated the intellectual scene of sociological theorising and research. One of them was to become the just emerging ambitious Parsonian theory of social action, which was still to be combined with a theory of social systems (Parsons, 1951). It was then about to dominate sociological theorising during the fifties and partly the sixties of the twentieth century.

However, intellectual life is generally marked by interruptions, sharp turns, leaps forwards and backwards, which might seem quite strange or paradoxical at first glance. They are abundant in the development of sociological ideas as well. It could be interpreted as an irony in the personal intellectual career that exactly Parsons reached a turning point in his biography where he discovered the merits of sociological evolutionism. His *Societies. Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (1966) can be undoubtedly un-

derstood as a rehabilitation of evolutionary thinking and thus as an implicit rehabilitation of Spencer. It turned out that sociological evolutionism had to be taken seriously once more. Obviously, the social environment and the intellectual fashions have changed in the meantime.

Given this historical precedent, one may go one step further and ask seriously: Who actually reads Parsons today? The correct answer is certainly not 'nobody'. Majors in sociology are obliged to know about the famous A-G-I-L conceptual scheme and some of them even read the original Parsons from time to time. There are numerous university professors who teach sociological theory. Most of them really read Parsons – at least for preparing their lectures and seminars. But there are only isolated efforts (Münc, 1982) to achieve an intellectual breakthrough by going '*with Parsons beyond Parsons*'. Niklas Luhmann's ideas are often regarded as a specific continuation of sociological systems theory of Parsons. In reality, Luhmann increasingly moved towards deviation and not continuation of Parsonian theorising. Currently, the typical approach to Parsons is just to repeat his ideas in order to secure intellectual continuity in the reproduction of the sociological community since his works have symbolic relevance for the identity of the discipline. But his theoretical achievements are certainly out of fashion in spite of the repeated appeals to return to his legacy (Mouzelis, 1995). He is only incidentally read with the ambition to secure a cumulative advancement of sociological knowledge. Moreover, there have been years of total negation of Parsons in combination with efforts to replace structural functionalism and every hint of scientism by interpretations of the meaning of face-to-face interactions.

Against the background of this experience, is there any reason to talk about scientific revolutions or counter-revolutions in sociology? Most probably not, at least in the sense of Thomas S. Kuhn. At least at the first glance there is no visible path of cumulative cognitive advances in the discipline. Breaks, deviations and repetitions seem to be typical for the process. Sociology appears not just as a multi-paradigmatic science. In it discontinuities and fashions obviously prevail over the cumulative conceptual developments and constructive intellectual innovations.

The easiest way to explain the predominance of discontinuities and fashions in the cognitive development of sociology is to refer to its immaturity. However, this cannot be a convincing argument anymore. The discipline has already established a relatively well-defined research field, a respected tradition and university curricula, which is difficult to question. Another easy way to counter concerns about the peculiar intellectual turns and returns of sociological fashions is to refer to similar phenomena in all sciences. This argument is also questionable. Yes, there are discontinuities and fashions in the development of physics and chemistry, not to speak of demography and economics. But in none of these sciences could one notice serious efforts to put the cognitive advances of the discipline in question as it has been repeatedly done in sociology on various occasions (see the contribution by Stella Quah

in this volume). Respected representatives of sociology itself have defined it as an art form not following the pattern of cumulative development of scientific knowledge, but obeying the rules of uniqueness typical for arts (Nisbet, 1966). There is no lack of more general and stronger judgements as well: "In sociology, all too often the generation of points of view is substituted for systematic theory; illustration is confused with demonstration or even proof; moral conviction is seriously offered as a test of objective validity; presumed goodness is confused with truth; faddism is mistaken for innovation; and arguments *ad hominem* are confounded with compelling logic" (Inkeles, 1986: 25).

The complexity of the problem becomes obvious after noticing the fact that these sobering judgements appear in the context of a serious effort by Alex Inkeles himself to outline real achievements in the development of sociological knowledge. The present collection continues this line of critical and self-critical assessment of the cognitive dynamics in the discipline combined with intellectual respect to the efforts of predecessors or contemporary colleagues to achieve breakthroughs or small steps forward in its cognitive development. Thus, the papers included in this volume offer an opportunity to revive the debate on the cognitive processes in sociology by taking stock of various disciplinary research fields and types of experiences. Given the rich information contained in the contributions to the volume, one might pose difficult questions: what are the causes and reasons for the peculiarities of the sociological tradition? Are there real advances in sociological knowledge over half a century? Or, perhaps, there are just changing intellectual fashions which mark the pretty heterogeneous cognitive landscape of the discipline?

These concerns and related questions are certainly not new. There have already been efforts to identify and analyse advances in *all* social sciences between 1900 and 1980 by answering *all* difficult questions concerning scientific innovations in this broad field: what, who, where and how? (Deutsch, Markovits and Platt, 1986). Our task is more modest. We have concentrated on the advances of one social science discipline and defined our aims even narrower at the outset of the project. The manifold problems concerning methods of sociological inquiry were intentionally left aside together with the specific histories of innovations and their authors. Contributions to the description and explanation of local phenomena or references to the local institutional setting of innovations only rarely appear to support the mainstream of analysis. Its focus is on the development of concepts and conceptual schemes. In some cases the argumentation requires references to operationalisations and applications, but they are not regarded as an autonomous part of the endeavour. Its principal intention is to identify major moves in the content of sociological ideas during the period under scrutiny by elaborating on cognitive continuities and discontinuities in developing research interests, thematic orientations, conceptual schemes and cognitive outcomes. This does not mean that the debate has been artificially disconnected from the social and intellectual context of the development of sociological ideas. On the contrary, the contextualisation of the analysis plays a central role in the proj-

ect, but only the major contours of the context are explicitly taken into account.

The period under scrutiny here is marked by one major turning point: the year 1989. Formally seen in terms of time measures, it divides the period into two rather unequal parts. But what matters most in the given context is the uneven social time together with the changing intellectual substance of disciplinary debates and not the formal time measure. Before 1989, it seemed for most sociologists that the historical type of industrial society had taken two specific forms, namely the individualistic-capitalist and the statist-socialist ones. Accordingly, there seemed to be two major ideological and political orientations influencing specific research interests, theoretical preferences and cognitive outcomes in sociology (see the contribution by Jiří Musil in the present volume). If any indeed, the prospects for conceptual homogenisation of sociology were usually discussed in connection with the expected strengthening of the common features of these types of industrial societies. This could eventually happen together with the emergence of the common type of post-industrial society in the course of the evolving economic, political and cultural convergence of both paths of modernisation in the future (Bell, 1973).

These theoretical and practical concerns became meaningless after 1989. The year marked profound changes in major political and cultural orientations mostly in the former Second World, which practically disappeared from the historical scene. Now it is obvious that there is one common path of social development and it is globalisation. This process became the major reference point and homogenising factor of the cognitive developments in sociology during the nineties. At the same time, new geo-strategic and cultural divisions imposed their deep imprint on the efforts to make a diagnosis of our time and to draw conclusions about the means and ends of developing sociology under the new conditions.

The above distinction of two periods in the post-World War development of sociology is just a rough historical scheme. In reality, each of these periods is marked by a series of complex and often controversial cognitive developments. Each of them would require special analysis. This will be done only on a few crucial points located in the first sub-period under scrutiny, which was the time of cognitive and institutional stabilisation of sociology as a truly international social science.

2. Convergence and Divergence in Sociology before 1989

The proper starting point of the reflection on the cognitive developments during the first period should be undoubtedly the predominance of structural functionalism in (the US) American sociology during the fifties of the last century. At that time, the French and German sociological traditions were

still in their recovery after the war and it fell very much under American influence. With few exceptions in Poland, there was no sociology *senso stricto* in the area of the Soviet ideological and political dominance. Thus, because of unique historical circumstances, this was the period marked by the highest level of conceptual convergence in sociology since there were no international competitors to American sociology and it was relatively homogenous in itself (Genov, 1989).

Some theoretical breakthroughs in American sociology of that time remain valid and basically uncontested until today. This holds true, for instance, for the introduction of status-role-sets by Robert King Merton. Referring to the pre-war simplified interpretations of statuses and roles, Merton succeeded in conceptualising multidimensional parameters of the structural setting of acting individuals together with the multidimensionality of their action. The added value achieved by this conceptual breakthrough is a better understanding of both structural parameters of social life as well as factors determining role implementation and role change. The concept of status-role sets has been applied to a large variety of specific cases by Merton himself and by many sociologists thereafter and has not been repudiated by the scientific results so far (see also the contribution by Lance Roberts and Susanne von Below in the present volume).

Although its level of acceptance is different, the interpretation of the hierarchy of status-role-sets (the stratification system) in a given society proposed by Wilbert Moore and Kingsley Davis and further elaborated by Parsons (1966) deserves attention mainly because of its provocative character. In contrast to well-established visions searching for explanation of the status-and-role hierarchy in the division of labour, property structures or in the power relations, the idea of Moore-Davis-Parsons is different. They based it on the assumption that given the value-normative integration of a society, it develops mechanisms of selection of individual actors, who are best suited to fill in the higher positions honoured by money, power and prestige. The basic value-normative assumption might be questioned and for good reasons. But taking it for granted and analytically setting the issue of value-normative change aside, one could develop impressive explanatory schemes following the so outlined concept of social stratification.

In order to reconstruct the intellectual situation of the fifties and early sixties precisely, one has to face the reality that the major and most contested conceptual schemes in American sociology during that time were developed and applied by Talcott Parsons himself. They set the standards of sociological conceptualisations although operationalised and applied in a methodically precise manner in only few empirical research projects. Parsons himself did not take any initiative in this respect after his early study on the medical profession, which remained incomplete.

As seen from a present-day point of view, the attempt undertaken by Parsons to develop a systematic outline of the meta-theory of all social sciences and to elaborate on the general sociological theory in this over-stretched con-

ceptual framework reminds of the project of the French Encyclopaedia from the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, many arguments raised against key concepts of his theory and mostly against his famous A-G-I-L conceptual scheme during the late fifties (Mills, 1959) and later (Eisenstadt and Curelaru, 1976; Eisenstadt, 1986) seem today somewhat peculiar. Can one really imagine serious and successful investment into 'middle range' theories without concomitant efforts to organize them in a vision of social order, social action and their relationships? How long would it be possible to postpone the efforts to develop major concepts of general sociology and their relations without endangering the cognitive coherence of the discipline? Or, one may also focus on substantive issues. Is it reasonable, for instance, to talk about alleged detachment of the A-G-I-L scheme from the production, distribution and use of meaning while keeping in mind that this conceptual framework came about after re-working the 'pattern-variables' scheme, which was focused on structures and processes in micro-social interactions? How can the arguments against the assumed over-stress on boundaries of social systems and sub-systems by Parsons be accepted, while his key ideas concerned the permeability of boundaries outlined in some cases just for analytical purposes?

These questions do not imply uncontested agreements with ontological or methodological assumptions of Parsons, which became the backbone of structural functionalism. The guiding ideas of this influential current in modern sociology contained the inspirations and limitations of the social and intellectual context of the post-war decade. It was marked by a remarkable value-normative consensus in American society at that time. This made it possible to assume a universal pattern of social integration by shared values, which was seen as the major constitutive factor of all social systems. Even on this basis valuable studies on mass behaviour could be carried out (Smelser, 1959). However, in the long run this assumption led to systematic underestimation of the constitutive role of material necessities dominating the division of labour or of the historical patterns of political domination, conflict and coercion. It is difficult to deny the fact that the structural functionalism of the fifties laid the stress on synchronic explanatory patterns, although some of its ideas were also included in theorising and research on modernisation processes.

The constructive reactions to the above shortcomings of the Parsonian structural functionalism could not wait for long. Charles Wright Mills developed a diverging explanatory model concerning the formation and self-reproduction of the power elites based on vested economic and political interests (1956). This model later became a powerful inspiration not just for sociological studies alone, but also for political activism (see the contribution by Terry Nichols Clark in this volume). References to sociological classics and conflict-laden social realities brought about the revival of theorizing and research on social conflict (Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1964; Collins, 1975) in opposition to the stress on value-normative integration in the mainstream

structural functionalism. It is difficult, if not impossible, to say which of both cognitive and social factors were decisive for this turn. It is for sure, however, that the political clashes caused by the Vietnam War and the racial tensions were already the dominant issues in the country in the mid-sixties, which made the reception of conflict theories easier. Moreover, the United States and her allies had to cope with the Sputnik-shock and with the emerging existential uncertainties on a global scale, which became obvious in the Cuban crisis.

Thus, it is not by chance that Parsons tried to accommodate ideas of conflict and evolution in his evolving conceptual schemes and apply them on large-scale historical processes with a special focus on the alleged two paths of contemporary modernisation (Parsons, 1971). But the previous high level of conceptual convergence in sociology could not be re-established in this way. On the contrary, the turbulences of 1968 and the concomitant intensive ideological debates strengthened the perception of deepening social and intellectual cleavages, which turned into the diagnosis of the coming crisis of (Western) sociology (Gouldner, 1971; Gouldner 1973).

The debate on the crisis of sociology during the seventies was intellectually prepared by the numerous criticisms on structural functionalisms, some of which were conceptual breakthroughs in themselves, like the famous concept by Dennis Wrong on the over-socialised vision of man. But the debate itself often took the characteristic of a superficial intellectual fashion focusing on ideological criticisms or on epistemological debates bringing little added value to substantive sociological theory. Besides the serious analytical efforts to reflect on achievements and failures of the discipline, extreme views on real or artificially constructed issues were abundant. Many of them just missed the excellent historical opportunity for critical and constructive self-reflection on sociological theorizing and research. This failure was even more striking given the fact that at that point of time, sociology was already no more an exclusively American enterprise but had taken on the typical features of an established science worldwide.

The proliferation of national sociological traditions meant that the diversification of sociological concepts was not mostly determined by diverging theoretical preferences alone, but also by specific social situations and cultural traditions in various national and regional settings. For instance, German sociology had already developed its own reference points and inertia in the meantime. This became evident in the debate published under the misleading title *Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie?* (Habermas and Luhmann, 1971). National sociological traditions developed practically all other Western European as well as Eastern European countries. Last but not least, the legacy of Marxism, which seemed outdated at least from an American point of view, received a new impetus under the influence of students' movements and of other social, racial and national turbulences. It re-appeared as a counter-force to mainstream Western sociology dominated by structural functionalism and various versions of positivism. In fact, what became

popular under the fashionable heading of Marxism was not even tentatively a homogenous conceptual framework, but a large variety of Marxisms ranging from technological and economic determinism to humanistic visions about enlightenment and liberation together with direct appeals for political action.

While it is relatively easy to identify social and intellectual roots of the rise of Marxist ideas during the sixties and seventies, this does not apply to the concomitant fashionable spread of interpretative sociological approaches like symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), and phenomenological sociology. The superficiality of the fashions notwithstanding, these meta-theoretical and substantive developments sharpened the cutting edge of concepts referring to social and social-psychological determinants of orientations, decisions and action of individuals and of micro-social interactions. This holds true first of all for the various elaborations on the fundamental idea of Alfred Schutz about the life world referring to the emergence and influence of basic cognitive and value-normative assumptions of everyday thinking and behaviour.

The spread of these ideas and the efforts to apply them in empirical studies raised issues, which have implicitly or explicitly accompanied sociology from its very inception and will certainly stay with sociologists in the years ahead. They concern the difference between scientific and humanistic styles of conceptualisation and between the 'hard' and 'soft' methods of empirical study. The complexity of these issues and of their repercussions on sociological theorising and research is underscored by the fact that the re-orientation of intellectual fashions towards micro-social interactions during the seventies did not focus the attention on interpretative approaches in sociology alone. Strong scientist micro-sociological approaches also profited from the turn to the complexities of modern everyday life. Serious conceptualisations focusing on empirically testable law-like propositions concerning personal behaviour and exchange in small groups, which were already developed in the sixties, attracted broader attention in the new intellectual context (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964).

On the opposite macro-sociological side of the theoretical spectrum there were ideas still predominantly influenced by Marxism. In Latin America they took the regionally specific form of dependence theory represented by Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando H. Cardoso and others. Taking a broader historical context into account, the vision of the world system (Wallerstein, 1974-1988) laid the stress on relations and processes by far exceeding the traditional sociological focus on national societies.

Taking inspiration from various sources, the French structuralism developed its own tradition (Levi-Straus, 1958). Although the search for deep or hidden structures of economic, political or cultural life has indeed had a long tradition in sociology and in social sciences, French structuralists managed to conceptually generalise this approach and to specify it with a view to various social phenomena mostly connected with symbolic structures. Following a similar vein of thinking, but also influenced by Marxist ideas, others laid the

stress on the economic and political reproduction of social structures in a broader historical perspective (Godelier, 1973). The strong influence of sociological structuralism remained basically a French phenomenon, but it had repercussions in other parts of the international sociological community as well.

Influences from genetic biology shaped the fashion of socio-biology in the mid-seventies. The over-stress of biological influences on behavioural patterns put this line of thought in some kind of intellectual isolation. However, it became indicative of the need to re-think the influence of the natural environment, human biology and technological factors on social action and social structures. Special impetus in this respect was given to sociological theorising and research by the reports of the Club of Rome and later by the warnings of the Brundtland-Report *Our Common Future* to the UN (1987). These developments signalled the need to re-think the traditional Weberian and Durkheimian self-imposed short cut of sociological explanations to causes and reasons exclusively stemming from orientations and decisions of individuals or rooted in the mass consciousness. Opening to a broader range of determining factors was obviously needed but no influential sociological paradigm managed to cope with the problem at that time.

Thus, as seen from the point of view of the rationalistic search for coherence and intellectual integrity, the developments in sociological theorising during the seventies and eighties might seem disappointing. Sociology was increasingly becoming a discipline without a clear conceptual core, boundaries, goals or specific applications. Nevertheless, parallel to the continuing trends towards diversification, some efforts towards conceptual convergence also appeared during this period. In the theory of communicative action of Jürgen Habermas (1981) one can easily recognize the attempt to synthesize Parsonian concepts concerning media constituting and supporting social systems and the interaction of these concepts with ideas about the life world borrowed from the phenomenological tradition. Moreover, the introduction of the idea of colonisation of the life world by functionally differentiated and regulated social systems in the course of the social and cultural evolution is a clear sign of Habermas' efforts to revitalize evolutionary ideas as well.

Niklas Luhmann (1984, 1997) also tried some kind of theoretical convergence by elaborating on the idea of social systems. His vision of social systems never coincided with the traditional stress on boundary maintenance. At a given point in time, Luhmann elaborated on the capability of social systems to reduce the complexity of their internal and external environments. He then moved to the idea of creative self-reproduction (*autopoiesis*) of social systems. Some links between his ideas concerning social systems and some early views of Parsons might nevertheless be established, since Luhmann consistently laid stress on the capacity of social systems to produce, reproduce, communicate and use meaning (Sinn).

Given this intellectual situation, it is clear why the topic of the generic pattern of industrial society with two major subtypes – capitalist and socialist

– was still high on the agenda. The sociological community was not yet ripe for a meaningful discussion on globalisation in all its technological, economic, political and cultural dimensions as they went to the forefront during the nineties. However, besides the path-breaking Brundtland Report, another signal of the forthcoming new topic, which had to flourish on the same soil of environmental concerns, was the issue of risk society, which appeared for the first time in the mid-eighties as well (Beck, 1986).

There was still another intellectual move which prepared the soil for new paradigmatic developments in sociology during the nineties. Together with the success of neo-liberal policies in Great Britain and the USA, the eighties witnessed a rise of neo-liberal ideologies. They strongly influenced the debates on globalisation and nation-states during the following debate.

Given this intellectual landscape, one could assume that sociology was moving not just in the direction of a clearly multi-paradigmatic science as it has in fact always been. Still another assumption could be that the discipline was too much under the pressure of intellectual anarchism – present and perennial. The advancing internationalisation of social sciences made it less and less probable that a given national tradition would take the lead in the direction of intellectual homogenisation of sociology. Moreover, within the major national traditions, the diversification of sociological approaches was the strongest because of the abundance of outstanding sociologists, teaching and research institutions and research teams competing with each other.

What the intellectual development could not in itself bring about was achieved nearly unnoticed by the development of the very social processes. The crucial moving factor for the new phenomena of homogenisation of sociological theorising and research became undoubtedly the multidimensional trend of globalisation.

3. The Consolidating Power of Globalisation

The collection distributed to the participants in the XII World Congress of Sociology held in Madrid might be symbolically seen as an opening up of a new situation in world sociology (Albrow and King, 1990). The title concerned globalisation, but the papers included in the volume covered nearly the entire range of topics discussed by modern sociology. The signal was clear: a new ‘grand’ thematic orientation was most probably on the rise; however, it could be also devalued fast and easily. ‘Globalisation’ could soon become a catchword labelling just another intellectual fashion.

This uncertainty accompanied the expanding discussions on the issue during the nineties and did so for good reasons. There is still a continuing controversy about the historical parameters of the phenomenon. Some sociologists locate globalisation already in the times of the great geographical discoveries and the development of major trade routes around the globe. This

is probably a rather strong view since in this way local civilisations were connected, but have remained basically on their own for centuries thereafter. Even the two World Wars could not establish a widespread vision of global unity since they were waged by divided nations and for the sake of their national interests. The bipolar confrontation after the Second World War fostered an understanding of interdependence worldwide because of the threat of global destruction, but consolidated divisions, isolationism and confrontation as well. Reflecting on this historical situation, sociology could only remain divided along political and ideological lines despite the tremendous progress in its internationalisation (Genov, 1991).

Given this historical background, globalisation, in the sense of full-fledged interconnectedness and interdependence of structures and processes all over the world, could come about only in the wake of the profound turn of history after 1989. For the first time it became possible to transfer technology worldwide without the need to overcome the barriers of isolationist states or of regional divisions and confrontations. Indeed, truly world markets could be established only during the nineties. The global culture, based on the idea of universal human rights, definitely took the lead after the dividing ideological and political barriers disappeared. Thus, it is not by chance that the decade was marked by two important events manifesting the extend to which global consciousness and global concerns have taken root at all levels of orientation, decision and action. The first was the World Summit on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) and the second the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995).

Both events had the same background, namely the need to draw practical implications from the numerous studies on global threats starting from the overexploitation and excessive pollution of nature to the markedly increasing global economic, political and cultural inequalities. This is the major reason for the substantial changes one may notice in world sociology, namely the emerging coordination and amalgamation of sociological approaches and results of sociological studies around one highly complex, but also uniting topic of *globalisation*. In the course of the nineties it has received the intensity of attention of sociologists, which is unique in the development of the discipline. Moreover, the sociological elaborations on global relations and global trends have activated practically all sub-fields of sociological studies. The topics range from studies on the connection between research and technological development to studies on economic and political processes, arts and religion. The efforts to conceptualise globalisation affected both the research on global dynamics and the analysis of micro-level interactions. Still another line of influence concerns the links between studies focusing on conceptual developments and those searching for direct practical implications of sociological research.

The new 'grand topic' of globalisation not only opened vistas to emerging social and cognitive problems, but also helped activate concepts already used in the analysis of social processes. The traditional issue concerning the