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ON SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE. THE CASE OF A POLISH SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

The present text is an attempt to show the changes taking place in the sub-discipline of sociology of education. The theoretical frame of the discussion includes concepts of Emile Durkheim, Mary Douglas and Stephen Fuchs who emphasize the importance of social conditions for the process of knowledge institutionalization. Analyses carried out in the article aim also at identification of causes of marginalisation of the discussed sub-discipline within sociology as a whole. One of the reasons seems to be identity incohesion resulting from the fact that sociology of education is a shared field of study of both sociology and pedagogy, to mention the two main study contributors.

Key words:

development of the sub-discipline, knowledge institutionalization, marginalisation of sociology of education, integration and control of academic community

One of the key assumptions accepted in sociology is the recognition of the social character of knowledge¹, which, as a human product, reflects the specificity of the conditions within which it is created. Therefore, being a result of human cognitive activity aimed at understanding the world and themselves, knowledge reflects its socio-cultural context. This means that the structural character of the social context within which a process of cognition occurs is a crucial factor that determines both the form and content of the answers to the questions asked that add to the body of human knowledge. Additionally, this knowledge is the result of group processes that reflect the common lots, actions, and difficulties shared by other individuals in a similar social situation. The said social context explains why knowledge, as a result of identical human mental processes, focus on the same object – the common world, yields entirely different images of this world. It is the distinctness of group interests that is the source of different ideas, styles, or models of thinking².

Thus, social knowledge is the effect of clashes, conflicts, or compromises that reflect collective struggle for possibly full achievement of a given group's interests. Recognition of its material condition leads to the relativity of cognition from someone's point of view. The validity of a certain interpretation of the world is legitimized by the powers competing for the domination of a given group of interests. However, knowledge is not the product of different collective actions that aim at imposing some vision of reality. Neither is it the output of accumulated and different viewpoints and perspectives unique for certain groups, which would somehow guarantee value-free objectivity. This means that in spite of the variety of meanings given to the experiences of distinctive communities hardly few of these meanings are found valid and right. The remaining part of cognitive processes effects is treated as heretical, false, and destructive for the accepted social order. Therefore, understanding and explaining the present state of social knowledge and changes in it should be sought for in structural qualities of the communities that are responsible for this state of affairs. Such analysis should be completed with the discussion of correlations between socio-cultural circumstances and a context of unique forces active in the field of science in which individuals and groups produce knowledge.

¹ See E. Mokrzycki, *Introduction to Polish Edition* [in:] *Mocny program socjologii wiedzy* [Strong Programme of Sociology of Knowledge], B. Barnes, D. Bloor (sel.), Warszawa 1993.

² See K. Mannheim, *Ideologia i utopia* [Ideology and Utopia], Warszawa 2008.

1. Significance of cultural factors in knowledge development – knowledge as a symbolic system

Any kind of knowledge is a symbolic reflection of the human perception of the world. The same applies to scientific knowledge as one of the ways to explain the reality based on strict principles that enable the demarcation of scientific and common sense knowledge. It does not mean, though, its superiority over other modes of learning the greater world and scientific cognition is just one of the directions social attention can choose to follow³. Such an approach allows one to treat the development of knowledge in similar terms as other symbolic systems whose form and content depend on social conditions. As a result, the quest for explanations for changes within scientific knowledge, in this case within education, should be based on the structural analysis of the academic community (scholars who deal with education as a whole), as well as the of type and force of social solidarity that contributes to the cognitive coherence of this group.

It is also essential to accept the assumption that knowledge is the emanation of the cultural conditions on which it feeds⁴. While accepting such an assumption, one should remember that any study of the problems and objects of cognition are products of the cultural values system that is followed by a given community. Scientific knowledge, as a cultural product, is closely connected with socio-cultural conditions under which it is brought into being. Therefore, scientific investigations should take them into consideration. Whereas, any manifestations of scientific knowledge inadequacies should be treated as a turning point that is likely to end up in a paradigmatic change. Social history abounds with such breakthroughs that are followed by remarkable changes in either theoretical assumptions (ontological, epistemological and methodological) or in language (conceptual apparatus).

In time, bonds connecting culture and knowledge relax. Then, the cognition object achieves autonomy and “a conceptual model of reality breaks away from a specific study problem which bore it”⁵. These are immanent, but temporary processes of alienation and disalienation of scientific knowledge. It is worth emphasizing that the above quoted researchers, when discussing the development of scientific knowledge in processes of proceeding revolutions, define it in a different way than the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Thomas Kuhn does. Ac-

³ See J. Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Science*, Cambridge 1988.

⁴ See A. Flis, S. Kapralski, *Kulturowe mechanizmy rozwoju nauki* [Cultural Mechanisms of Science Development] [in:] *Racjonalność, nauka, społeczeństwo* [Rationality, Science, Society], H. Kozakiewicz, E. Mokrzycki, M. Siemek (eds.), Warszawa 1989.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 98–99.

ording to them, the causes of scientific revolution transcend the purely cognitive sphere. This means “it [scientific revolution – T.L.] is a process that occurs between the cognitive and cultural spheres, with the latter being responsible for the revolutionary change”⁶. These implications seem important for study guidelines when considering the removal of sociology of education⁷ from mainstream sociology.

The hypothesis referring knowledge marginalisation was based on the analysis of publishing activity of sociologists of education and institutional – organizational dimensions of this sub-discipline. These phenomena illustrate the status of sociology of education and account for its present crisis.

In order to discern the changes occurring within scientific knowledge in sociology of education, some introductory assumptions should be made. The application of sociological theory of the scientific organization⁸ enables one to assume that the results of research work, in the form of scientific knowledge, are dependent on the conditions and technology of its production. The styles of thinking and the perception mode are derived from the social structure of an academic community. Being a social fact, knowledge is affected by the structural forms of its generation. Thus, when discussing the crisis in the sociology of education, as a whole, sociological scientific activity should be taken into account. Specificity of relations in an academic community and conditions of its functioning determine development and scope of theoretical knowledge, along with its assumptions, conceptual apparatus and methodological tools. The key categories used to describe structural and technological dimensions are Durkheim’s solidarity and Weber’s bureaucracy. Thus, on the one hand, we have to do here with either democratic or authoritarian relations that prevail in the community, and which are connected with given principles and cognition style, as well as with social control. On the other, though, there occur restrictive observance of scientific activity procedures (routine) or openness to any types of innovation which aim at efficiency of scientific activity.

The question is thus, whether Fuchsian model of scientific knowledge development determined by the category of solidarity and bureaucracy, which is an adapt-

⁶ Ibidem, p. 102.

⁷ Terminology problems connected with the name of subdiscipline is a pretty complex one and exceeds the topic of the present paper (see T. Leszniewski, K. Wasielewski, *Socjologia wychowania w Polsce – pytanie o wymiar tożsamościowy* [Sociology of Education in Poland: Identity Dimension of a Sociological Subdiscipline], “*Studia Socjologiczne*” 2013, No. 2), in the text I use two terms to designate the same discipline of sociology.

⁸ See S. Fuchs, *A Sociological Theory of Scientific Change*, “*Social Forces*” 1993, No. 4.

ed form of Mary Douglas's⁹ grid and group concept, can help understand the changes that are taking place in sociology of education?

In spite of the fact, that Douglas studies social entanglement of religious life in various communities and asks the question: what types of cosmology, beliefs or rituals will develop within a given social conditions prevailing a given group¹⁰, David Bloor¹¹ recognizes cognitive usability of his concept and applies it in sociology of knowledge. He discusses the anomalies that emerge within the publicly accepted classification patterns of experienced reality, which was described in Douglas's work *Natural Symbols*, and argues that the factor that shapes the response to these anomalies is the configuration of the social structure in a given community¹².

The important question here is whether with the use of this conception it is possible to explain or better understand the phenomenon of the marginalization of the sociology of education within mainstream sociology. Formulated in this manner, the problem can be solved only to some extent. It means that the application of Douglas's model, as adapted by Fuchs, should be preceded with an assumption that the main reason for this phenomenon (marginalization) lies in the very structure of the body of knowledge collected within the sociology of education and in social relationships in the community of researchers in this sub-discipline. This model is in no way receptive to exogenous factors that could affect this type of knowledge. For example, it omits competition and types of interaction between the sociology of education and sociology. Thus, the author will focus only on endogenous factors connected with the marginality of sociology of education.

2. Basic elements of the analysis

Accepting the sociological perspective of scientific knowledge development requires the prior presentation of some elementary issues connected with its social nature. The specificity of both the form and content of knowledge about the social world is the effect of interactive negotiations leading to collective consensus within the involved community. To be more precise, the community considered here is

⁹ M. Douglas, *Symbole naturalne. Rozważania o kosmologii* [Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology], Kraków 2004.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ D. Bloor, *Wielościany i nieczyste zwierzęta z Księgi Kapłańskiej* [Polyhedrons and Impure Animals form the Priesthood Book] [in:] *Mocny program socjologii wiedzy* [Strong Programme of Sociology of Knowledge], B. Barnes, D. Bloor (sel.), Warszawa 1993.

¹² Ibidem.

the *academic community* whose activity is knowledge production-oriented. However, the category of academic community seems pretty general. Usually, it would include persons who share similar values and norms characteristic of cultural activity defined as cultivating scientific knowledge. This means that a category of academic community does not take into account any internal diversification – a complex structure – of the community which produces knowledge professionally. Thus, it does not explain why the academic ethos accepted by such a community does not contribute to similar achievements by all members of this group.

Therefore, when trying to find a research category suitable to analyze the present condition of the sociology of education, one could use the notion of *scientific school*. Researchers who affiliate with this or that group share common “approach to problems and purposes of science, consciously contrasted with other schools”¹³. Additional attributes of the school, according to Stanisław Ossowski, are lasting personal interaction between members of the academic community, which are a causative factor of development of common habits, interests or styles which reflect their academic identity distinctiveness from identity of representatives of other schools¹⁴. Another crucial feature of the school, not mentioned by Ossowski, is the strong dependency by students on not only some patterns of science cultivation, but also, or we should rather say, first of all, on the master—the founder and inspirer of the group.

Due to the dubiousness of this notion – the school – in the context of the current situation in the Polish sociology of education, in which the identification of actual academic schools that would meet all the above definitional requirements is rather difficult, it seems reasonable to continue quest for an adequate category.

Rapidly changing social reality makes it impossible to found a coherent and resilient academic school. Following Fuchs, who considered changes that occur in the field of science and controversies connected with the problem of social groups that produce knowledge with the use of the term *specialty*¹⁵, the term understood by some researchers as an academic or study community¹⁶. Such a group involves researchers with similar educational backgrounds, as well as those participating in the same conferences and reading the same literature. Moreover, their interactions

¹³ S. Ossowski, *O Nauce* [On Science], Warszawa 1997, p. 225.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ See S. Fuchs op.cit.

¹⁶ See R. Sojak, *Paradoks antropologiczny. Socjologia wiedzy jako perspektywa ogólnej teorii społeczeństwa* [Anthropological Paradox. Sociology of Knowledge as a Perspective of General Social Theory], Wrocław 2004.

and exchange of ideas is most frequently limited to the same community (see quoted). All this makes them a group that consists of similar individuals.

This similarity in the analyzed case may result from the shared field of study that covers the issues of education. Thus, the binding factor for this group, which distinguishes it from other members of the academic community of sociologists, is its *study object*, i.e. specialty. The internal diversity of this group can be determined with by its contributions and involvements in the development of this field of study. Thus, the first and most crucial although the least numerous sub-group consists of the most productive researchers – those recognizable in the academic community. They will constitute the core of this specialty. The second sub-group consists of solid, reliable persons whose achievements can be classified as ordinary or average. They can be located in semi-peripheries. And, the third sub-group, called peripheries, includes those not very active or temporary not active¹⁷. Because of the study problem in this article, the analysis of the research activity of persons placed in the center of the sociology of education study field, as well as their relationships (communication problems) with the other two sub-groups in this study field, will be of crucial importance.

The Mannheimian concept of *thinking styles* can be used to the above accepted analytical criterion applied in order to delimit the population under study. The thinking style, besides the study object that integrates individual researchers, is essential here. Depending on the structure of a given group, in this case representatives of the sociology of education, the thinking style may be either common or diverse.

What is a thinking style and what distinguishes it from a thinking habit? Both notions reflect the collective nature of cognition categories that humans use in their everyday life. The situations they encounter are cognitively structured through accepted thinking patterns. It means that in most cases human intellectual responses are not of creative nature, but rather “the repetition of some statements whose form and content have been derived from their cultural environment”¹⁸. The difference between the above notions can be regarded in terms of a mechanistic approach to the history of thought. According to Mannheim, the idea of style includes a greater potential of change in social thinking patterns. Therefore, his argument is that “the development of human thought takes place also through ‘style’, and there are different schools of thought distinguishable on the basis of

¹⁷ See D.J. de Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science... and Beyond*, Columbia 1986 [in:] S. Fuchs, op.cit.

¹⁸ K. Mannheim, *Myślenie konserwatywne* [Conservative Thinking] [in:] *Socjologia Ogólna* [Sociology], M. Malikowski, S. Marczuk (sel.), Tyczyn 1997, p. 375.

analysis of the ways various patterns and categories of thinking are applied¹⁹. The thinking style is a form of expression of latent intentions and motives found behind a certain mode of social reality interpretations. Thus, through following a given thinking style, the group defines individual abilities to experience and learning this reality²⁰.

Apart from the academic community, which is distinguishable through its studied object – sociology of education – and through its thinking style, which determines the direction and way of exploring this object, the analysis of interactions between particular individuals involved in the research work in the sociology of education should be taken into account when considering the problem of the social production of knowledge and the marginality of some its content. Taking into consideration its structural dimension, the Durkheimian concept of *solidarity* and its basic forms should be applied. What is meant here is either a *mechanic* or *organic* character of social bond developed in the context of social involvement. Both forms reflect functional diversity of the community based on distinctive dimensions of legal regulations. According to Durkheim, the transition from repressive to restitution law is connected with the changing form of social life organization. These two definitions of social solidarity can be complemented with the Durkheimian dimensions of regulation and integration of social space. The disruption of a regulative or integrative relationship between the individual and society is manifested in the insufficient presence of a community in the life of a given individual. This insufficient presence can refer to the lack of collective actions – increasing individualization – or absence of society in the purely individual feelings of a person, which results in a loss of the regulative function that is otherwise inherent to feelings²¹.

The above-defined notional apparatus, which reflects the quality of structural aspect of social life, seems to be close to Mary Douglas' concept of grid and group²². She defines a structural dimension of social reality on the basis of the two categories, which are convergent with Durkheimian implications. For Douglas, both the pattern of control and of communication accepted in a community seem to be of crucial importance. These patterns determine the quality of the structural order of the group, which develops, ranging from unique for small collectivities based on contextual meanings to specific for the widest structures of industrial societies. In

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 376.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ See E. Durkheim, *Samobójstwo* [Suicide], Warszawa 2006.

²² M. Douglas, op.cit.

other words, from the rigid structures with closed, stabile, and sharp boundaries to flexible structures that are internally diversified, opened, and change – and innovativeness-oriented. For Durkheim, like for Douglas, this structural order of collective life expresses a certain type of human relations in a community, as well as the image of reality (cosmology – Douglas) unique for this organization form.

With reference to the above raised problem of the marginalization of sociology of education within mainstream sociology, the nature of structural conditions in this kind of knowledge should be traced in order to find out whether this will set us on the trail of a satisfactory answer to the study question.

However, even an introductory analysis of the problems connected with sociology of education suggests emerging difficulties. They result from the fact (which was mentioned earlier) that, on the one hand, there are two fields of study in sociology of education. On the other hand though, the development of this sub-discipline is shared not only by sociology, but also by pedagogy. As a result, by probing into the discussed problem, the hypothesis could be accepted that the analyzed discipline correlates with the process of marginalization and with the *identity problem* seems of crucial importance. This problem reflects the diversified structural conditions under which scientific constructs emerge and these constructs are study findings obtained by persons rooted in different environments. Therefore, the question of whether the structural conditions of socio-educational knowledge construction within sociology of education within sociology and pedagogy are different becomes an essential issue.

3. The problem of control, integration and knowledge construction within sociology of education

The way of organization and activity of sociologists and pedagogues within their scientific associations seems to be an excellent mirror which reflects the specificity of knowledge construction conditions in sociology of education by the two disciplines – sociology and pedagogy. By investigating the organization structure and ways of action in the Polish Sociological Association (PTS) and Polish Pedagogical Association (PTP) one can arrive at interesting conclusions, which may highlight the problem discussed above. Without a doubt, the internal diversity of PTS, with its subdivisions, is more complex than that of PTP's. This diversity is easily noticeable both during congresses and research studies that follow. Subdivision into specialized sections specific for sociological community is missing in the organization and scientific activity of pedagogues' association. Moreover, there are

no premises that could predict any changes in PTP in this respect. Such a indicator finds evidence in the letter addressed to participant of the VII PTP congress held in Torun in the year 2010: "There appeared in the past, are being formulated now, and perhaps will be put forward in the future, suggestions and postulates to found different sections that would focus on particular sub-disciplines of pedagogy. However, we would like to mention, that the Congress held now by the Polish Pedagogical Association (PTP) is aiming at integration of pedagogy and not at dividing it into branches. The Congress focuses on pedagogical problems, so it is to cross the boundaries of sub-disciplines and to approach the discussed issues from different perspectives, and not to become a congress of "sub-pedagogical federation". Such is our idea, and such is the conception of the national program team (or we should rather say, of those who were willing to participate in the works of this team), and such is our offer. We address it, of course, to those who accept it"²³. This lack of internal diversity is connected with certain structural necessity, namely with the power based on authority and charisma, which seems to be confirmed in the analyses of leadership in the structures under study. To be more precise, the president of PTS serves one or two terms in office while the president of the PTP can serve more terms; in fact, there have been two presidents of the association over the past two decades.

Another difference between the two organizations is the involvement of their members. One form of involvement is active participation in academic discussions during recurring congresses. As statistical data regarding a recent pedagogical congress in Torun (22–23 September 2010) and a recent sociological congress in Cracow (8–11 September 2010) show, the differences in the level of participation are remarkable. Whereas, only 310 pedagogues traveled to Torun, nearly four times as many sociologists (over 1200) went to Cracow for the congress. The figures speak for themselves and prove that the ranking of such academic meetings is pretty different in each of the communities.

The above observation and more searching analysis (account of which exceeds the frames of the present article) make it possible to assume that these two communities are distinctive in respect of their control and integration. Although in both cases (sociology and pedagogy) we have to do with similar level of scientific activity control (equally high level), but as far as the level of integration is concerned, they are different. Social relations in the community of pedagogues are characteristic for their lower level of integration than those in the community of sociologists. It is reflected in the mechanisms of delimitation and the monitoring

²³ <http://www.pedagogika.umk.pl/zjazd-pedagogiczny/index.html> [access: 22.03.2010].

of boundaries, which determine the group's distinction and uniqueness – identity, and these social relations become the factors of its internal integration. It is the sociological community that places a strong emphasis on the delimitation of the discipline's boundaries and on the control of possible inter-disciplinary diffusion. It is also reflected in the more advanced institutionalization process of sociology as a scientific discipline.

Stronger inclusion of the scientific field developed by pedagogues and greater openness to change seem to be the effect of this discipline erstwhile condition. In the context of the system transformation, pedagogy confronted the need to find new sources of theoretical inspirations, as the former ones became discredited due to their ideological commitments. Moreover, because of its ideological receptivity, pedagogy constitutes fertile ground within which postmodern ideas can take root in the form of committed knowledge. This means that one of the determinants that affect the quality and content of this knowledge are the intentional actions undertaken by researchers in the center of the community, who are searching for new paradigms and scientific theories to reflect the expectations and conditions of modern reality. Thus, adapting to the changeable socio-cultural conditions reflects the importance of external context for the academic community and for the mode knowledge is constructed within it. In this case, the temporal aspect of these activities is essential because the present enquiries result in a way from the trauma which pedagogy as a discipline experienced due to its ideological entanglements²⁴. With reference to the analysis of both associations' activity, it should be also emphasized that, during the transformation of Poland, PTP was devoted to finding the answer to the question of its own identity in the newly emerging social order. The subject matter of congresses during the period clearly show this²⁵. For exam-

²⁴ See T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska, *W poszukiwaniu tożsamości pedagogiki. Świadomość teoretyczno-metodologiczna współczesnej pedagogiki polskiej (geneza i stan)* [In Search for Pedagogy Identity. Theoretical and Methodological Consciousness of Modern Polish Pedagogy (genesis and condition)], Bydgoszcz 1989.

²⁵ See Z. Kwieciński, *Pedagogika wobec kryzysu i przełomu. Funkcje ogólnopolskich zjazdów pedagogicznych w latach dziewięćdziesiątych* [Pedagogy in the Face of Crisis and the Turn of. Functions of National Pedagogical Congresses in the 1990s] [in:] *Kongresy i zjazdy pedagogiczne w Polsce w XX wieku* [Pedagogical Congresses and Conferences in Poland in the 20th Century], A. Kicowska (ed.), Toruń 2003; R. Leppert, *Polskie zjazdy pedagogiczne lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku wobec problemu tożsamości jako dyscypliny naukowej* [Polish Pedagogical Congresses in the 20th century. Identity of the Scientific Discipline] [in:] *Kongresy i zjazdy pedagogiczne w Polsce w XX wieku* [Pedagogical Congresses and Conferences in Poland in the 20th Century], A. Kicowska (ed.), Toruń 2003; Z. Melosik, *Kongresy pedagogiczne lat dziewięćdziesiątych XX wieku – od „pedagogiki zamkniętej” do „pedagogiki pogranicza”* [Pedagogical Congresses of the 1990s – From „Closed Pedagogy” to „Borderland Pedagogy”] [in:] *Kongresy i zjazdy pedagogiczne w Polsce w XX wieku* [Pedagogical Congresses and Conferences in Poland in the 20th Century], A. Kicowska (ed.), Toruń 2003.

ple, discussions at these meetings focused on the issue of pedagogy's identity in the context of wider social changes.

Another factor – an internal one that accounts for the distinction in the research field of pedagogy – is the structure of the group, which is also undergoing restructuring in the new social context. Thus, there occurs remarkable differences in the structure of employment in this community: the internet database and People of Science OPI (Center for Information Processing)²⁶ reveals that the structure of the sociological community, unlike its pedagogical counterpart, is relatively more simplified and free of significant disproportions between its particular segments. This is reflected in the ratio of employees with PhD degrees to the number of independent researchers – habilitated doctors and professors²⁷. In sociology, the structure of employment is as follows: 1639 doctors and 623 independent scientists, out of whom 285 are professors. Whereas, in pedagogy, there are 2824 doctors, 785 independent researchers with 316 professors. In sociology, it means that the proportion between independent researchers and doctors is 1 to 2.6 and, in pedagogy, this proportion is 1 to 3.6. The percentage representation of this proportion looks like this: in pedagogy, we have 78% doctors, 13% habilitated doctors, and 9% professors; whereas, in sociology, 72% are doctors, 15% are habilitated doctors, and 13% are professors.

However, it should be remembered, that it is not only the percentage composition of a given structure that affects the specificity of group processes, but also the number of individuals in a given segment²⁸. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the group of pedagogues is unique for its remarkable increase in the number of researchers with PhD degree in proportion to the number of professors. In sociology, with comparable the number of professors in sociology, the number of doctors is relatively lower. Are these structural differences between the disciplines of sociology and pedagogy meaningful enough to generate distinctive patterns of activity?

The analysis of the specificity of research carried out by the pedagogical community shows limited opportunities of real success, which results from the strong hierarchical tendencies within this group, and inspires some alternative ways to become popular (new paradigms which undermine the system). In other words,

²⁶ The data collected with the use of this method are characterized by some kind of limitations, as they include ceased sociologists and pedagogues and those who are visiting professors from abroad. So a margin of statistical error should be take into consideration in both groups (pedagogues and sociologists).

²⁷ http://nauka-polska.pl/shtml/raporty/raporty_ludzie.shtml [access: 01.02.2011].

²⁸ See G. Simmel, *Socjologia* [Sociology], Warszawa 2005.

the anomic and success-oriented conditions under which knowledge is produced correlated with a limited pool of options available to a remarkable proportion of the community and result in the development of different adaptation strategies accompanied by some innovative behavior²⁹.

The specificity of such research conditions in the field of pedagogy produces two types of new phenomena. The first can be recognized as a constructive tendency. As Zbigniew Kwieciński labels it, it is “a somatic feature of sociology of education within pedagogy”³⁰. The second is the effect of the range of deviant behavior in answer to the bottleneck of professional advancement in the pedagogical community. Here, numerous cases of obtaining a habilitation degree in Slovakia can be included³¹ and other pathological, but frequently met practices³².

Adherence to the theory of social, particularly to structural or structural-functional paradigms, in analyses within the sociology of education seems to be a symptom of far reaching control in the field of scientific reflection. What is specific, studies with the application of this paradigm generally resort to quantitative research methods which, along with a relatively high level of advancement, give the researcher a reasonable sense of success³³. They are predominantly the studies focusing on social changes in our country. Their theoretical, free of ideological commitment, foundations made it possible to retain a stable system of knowledge production in this community. This fact, though, has twofold consequences. Namely, besides undisturbed development (mentioned above) and certain stability of the produced knowledge, there is a noticeable consequence in the form of petrification of sociologists’ aspirations and interests. Typical enough, the problems of education in the modern society is most frequently discussed by researchers who focus on social structure rather than on problems of sociology of education itself³⁴. Such

²⁹ See R.K. Merton, *Teoria socjologiczna i struktura społeczna* [Social Theory and Social Structure], Warszawa 2002.

³⁰ See Z. Kwieciński, *Między patosem a dekadencją. Studia i szkice socjopedagogiczne* [Between Pathos and Decadence. Socio-Pedagogical Studies and Essays], Wrocław 2007.

³¹ See K. Klinger, K. Wigura, *Słowacka fabryka polskich profesorów* [Slovakian Factory of Polish Professors], „Dziennik” 2008, No. 3; K. Klinger, *Musimy zmienić prawo* [The Law Has to Be Changed], „Dziennik” 2008, No. 4. According to the Polish scientific community habilitation procedure in Slovakia is less restrictive. Therefore, scientists do not meet the application requirements of habilitation procedure in Poland go to Slovakia and there receive a degree of habilitation.

³² See Z. Kwieciński, op.cit.

³³ See S. Fuchs, op.cit.; J. Włodarek, *Socjologia wychowania w Polsce* [Sociology of Education in Poland], Poznań 1992.

³⁴ It is proved through the analysis of „Studia Socjologiczne” – a recognized scientific journal which has been published for some thirty years.

an approach affects the still poorly penetrated interactive and institutional space and environment in which structural processes under study occur.

The above characters of the two academic communities seem to fit into the categories – ritual and anti-ritual forms of action – that were suggested by Douglas³⁵.

The two situations, unique for their distinctive systems of control, account for the emergence of two different orientations connected with research and scientific activity. Namely, they are either status and position-oriented (positional) or researcher's personality-oriented (good human relations etc.). By referring to these two distinctive academic communities of sociologists and pedagogues and taking into account the domination of one of the above orientations, it can be assumed that positional orientation is typical for the sociological community (sociology of education) and that personality orientation is characteristic of the pedagogical community (sociology of education). In other words, the distinctive structural conditions in a given community generate different targets of an individuals' activity, which accounts for the differences in the final effect of symbolic representation of the experienced social reality.

The clear interdisciplinary boundaries, rigid position system, and „tight pressure” of structures that impose the classification system of social order, all create a favorable atmosphere for ritualistic activity tendencies. And, these activities are undertaken because of the greater certainty of a future success. The strong grid of research procedures constitutes an essential element for maintaining community solidarity, which further provides for a high level of trust of others, to institutions and to the rules of this academic community performance. There is not much room left for innovative or rebellious behavior. In order for this type of behavior to develop, a different social space is necessary. When, for any reason, the structure loses its influential force upon individuals' activity, the individual and his/her independent forms of control become more important. „The more boldly and more totally they put their minds to think over the ideas, the more chances they have to achieve professional success. In this way, the value of radical thinking is socially confirmed and reinforced”³⁶.

The discussed forms of social relations, which organize the intellectual scope of scientific discipline and, at the same time, reflects a relaxing of relations between the structure and the individual, is an indispensable condition for the reconstruction a classification formula referring to the aspect of social reality under study. It means the birth of a possible theoretical and methodological breakthrough and

³⁵ See M. Douglas, *op.cit.*

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

the redefinition of the previous research object. Such a situation seems to be a good point to take an individualist direction within a scientific discipline. The symptoms of this new move are already noticeable in stronger critical approaches, which, being present earlier in the sociology of education in the form of social ideas of equality and justice, have now been complemented with a theoretical basis for this style of thinking. However, it should be emphasized that the current critical and unmasking view of the world takes a more individualized form. Thus, identity, body, gender, etc. are becoming key analysis categories.

At the same time, the strong structure of the group and positional forms of control discourage the above-defined community tendencies. Instead, they encourage ritual actions, which being stable and clear-cut in their symbolic message, give a guarantee of the desired success. This creates problems and results in the exclusion of torchbearers of non-scientific opinions connected with revealing the studied reality.

By referring here to Fuchs's analyses of the social basis of changes in science on a theoretical level, the problem of resources should be discussed. On the one hand, these resources could function as a group coherence factor, but, on the other hand, their level and importance for the community accounts for the form of produced knowledge. The greater the importance and higher level of the resources used in knowledge construction processes, the stronger group dependency, as well as the stronger conformity to community control, and in particular obedience to those who decide about the distribution of these resources.

Analysis of the recent (40)³⁷ competition of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for grants to finance scientific research shows different tendencies in the two studied communities. These differences are namely the number of applications by pedagogues (35) is higher than the number of sociologists (22) that competed for external financial resources to carry out their research. A closer look at the applicants reveals that the majority are scholars with PhD degrees. In the case of pedagogy, they constitute 54%; and, in the case of sociology – 59% of the whole population. However, it should be emphasized that in spite of the fact that it is independent scholars that are usually granted financial support from the minister, the difference between successful applications of independent and dependent scholars within sociology is smaller: 14% independent scholars and 9% of dependent scholars. In pedagogy, these proportions are the following: 26% independent scholars and 9% dependent ones. Even though the proportion of doctors who managed to win financial ministerial grants is identical (9%) in both disciplines,

³⁷ <https://osf.opi.org.pl/app/aawi/wynikiKonkursow.do> [access: 05.05.2011].

the real numerical figures are still very low: two persons in sociology and three persons in pedagogy. When compared with the number of the whole population of doctors in both disciplines (1639 and 2824 respectively) the data is alarming and puzzling at the same time. Even if one takes into account those who have not received a positive response to their offer of research projects, the figures are not dramatically different. In sociology, the number of dependent applicants included 13, and, in pedagogy, 19 persons.

Turning our attention to another part of the data under analysis, that is seeking for financial resources and efficiency of these attempts in case of independent scholars, pedagogues present higher effectiveness. Out of the 16 independent scholars in pedagogy, nine persons received the grants they for which they had applied. In the case of sociology, of the nine applications, only three proved successful. It would mean that in the race for financial resources in the community of pedagogues, the independent academic position of an applicant provides better prospects of success than the same position in the community of sociologists. It also confirms the validity of Merton's implications concerning the regularities named by him as St Mathew's effect³⁸. However, a deeper insight of the problem reveals that all successful applications in sociology (3) and almost all (8 out of 9) in pedagogy are promoters' motions. What does this mean? It seems that taking advantage of such essential financial resources, such as grants provided by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, is an essential factor in making one's career and achieving positions in academic community mainly for young scholars striving for their academic independence – occupational advancement. It is a liminary stage crossing of which is extorted by academic dependency. The example of pedagogues proves how much the support from somebody who crossed this border matters. The eight successful promoter's applications to three submitted by dependent scholars but not aiming directly at promotion in pedagogy, and respective relationship three to two in sociology speak for themselves (see table 1, 2, 3).

This analysis raises both the conclusions and the next questions. Firstly, what does the data in question tell us about the cohesion of both communities? And secondly, how do they affect the condition of both disciplines?

Thus, problems with obtaining external financial resources intended for scientific research can be expressed as an indicator of social dependency. The more difficult it is to get necessary resources, the stronger conformity is required on the side of the persons who plan to benefit from these resources. Sociology, where the application for financial resources and granting are lower than in the same cases

³⁸ See R.K. Merton, *The Matthew Effect in Science*, „Science” 1968, No. 175.

in pedagogy, is a good example here. When financial support, in the form of grant, is relatively easy to win, the more favorable conditions of scientific activity develop. Here, an analytic insight requires a repeated reference to Durkheim's concept, and pointing out to a pretty subtle difference between cohesion of individuals and the group, and between dependency of individuals on the group. These two different, but complementary factors affect the above-regarded academic communities with a different influential force. Therefore, a relatively stronger dependency is noticeable in the pedagogical community and is linked to a lower level of this group's cohesion. The case of sociology is a distinctive one. Here, stronger integration and control is not accompanied by a similarly high dependency by particular individuals on the group (see table 4).

Nevertheless, referring to Durkheim's considerations of the issues of integration, dependency, and control, one is not able to answer the question of how such a specific configuration of the above factors affects the functioning of the above-mentioned communities. Thus, perhaps empirical research would be helpful if we wanted to explore this problem. By interpreting the above situation with the application of Douglas's grid and group concept, we can assume that the values of the given factors indicate a remarkably deeper fragmentation of the pedagogical field. A much less complex group structure under conditions of lower control level (as compared to the sociological field) creates a favorable atmosphere for a hermeneutic inquiry into educational influences. This epistemological basis is linked to the qualitative methodological orientation that is followed in studying reality.

4. Summary, i.e. conditions of knowledge development and the problem of marginalization

The presentation of the structural mechanisms of knowledge production in a scientific discipline does not seem to be sufficient to discovering the sources that marginalize the sociology of education within the mainstream discipline of sociology. The above considerations enable one to assume that the analyzed marginalization is not the effect of a lack or limited level of innovativeness in scientific activity, but rather the result of the inhibited process of institutionalization, as well as the fragmentation of the community.

This condition can be also caused by distinctive dynamics of the abovementioned institutionalization process at the level of scientific disciplines, such as sociology and pedagogy, which are the two main forces that impel the sub-discipline of sociology of education. It seems to reflect the problem of scientific field iden-

tity. The heterogenous nature of the community – the analyzed sub-discipline – is ambiguous in its effects. It evokes, on the one hand, the state of uncertainty and tension, but, on the other, stimulates changeability and innovativeness. It also allows us to notice the problem of “classificatory solidarity.”

The presented analysis of a structural-institutional dimension of sociology of education in Poland, with reference to the thesis of specificity of social sciences – among others their multi-paradigmatic character connected with the freedom of choice, may justify the conclusion on anachronism of the discipline that sticks to rigid borders that hinder ideological and personal diffusion. Whereas in the situation of the community’s low level of control and integration, the sub-discipline loses its internal controllability for the overall social (influence of changes on a level of the social system) and cultural tendencies (fashionable topics, social problems etc.). Thus, the changes that take place on the level of scientific disciplines become more flexible and equivocal.

The low level of integration in the considered academic community contributes to the growing importance of freedom in the relationship between a researcher and the studied object (subject). As a result, a certain type of escape from normativeness in descriptions and interpretations of social phenomena and processes under study (e.g. education) is noticeable. It is connected with the dynamics of changes that take place within a scientific field. These changes are likely to shorten the time perspective of undertaken analyses and formulated conclusions. As a result, it will likely narrow the frame of imagination down to current social issues and neglect opportunities to generate visions of future conditions of society. Therefore, we have difficulty with defining their targets and justifying the necessity of their existence.

The above analysis shows that the problem of the decreasing importance of sociology of education within mainstream sociology can be only partially explained when focusing exclusively on its institutional and organizational dimensions. The presumption articulated at the beginning of this paper, which emphasized the negative consequences (marginalization) of the involvement in just one thematic field of representatives of the two scientific disciplines (two main forces) connected with uneven level of social organization in the form of cohesion, control and group dependency, seems not to offer clear-cut determinants in the perspective of the theoretical basis accepted here. This suggests that searching for solutions to this problem requires broadening the analysis scope by other fields directly connected with the dynamics of sociology itself. The issues of a scientific borderline and the resulting heterogeneity of the community involved in the problems of education is not the only one (that affects the condition of the present sociology of

education. This calls for further scientific search in order to obtain pragmatically complete explanations.

Table 1. Data on the number of applications for grants in 40 MNiSW Contest in two scientific disciplines

	Number of applications	Independent scholars		Dependent scholars	
		Applications	Successful	Applications	Successful
Pedagogy	35	16	9	19	3
Sociology	22	9	3	13	2

Table 2. Data on the number of promoter's applications for grants in 40 MNiSW Contest in two scientific disciplines

	Promoter's applications	
	Applications	Successful
Pedagogy	9	8
Sociology	3	3

Table 3. Success rate among applicants for grants in 40 MNiSW contest

	Success rate		Total
	Independent scholars	Dependent scholars	
Pedagogy	0,25	0,08	0,34
Sociology	0,13	0,09	0,22

Table 4. Diversity of pedagogical and sociological communities with regard to the level of integration, dependency and control, „+” means a higher level of a given factor in the group

	Pedagogical community	Sociological community
Integration	-	+
Dependency on the group	+	-
Control	-	+

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